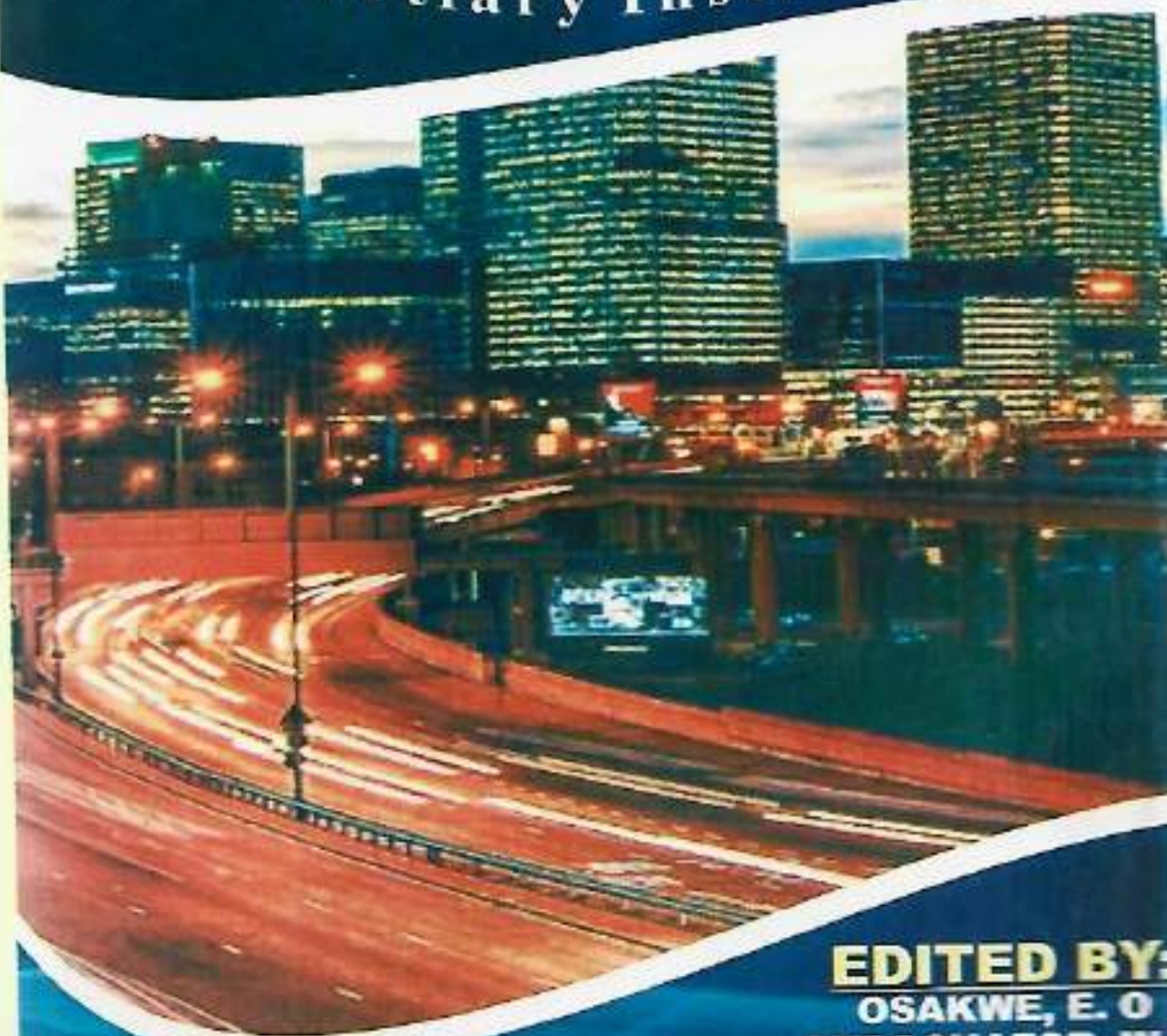


# **SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION**

*in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*  
*For Tertiary Institutions*



