Female Mutilation Essay, Research Paper

Female Mutilation: Another Way to Control Women?

More than 20 years ago, a Somali woman named Waris Dirie had her sex stolen from her in an African ritual. Her story is not as rare as we would like to think. It is estimated that 135 million girls in the world have undergone female mutilation ( Out! Magazine). Despite the health and psychological affects on these women, it is still being done in more than 28 African countries. There are several things people do not understand about female mutilation; for instance: why is it done, how is it done, and what are the side effects of it?

Female mutilation is a very dangerous cultural tradition. Several different cultures do it for several different reasons. Some culture s believe that a girl can not be considered a woman until she has undergone female mutilation. It is a type of initiation into adulthood followed by ceremonies attended by only women. Some culture s believe that removing the clitoris and the labia enhances the girls femininity, since they are viewed as the male parts of the female body. In communities that practice female mutilation, it is believed that if a female does not have her sexual body parts removed they would grow so big that they would hang down between her legs. Some groups believe that a woman s clitoris is dangerous and that if it touches a mans penis, he will die. Others believe that if the baby s head touches the clitoris during childbirth the baby, too, will die. Some cultures believe they are doing it for smart reasons. They believe that it enhances fertility. They also believe it makes childbirth easier, and others think that is a women is not mutilated, she would be unable to conceive a child (Human Rights..). Some culture s do it out of

stupidity and do it only to enhance a man s sexual pleasure. The main cause in most communities for female mutilation is to keep men s wives from being unfaithful. These cultures believe that if a women s sex organs are removed, they will not know sexual pleasure, therefore, they will not want

to be promiscuous. Yet, no matter how they believe female mutilation helps the women of these cultural groups, it is still a very dangerous act.

The procedure of female mutilation is carried out at a variety of ages that range from shortly after birth to during the first pregnancy; it is most commonly carried out between the ages of four and eight. Some girls go through female mutilation alone, but more often than not, it is undergone as a group. The group usually consists of sisters, other close relatives, or neighbors. There are three different types of female mutilation. First is Sunna circumcision. This involves removing the prepuce covering the clitoris glands, and often the clitoris gland itself. The second type of female mutilation is excision. This is the removal of the clitoris glands and the cutting and scraping away of the labia minora. Sometimes it also involves the partial closing of the vulva. The third and final type of female mutilation is infibulation, also known as Pharonic circumcision. This is the worst and most dangerous type of female mutilation. This is where they clean out every one of the sex glands. They remove the clitoris gland, cut and scrap the labia minora and majora, and pin the vulva shut with thorns or pins until it grows closed. Usually, a small hole about the size of a matchstick is left open for urinating and menstruating. During the process, no steps are taken to reduce pain. The girl is held down, usually by an older woman of the community, with her legs open. It is not done with a scalpel or a knife; it is usually done with broken glass, a tin lid, scissors, or a razor blade. When the mutilation is taking place, thorns or stitches are used to hold the sides of the labia majora together and the legs may be bound together for up to forty days. Antiseptic powder may be applied, or, more usually, pastes that contain herbs, milk, eggs, ashes, or dung. This is believe to help the healing process. The people who carry out these processes are usually unqualified women of the community. The inexperience of these women can cost someone their life, and often does.

The side effects of female mutilations are horrific. It can often times cause death from infections or loss of blood. At the time of the mutilation, pain, shock, hemorrhage, and damage to the organs surrounding the clitoris and labia can occur. After the mutilation, urine is often retained which causes bladder infections that reoccur throughout their entire life. Chronic infections, internal bleeding, and small tumors are part of the life these girls are forced to live. The mutilations also cause stones in the bladder and urethra, kidney damage, reproductive tract infections, pelvic infections, infertility, and excessive scar tissue. Bacterial infections are caused from intercourse. Since the vulva is sewn up so small every time a man wants to have intercourse with his mutilated wife, he has to cut her open and sew her back up again. This is repeated hundreds of times in her life, which causes excessive scar tissue and chronic infections.

Female mutilation is practiced for a variety of reasons: cultural identity, gender identity, control of women s sexuality and reproductive functions, beliefs about hygiene, health, and religion. The most common reason for performing female mutilation is to keep women from being promiscuous. The results that follow female mutilation continue throughout a woman s life and is a constant reminder of her devalued place in society. Most people in mutilation practicing societies can not imagine a woman who had not had this procedure done. In these societies, a girl can not be considered an adult until female mutilation is performed. These countries need to realize that they are the only ones practicing this ritual. They need to be educated to where they understand that the female body parts are there for a reason; until they are, there is no way to reach these cultures.

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