Female Genital Mutilation and Its Impact on Health

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Abstract

This review article focuses on the very essential issue of a very damaging superstitious act of female genital mutilation which has physical and mental repercussions for young girls. The whole aim of this article is to bring awareness regarding this issue and to encourage mental health practitioners and medical practitioners to create awareness amongst those who are ignorant of the hard hitting reality and to help curb this situation to great lengths, so that young innocent children do not have to go through such harsh treatment and trauma, initially this practice was limited only to the Egyptians and Ethiopians, but due to rapid increase in immigration and globalization it is being spread throughout the globe, therefore it is essential for us to be acquainted with this tradition and look for ways together to overcome and stop this harsh practice.

Keywords: Female Genital Mutilation, Mental Health, Depression and Superstition

INTRODUCTION

Superstition isn’t a new term for us, yet we aren’t able to understand the significance it has for us, everywhere around us we see, people abiding by some rituals which according to them either brings good luck or might lead them to some sort of prosperity, to a level all this is fine, but as it is rightly said there are limits to one’s tolerance. And thus the time has fallen upon us to act, and not act just for our selfish gains but to act for the sake of humanity. And thus to open our minds to this, through this research paper, the author intends to bring to light a very strong and crucial topic of female genital mutilation which in some countries and cultures is practiced as a horrendous act in which the external genitalia of young women and girls is removed or amputated, thus leaving the little girl with pain, and sadly this physical pain is not the only pain that these youngsters experience, they even have to go through the mental torture, where initially they have to prepare themselves for such an act, which with each passing phase creates more and more fear. This fear and apprehension is
followed by the feelings of betrayal, where these girls realize that it is there family members who are behind the whole act, which brings all their hopes crushing down, then is the physical pain, which I think none of us can imagine to tolerate, without any reason; just because the society’s unrealistic belief system has inculcated it into our roots, the young children have to face the brunt of our decisions. And after all this is done, all the torture is over, the young girls start experiencing drastic changes in their mental health. 

The ritual which is supposed to bring happiness to the girl and her family according to the superstitious ritual brings nothing other than havoc in the life of the victim. Such young minds then without the fault of their own actions have to bear with the hard hitting consequences in the form of mental illness and trauma for throughout their lives.

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION
It is a traditional practice which is performed as a superstitious act, in which female genitalia is circumcised of the young girls. Girls within the age group of 0 to 15 years of age have to face this procedure, which is conducted for religious, cultural and non therapeutic gains. According to W.H.O. in 1995, it can be classified into four types; first is the total removal of the clitoris known as the clitoridectomy, second is the partial or total removal of the clitoris with partial or total cutting out of Labia minora, third is the total removal of the external genitalia and stitching or narrowing of the vaginal opening and the last type is a little rare activity in which the areas surrounding the clitoris are stretched, or either sewn together (WHO, 2010).

Research studies conducted on this around the globe has shown that this practice is mostly prevalent in the rural areas, where the people of the village are one homogeneous unit and where views opposing this practice are suppressed or not provided an adequate outlet (Daffeh, J et al. 1999). And shockingly the sects or groups promoting this act believe that such acts protect the women from indulging in premarital sex and help in keeping the sexual feelings at bay and thus it helps in continuing positive moral values (Bafrow Baseline Report 1997). For others this ritual signifies purity and a desired pathway for marriage; families prefer brides who are virgin and have gone through this process (Daffeh, J et al. 1999). And that’s not all another horrific truth behind the prevalence of this act is that it helps many earn their livelihood, as a result those girls who agree to go under the knife, there family gets paid for it, which has become a source of income for many households (Gamcotrap, 1999).

FGM AND ITS HARMFUL EFFECTS ON THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH
According to the report of MRC in 2001, it has been reported that those going through this ritual have to face many physical complications to name a few: such women have
high prevalence of Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) and for herpes simplex virus 2, at the same time they are exposed to the increased risk of HIV; other consequences that they have to fight are those of infertility, tumors in the vulvas areas, septicemia, cheloids, fibrosis and reproductive tract infections.

According to the research work by Toubia and Rahman (2000) it has been seen that those victims who have to abide by this tradition, start developing low self esteem and their sense of self identity starts deteriorating. Though shockingly it has been seen that in cultures where this practice is prevalent few women who do not get circumcised feel left out because of the way (Baron, 2006 & Cook, 2002), it has been embedded in their bloods, that “if you don’t get cut, you are impure”. However these are views of only a small percent of women, the other majority are left with the post traumatic stress disorder, flash backs. There are scarce researches with regard to its impact on the mental health of women, due to the taboo created by mental illness in these orthodox cultures which rely on this horrible practice, therefore assessing the mental health of such victims is a tough task, however whatever number of researches have been possible, they have shown that such victims face lot of anxiety symptoms, disturbances in mood, recurring nightmares, sleeplessness and thought disturbances, few of the victims also start experiencing panic attacks and eating disorders (Penn & Nardos, 2003). Other research findings indicated presence of psychotic symptoms in these victims, also PTSD and irritability and sexual disorders (Barstow, 1999).

CONCLUSION
It is evident from the studies on female genital mutilation and its impact on the mental health of women, that we as psychologists and mental health professionals have a heavy responsibility and therefore should start taking strong measures to create awareness in the society, regarding the consequences of such superstitious acts on the mental health of young children. Not only as a unit, but each one of us as individuals should do our share of work and help and spread a word through our clinics, so that slowly and gradually it can start having the desired impact and through proper awareness and education, this dreadful practice can be controlled and stopped; so that our young minds do not face the society with weakness in their minds.

REFERENCES