**EDITED BY:**

**OSAKWE, E. O.  
AKPOCHAFOR, W.  
UKADIKE, J. O.  
ONYESOM, LON**

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*Chapter Eight*  
**FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION: EFFECTS ON  
YOUNG GIRLS AND WOMEN**

By

**EBOH RHODA NKEMDILIM (Ph.D)**  
Department of Social Studies  
College of Education, Aghor  
Delta State

**Introduction**

Female genital mutilation is the ritual removal of some or all the external female genitalia. It is also known as female genital cutting and female circumcision. Female genital mutilation (FGM) refers to a variety of operations on the private parts of women and young girls that involves partial or total removal of the external genitalia. Female genital mutilation is frequently referred to as female circumcision UNESCO and other scholars disagree with this comparison (Akpochafo 2009). To them, this is misleading. Ukhun (2002) argues that circumcision is an inappropriate word to describe what women go through as circumcision is only applicable to male genitals. In the case of women, it is excision, genital mutilation or clitoridectomy. UNESCO (1977) had earlier on

them to social excursion. The health effects include recurrent infections, difficulty in urinating and passing of menstrual flow. Chronic pain, the development of cysts, an inability to get pregnant, complication during childbirth and excessive bleeding. Female genital mutilation has no health benefits.

### **Female Genital Mutilation and Sexual Intercourse**

The belief of African societies that female genital mutilation controlled the sexual urges of women and young girls is one of the reasons why it is being practiced. Darkenoo (2010) shares her view on Psychosexual reasons towards female genital mutilation. She gave examples with some African countries such as Mali, Kenya, Sudan and Nigeria where there is a belief that if women are mutilated, they are likely to be faithful to their future husband. It is also their belief that clitoris is dangerous to baby at birth if not cut, thus, when it come in contact with the baby's head it may kill the baby. She added that in Ethiopian, if a women's clitoris is not cut, it may grow and resemble men's penis and therefore cutting minimizes the growth rate and help the women to maintain femininity.

According to Karhu 2010, female genital mutilation causes torture for most mutilated women. Sex can excessively be painful and even put the women's life at risk. Women who have been infibulated may experience painful intercourse through out their life if they do not seek medical advice. In cases where there is no pain then there is no sexual fulfillment. Clitoris is an important organ in experiencing sexual pleasure and orgasm among women. Mutilation of the clitoris would negatively influence sexual achievement and fulfillment among many women who have undergone the procedure of female genital mutilation (FGM), (Foot-Klein, 1989).

#### **Female Genital Mutilation and Religion**

Female genital mutilation is practiced by some religious sects world wide. The religious institutions/groups who practice genital mutilation include Islam, protestants Catholics, seventh day Adventist and animist.

Mustafa (2010) states that female genital mutilation is more in Muslims communities than in any other religious groups. For instance, in Sudan and Somalia where majority are Muslims 50% of the women there are mutilated. Purekh

embarrassed when they go to hospitals to see doctors either for child birth or medical examinations when problem arises.

### **Psychological Consequences**

Female genital mutilation causes psychological problems for the victims. The victims often have recurring nightmare about the mutilation day, the pain they went through and the fear associated with that day. Some of them were psychologically traumatized wondering why those they trusted to protect them such as their parents and grandparents, would allow them to pass through such pain. They also experienced difficulties to sit and sleep which were associated with the problem of cutting.

### **Sexual Consequences**

Due to the removal of the clitoris which is the sexual stimulant in women, many of them do not have sex satisfaction when having sex: many of the mutilated female found sex painful because of the penetration and the narrow hole in the vaginal. They do not always have urge for sex.

## **Social Consequences**

It causes embarrassment for women when they visit the doctors/gynecologists because of the way their organs look like due to the disfigurement caused by female genital mutilation (FGM). There are some communities that girls choose to undergo the process of circumcision because of the influence from the peers, to avoid name calling and to find husbands in the future. Some of them are also involved in the mutilation because it is associated with gifts. According to Toubia and Rahman (2000) in WHO (2008), female genital mutilation does cause physical, sexual, social health consequences to those who undergo the procedure. The consequences are either short or long term depending on the type of female genital mutilation carried out on the individual.

