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FGM on the RISE

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as embodying “all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non- medical reasons” (2016). FGM is practiced across cultures and communities such as in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that over 100 million woman and girls have been subjected to FGM and that 3 million girls are at risk of undergoing one of the procedures every year (2016). In addition, those who have undergone and/or are at risk for such procedure include migrants specifically women and their number is on the rise. Female Genital Mutilation is a violation of human rights and if steps are not issued to bring an end to such procedure, it will continue to bring physical and mental challenges to woman across the globe.

FGM is a practice deeply entrenched in culture. Bradley (2011), a reader in International Development Studies, discusses the sensitive and controversial issues pertaining FGM. She sheds light on areas of tension in which woman whose culture practice FGM feel conflicted, to go against such practice or remain loyal to their cultural identity. For instance, two Somali woman recount their experiences of FGM and how though they interpret in as a brutal act of violence, those who don’t undergo the procedure are condemned due to the religious and societal affiliations tied to FGM. Her book titled *Women, Violence and Tradition,* reflects on the cultural parameters and beliefs associated with the practice of FGM. Woman feel obligated to undergo such traditional practices due to it acting as a way to further validate their religion and culture, seeing as it’s a role infused to them by the men in their community. Her book provides an in-depth experience of woman whose culture is shaped by FGM and organizations who advocate for anti-FGM actions. At a larger scale, FGM is recognized as a violation of human rights yet this is still a debate considering the rhetoric of cultural practices and the western approaches. The United Nations Population Fund estimates that countries such as Chad and Central African Republic have banned FGM, with consequences ranging from fines to incarceration (2015). Though such procedure holds cultural meaning and is part of the dominant discourse of someone’s lived experiences, it is important to recognize the mental challenges it brings forward to women.

Those who undergo FGM include children. It is performed on girls as early as four and twelve. The surgery is paid by the child’s parent. It is believed that the child will be marriageable only if she has gone through such procedure (Wheeler, 2004). Though it is often a family effort and decision, girls undergo a significant level of pressure and physical hardships after the procedure.

There are myths and stories associated to FGM. For instance, in Nigeria, and the people of Mali believe that if the head of the baby touches the clitoris, the baby will die (Dorkenoo, 1994, p. 34). Such ingrained beliefs foster greater confusion and ambiguity to the issue. The World Health Organization states, “[FGM is a] manifestation of gender inequality that is deeply entrenched in social, economic and political structures” (2008). These larger systems perpetuate gender inequality.

FGM/C has limited health benefits and is harmful in a number of ways. It not only inflicts trauma but causes the victim to undergo excruciating pain. While health consequences differ, they’re both immediate and long- term (OHCHR, et al editors, 2008) A long term effect being that woman who have been mutilated and are pregnant suffer higher rates of neonatal death, then those who have not. Pain, shock and death are complications that should also be considered.

Decades of prevention work undertaken by individuals, communities, organizations, and governments have contributed to the reduction of FGM in prevalent areas worldwide. FGM is becoming more recognized as a political issue and more action is being taken to bring an end to this practice. Fear and silence are still prevalent and FGM is a practice deep rooted in communities and cultures and it will not end in one day. It’s a battle we fight and it’s a root that if not removed entirely will resurface. The work that’s been done and issued is changing FGM worldwide. Its important to recognize that FGM sheds light on advancing reproductive rights in society yet challenges the mainstream and dominant discourse preserving cultural practices.

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