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**FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION: EFFECTS, CAUSES AND PREVENTION**

Female genital mutilation which is also known as Female circumcision is a practice which involves the partial or total removal of external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. Nigeria has the most female genital mutilation cases in the world today. This practice is considered harmful to girls and a violation of human rights as it is extremely painful and will lead to several complications afterwards including loss of life. This practice usually takes place amongst women who are between the ages of 0-15. Nationally, 27% of women in Nigeria between the ages of 15-49 were victims of Female genital mutilation, as of 2012. In the last 30 years, prevalence of the practice has decreased by half in some parts in Nigeria. In May 2015, then President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan signed a federal law banning female genital mutilation but this has not stopped the practice from happening in rural societies in Nigeria.

There are four types of Female genital mutilation practiced in Nigeria. They are: i) Clitoridectomy: This involves removing the clitoral hood and at least part of the clitoris. This type of FGM is usually prevalent in the southern part of Nigeria.

ii) Sunna: This is the removal of the full clitoris and part of the labia minora.

iii) Infibulation: This is the removal of the full clitoris, labia minora and labia majora. This also involves stitching the vaginal opening with a miniscule hole for urination and menstrual bleeding. This is usually prevalent in the northern part of Nigeria.

iv) This type includes other unclassified forms of female genital mutilation which may involve prickling, stretching, cauterization, or inserting herbs into the vagina.

Female genital mutilation is practiced due to various cultural perceptions without proper knowledge of the human anatomy and medicine. One of this cultural perception is that Female genital mutilation helps to reduce or eliminate promiscuity. It is also believed that female circumcision increases sexual pleasure among men. Another one of these beliefs is that female genital mutilation increases women’s fertility, ability to procreate and child’s survival. Some girls who are uncut are made to feel unclean and unmarriageable and due to such negative pressure, they decide to go through with the practice. Although no religious script prescribes the practice, practitioners often believe that the practice has religious support.

Female genital mutilation can lead to various complications because most times it is carried out with unsterilized tools and the practice is carried out with disregard to the female anatomy. Some of the immediate complications associated with female genital mutilation are: severe pain, excessive bleeding, genital tissue swelling, fever, infections e.g., tetanus, urinary problems, wound healing problems, injury to surrounding genital tissue, shock and death. While some of the long-term complications are: urinary problems( painful urination, urinary tract infections), vaginal problems( discharge, itching, bacterial vaginosis and other infections), menstrual problems( painful menstruation, difficulty in passing menstrual blood), scar tissue and keloid, sexual problems( pain during intercourse, decreased satisfaction), increased risk of childbirth complications( difficult delivery, excessive bleeding, caesarean section, need to resuscitate the baby) and new born deaths. Asides the physical complications caused by Female genital mutilation, the practice tend to affect the involved individuals mentally, most of them have traumas due to the extremely painful practice and have to live with it throughout their lives. Other than the effects to the individual, since there are many complications caused by the practice. The treatment of all the health complications costs a lot of money from the economic sector of the country.

Due to the numerous negative effects of female genital mutilation, some preventive measures should be put in place to bring an end to the harmful practice. Firstly, the federal government should eliminate ignorance among the people, they should ensure people are enlightened on the harmful effects caused by female circumcisions and that the practice does not in any way have a positive effect. Also the government should make known to the public the consequences of breaking the law against female circumcision. Female genital mutilation is really a huge problem in Nigeria and also a violation to human right of females and should be brought to an end.