

THE BRUTAL BLADES OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION AND HOW IT VIOLATES THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN.

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For the past 15 years in Uganda, Female genital mutilation has been on the helm of violation of women's rights. Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a traditional harmful practice that involves the partial or total removal of external female genitalia or other injury to female genital organs for non-medical reasons. The process involves various procedures which include the removal of the clitoral hood and clitoral glands; removal of the inner labia; and removal of the inner and outer labia and closure of the vulva. In this last procedure (known as infibulation), a small hole is left for the passage of urine and menstrual fluid; the vagina is opened for intercourse and opened further for childbirth. The health consequences include; hemorrhaging, infection, chronic pain, childbirth complications and in severe cases, death.

FGM is increasingly practiced in secluded areas on the border with Kenya. The ethnic groups that perform the practice include the Sabiny in Kapchorwa, Bukwo and Kween districts in Eastern Uganda; and the Pokot, Tepeth,



A picture of girls lying down as the old women cuts their labia and clitoris. Photo by Andrew Masinde

and Kadam in Nakapiripirit, Moroto and Amudat districts in the Karamoja sub-region and still are, primarily performed among young unmarried girls. In Sebei, the mutilation of older married women during antenatal visits or during childbirth is becoming more common. It is believed that when a woman is not mutilated, she becomes unruly so by mutilating her, she becomes submissive since her sexual urge is minimized making it easy to be controlled by a man.

It is true that tradition and culture are important aspects of

any society and help to mold the views and behavioral patterns of the society. However, some traditions and cultural beliefs and practices like FGM are harmful and must be abolished. There is so much pain involved in the practice since these girls/women are not sterilized, the blades used are shared and there is a risk of contracting diseases like HIV/AIDS. In addition to that, women are denied the chance to experience orgasm therefore; denying them sexual satisfaction. The government of Uganda has helped to stop the act by providing laws against FGM.

The 1995 Ugandan constitution provides for protection of women and their rights under Article 33 and specifically prohibits under 33(6) laws, customs, traditions, or cultures that are against the dignity, welfare, or interest of women. It also prohibits anything that undermines women's status. Furthermore, Article 44 states that no person shall be subjected to any form of 'torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment' there by protecting the rights of women and because FGM involves pain, it violate the above articles of the constitution.

In 2010, the FGM Act was put into place and it sets out the offences and punishments for FGM in Uganda. Media reports that two women were charged under the FGM Act 2010 for procuring and participating in the practice

on seven girls in Moroto District. They were sentenced to between three and ten years in prison. In addition to that, five men and women were sentenced to four years in prison for performing, procuring and aiding FGM in Kapchorwa District.

However, with all the efforts made by the government of Uganda to curb down FGM, prevalence among practicing communities in the eastern and north-eastern regions remains high. This is because most of the practicing tribes still have staunch belief in their culture and stopping the practice means they have gone against their culture. Unfortunately, the women whose rights are being fought for are the same people who participate in mutilating other young girls therefore making it hard for the people

who are fighting for their right.

In most cases, these people who are practicing FGM are not aware that they are committing an offence which violets the rights of a woman. Therefore, NAPE calls for the following,

- The government of Uganda should carry out sensitization programs to educate people about the different cultural practices that are against human dignity
- There should be a multi-disciplinary approach involving legislation
- Health care professional organizations and empowerment of the women in the society are needed to abolish the practice; otherwise, young girls in the practicing districts will continue to suffer the brutal knife.



A blade used to perform female genital mutilation. Photo by Luis Tato