

OP ED: Ending Female Genital Mutilation

By Jessica Knox

Puberty can be a very confusing time for a young women. Her body is changing and her emotions fluctuate by the minute.. On top of all of this, imagine being told you are about to get a procedure done. Your parents are telling you that you must be circumcised and your labia and clitoris must be removed. Soon after you will be married and sent to live with your new husband, which you haven't met, and probably will not see your family again. This sounds like an absolute nightmare, but is a reality for young women in many parts of the world including sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South Asia.

Genital mutilation is the removal of some parts of female genital organs without a medical need. There are 29 countries where some form of this practice is carried out. Girls who are about to enter or have just entered puberty, typically ages 12-16, are at highest risk for the procedure. If no precautions are taken to stop this practice, by 2030 over 86 million girls will run the risk of being victims.

There are absolutely no health benefits that are associated with female circumcision; in fact, it actually can be a huge health risk. The short term complications of FGM are severe pain, inflammation and infection, shock, and complications healing. The long term effects can range from profuse bleeding, the formation of cysts, problems when urinating, and complications with conception and childbirth. These issues affect many girls and not only can result in severe impairments to their health but in some cases have even resulted in death.

Not only is there physical trauma from this method but also results in psychological and emotional wounds as well. Female circumcision really counteracts the idea of gender equality and feminism. By taking away a woman's sexual organs, you are also taking away her pleasure during sex. This promotes the idea that sexual pleasure is only intended for men. If men only get pleasure out of sex, it creates the idea that women are only seen as tools for men to have sexual intercourse with. When women are only seen as objects that can have parts of them removed, it also promoted domestic violence and rape culture. Circumcising a female takes away a woman's voice as well, and giving her the option to make her own decisions about her sexual life.

This practice is harmful to young girls and should be stopped. Education is the best tactic for changing the factors promoting this practice.

- Girls that have mother who have completed some form of education have a lower risk of becoming victims. Girls who are also from families with a higher

source of income due to continuing education also have a lower risk of being circumcised

- The organization “Because I am a Girl” is huge activist for this situation. They went to Mali in order to reach out to 845 community leaders to explain the consequences of female mutilation, now 69 villages have abandoned the practice in that area.
- Every year on February 6th, that day is recognized as The International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation

The question arises, what about those who have already been circumcised? One action that has taken place in order to help these victims is a reconstruction surgery intended on reducing the pain and discomfort these women have to face on a daily basis. A study was conducted in France from 1998 until 2009 to almost 3000 FGM victims. This medical reconstruction was an attempt to restore the genitals when the clitoris or labia have been damaged or in most cases removed. Only 866 women showed up after a one year follow up in order to report their progress. It was documented that 821 out of 840 reported that there was a decrease in pain, and 815 out of 834 reported that they have had an increase in sexual pleasure. It was also stated that 430 out of 841 women reported that they have actually been able to experience orgasms when participating in sexual activities.

In conclusion, we must spread awareness of this subject and support organizations and campaigns fighting to stop it. Until recently, I personally did not know female mutilation was even a problem in the world. Now that I am aware, I feel that it is my duty to spread the knowledge to others. The more people care, volunteer, and donate, the more outreach we can make to educate these areas. Supporting these organizations can provide them with the opportunity to visit more regions and teach these people the facts and consequences. Together we can end female genital mutilation

Jessica Knox is a senior at East Carolina University. She plans to graduate May 2016 with a degree in Sociology and a concentration in marriage and family. After graduation she plans to seek a job at a domestic violence counseling center.