## **Classification of FGM**

There are four types of female genital mutilation classified by WHO (2008), UNICEF and UNPAI.

Type I: The first stage is referred to as Clitoridectomy. The Clitoridectomy of female genital mutilation is done by taking

out the blood of the clitoris and not touching any other parts. This type is one of the gentlest type of female genital mutilation that do not cause health effect to those who practice it.

Type II: This is known as excision, it is carried out on the victims by either removing the whole clitoris or part of labia minora. In some communities, who practice this type, the labia minora are completely taken out. This is the most practiced form of female genital mutilation.

Type III: The third female genital mutilation is referred to as infibulations. It is practiced by surgically closing the labia majora. It is the most severe type, of the circumcision ritual which involves the total removal of the clitoris. The genitals are sewn together leaving a small hole for urinating and menstrual flow. Girls at the age or around the age of puberty are subjected to this type of genital mutilation to ensure chastity. In some cases, the two sides of the legs are tied together for two to six weeks to ensure proper healing of the two vulvas. This is one of the dangerous types of female mutilation and is an injustice to womanhood.

Type IV: This is intermediate of the three discussed above. It involves mutilation and stitching of the clitoris. The clitoris is taken out and the labia minora either stitched together, or can be done by leaving the clitoris uncut and removing the labia minora. The labia minora are then stitched together and the clitoris is left intact. In some cases the cutting depends on the community.

### **Reasons for Female Mutilation**

The reasons for female genital mutilation which is harmful, crude and detrimental to the women and girls are numerous and complex. The origin of the practice has not been exactly determined and in spite of the pain and risk involved in the procedure, communities still continue to indulge in it (Ossai, 2015)

The following are the reasons for this cruel ritual cutting of girls as outlined by Akpochafo (2015), WHO (2013) in Ossai (2015).

- i. To enhance the sexual pleasure of the man



- ii. The desire to control female sexuality, preserve the monogamous status of women and protect family lineage
- iii. To reduce female libido in order to prevent promiscuity. In the traditional setting, it is believed that FGM helps to admonish sexual appetite among girls.
- iv. In some countries, it is considered as a cultural ritual that every female should undergo before marriage
- v. To initiate girls into womanhood
- vi. Preservation of virginity
- vii. As a superstitious belief practiced for the preservation of chastity and purification.

### **Reasons Why Female Genital Mutilation Must Stop**

Some of the reasons given above for its continuation may be passive on the surface but there is however, a massive campaign against the eradication of female genital mutilation. The reasons being canvassed for its eradication are as follows as outlined by Akpochafo (2009).

- a. It is carried out by untrained personnel in an unhygienic environment
- b. The equipment and tools used are crude and unsterilized.
- c. The operation is very painful as there is no use of anesthesia
- d. There is risk of death from shock or several bleeding and later the risk of infection such as septicemia (infection of the blood by harmful bacteria and tetanus)
- e. The long term consequences include pain during sexual intercourse, complication during childbirth, possible infertility because of infection, vulnerability to HIV and life long psychological trauma
- f. Clitoridectomy leads to the cutting of one of the most sensitive, pleasurable and life-giving part of a woman's body
- g. It prevents sexual satisfaction and it is against the dignity of women.

### **How to Eradicate Clitoridectomy**

Due to the awareness, the danger of clitoridectomy, some countries like Ghana and Burkina Faso have passed law forbidding female genital mutilation. Some of the countries are already attacking the issue holistically by considering the totality of violence against women. A good number of Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) in Nigeria have been working assiduously to put an end to violence against women. Workshops, seminars, rallies and other awareness programmes are organized by the above mentioned bodies to draw attention to the evils of violence against women and to work out strategies on how to get rid of female genital mutilation.

Nigeria has been at the fore front of the campaign to protect the rights of women for the past fifteen years. At the 46th world Health Assembly Nigeria was an active participant where decision was taken or resolution passed on the elimination of female genital mutilation.

Nigeria sent large delegation to the fourth world conference on women in Beijing which adopted the Beijing declaration and platform of action. A 25 member technical working group was set up by Nigeria in 1998 on

harmful traditional practices of which female genital mutilation is one of them. The committee is to submit a report detailing the line of action to be taken so as to eradicate harmful traditional practices by the year 2010.

The section 34 of the 1999 constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria, bars "torture, inhuman and degrading treatment" but no specific law yet against female genital mutilation.

### **Human Rights and Female Genital Mutilation**

According to (USAID 2004), Female genital mutilation was first recognized in the agenda of the United Nations in 1948 within the context of the universal declaration of human rights (UDHR). It was seen as a harmful traditional practice in the 70s and 80s, during the United Nation's year for women 1975-1989.

Dorkenoo (1994) in the work (forwarded 2002) states "female genital mutilation is a clear demonstration of gender-based human rights violation which intends to control women sexuality and freedom". Internationally, this practice is recognized as a form of torture and violence against women



and girls. Some of the international agencies like WHO, UNICEF etc., consider FGM as a violation of human rights and therefore made an effort in fighting against FGM. In the same vein, in 1993, United Nation passed a declaration to support the use of the FGM to describe clitoridectomy, infibulations and other FGM related practices. Molsa (2004) states that, some FGM practicing countries from the East have indicated interest to eradicate the practice by imposing some laws which includes UK, Sweden and Finland among others. For instance, in Finland, female genital mutilation is by the Finnish law punishment act in all forms. Since 1993, FGM is illegal in Sweden (WHO 1998).

Rahman and Tober (2000) listed the following as human rights that FGM violates,

**The Rights to be Free from all Forms of Discrimination against Women**

It was reported in article 1, of the women's convention "Discrimination against women" based on sex. FGM fits within this definition because it is a practice carried on women and girls that have effects on women and girls sexual desire and enjoyment for their fundamental rights. The pain it causes

or not being able to have sexual satisfaction means violating the rights.

### **The Right to Life and Physical Integrity Including Freedom from Violence**

Female genital mutilation affects the rights to life when death occurs in the process of mutilation. The practice violates the right to liberty and security of women and girls because they can decide for themselves if they need to be mutilated.

### **The Right of the Child**

Female genital mutilation is regarded as violation of children's right. In those communities where it is practiced, children as young as a few months after birth to 17 years are subjected to the practice. Considering factors such as age of the people affected they meet the definitions of a "child".

### **Right to Health**

According to International Human Rights Law, every individual is entitled to enjoy the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health. Female genital mutilation is associated with complications that have adverse effect on women and girl's physical and emotional health. Subjecting any person to health risk in the absence of medical approval as in the situation of FGM, is a violation of that person's right.





By not using any medication during the procedure and not allowing them to go to the hospital when they come in contact with infection means violating the rights of the people concerned.

### **Rights to Religious Freedom**

The rights to religious freedom is an important human right which is not to be interfered with by anybody. The issue of religious freedom arises because there are some religious group that practice female genital mutilation because of their religious belief. Therefore, interference of the practice in those religious group to discontinue the practice is regarded as violation of their religious rights. There is no support of FGM in the Koran, but a number of African communities where Islam is practiced, they believe that FGM is a religion (Karhu, K.K. 2010).

### **Rights of Minorities**

International human rights law recognizes that members of the minority groups, racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic are entitled to special protection to enable them to maintain their own culture free of interference and discrimination. In Africa and worldwide, female genital mutilation is practiced by minority groups and not by everyone in that society. The



practice is mostly common among the immigrants who are in minority.

### **Conclusion**

Female genital mutilation is a term used to describe various traditional practices that involve the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia for cultural and traditional reasons in many African countries. Human rights are meant to protect every individual despite their colour, ethnic background nationality and age. The practice of female genital mutilation has proven to be those cultural or traditional norms that need investigations in the light of human rights principles. It is cruel, harmful, painful and unnecessary because it affects the health of others. There is need for the education of the general public on the danger of female genital mutilation.

Female genital mutilation is a criminal offence according to legislature because it causes pain, violates the human rights and the health of women and girls are at risk. Empowering people in the community with knowledge on the subject and providing the necessary resources will help eliminate the practice in our society.

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