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QUESTION: WRITE AN ACADEMIC ESSAY ON ONE OF THE PROBLEMS YOU HAVE PERCIEVED IN YOUR SOCIETY.

The Adverse Effects of Female Genital Mutilation on Women in Nigeria and its Preventive Measures.

According to current statistics, nationally, about 27% of Nigerian women between the ages of 15 and 49 were victims of FGM, as of 2012. However, in the last 30 years, prevalence of the practice has decreased by half in some parts of Nigeria. Also, in May 2015, then President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan signed a federal law banning FGM. But like most laws in Nigeria, they are effective for a while before people return to their selfish ways.

Nigeria, due to its large population, has the highest absolute number of female genital mutilation (FGM) worldwide, accounting for about one quarter of the estimated 115-130 million circumcised women in the world. This just goes to show how backward our society is when it comes to matters like this.

The lives of many Nigerian women, especially in the north, and in various parts of Africa is characterized by the act or tradition of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). I would like to discuss the phenomenon and its adverse effects on their lives as a whole and on their health.

The first mention of male and female circumcision appears in writings by a Greek philosopher who visited Egypt around 25 B.C. Circumcision of males came about as a biblical reference due to the fact that God commanded it. However, there is no record of there ever being a time when God commanded that females be circumcised. As confirmed by the W.H.O, FGM has no health benefits whatsoever as it harms girls and women in many ways. The practice involves the removal and injury of normal female genital tissue, which interferes with the natural functions of girls and women’s bodies.

FGM, as practiced in Nigeria is classified into four types as follows. Clitoridectomy or Type 1. It involves the removal of the hood of the clitoris and all or part of the clitoris. The clitoris is the sensitive covering of the vagina which reacts to hormonal touches. Type 2 is a more severe practice that involves the removal of the clitoris along with partial or total excision of the labia minora. Type 3 is the most severe as it involves the removal of the clitoris, the labia minora and the adjacent medial part of the labia majora and the stitching of the vaginal orifice, leaving an opening the size of a pin head to make room for menstrual flow or urine. Lastly, we have Type 4 which basically includes any other form of pricking, cutting, piercing or incision of the clitoris or labia and the infusion of corrosive substances or herbs in the vagina and other forms.

In Nigeria, of the six largest ethnic groups, the Yoruba, Hausa, Fulani, Ibo, Ijaw, and Kanuri, only the Fulani do not practice any form.

There are both short term and long term risks of female genital mutilation. Some of the short term risks are severe pain, excessive bleeding, shock, infection, urination problems etc. The long term risks of FGM may occur at any time during life. Some of them are chronic genital infection, chronic reproductive tract infection and so on. It can also lead to death. Studies have also shown that girls and women who have undergone FGM are more likely to experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety disorders, depression etc.

With all the likely adverse effects listed above, it is clear why this tradition is barbaric and should be put to an end. I personally, have never understood the need for the practice in the first place. It has done no good to the society but rather, it has reduced the population of women and girls in society, left some injured and broken both physically and emotionally. It scars people for life and should be aborted. There are numerous barbaric and belittling traditions such as this that should be brought to an end. This is one of the many.

Female Genital Mutilation serves as an infringement of human rights. Individuals and organizations working against the practice of FGM bear witness to the fact that the practice is: associated with gender inequality, a form of discrimination against girls and women, a form of torture, cruel and degrading treatment of girls and women, an abuse of the physical, psychological and sexual health of girls and women.

The good news is; there are ways in which this act can be prevented and possibly eradicated. The first thing is to learn to challenge the discriminatory reasons FGM is practiced. Among the discriminatory reasons is a perceived need to control female sexuality which in itself is a barbaric way of thinking.

Another way is to change the traditions – with the support of older generations. Educating females on their right to decide what happens to their bodies is also an important lesson. As a society and as a nation, we need to begin to challenge beliefs that we know are based on all the wrong and anti-feminist reasons, starting with FGM. Speaking up about the realities and risks of FGM might also help to if not eradicate it, then to reduce the occurrence. I believe that our society also needs to understand and be aware that religion does not demand FGM. People think that Islam advocates cutting to ensure that a girl stays virtuous and pure. It doesn’t. Practices such as FGM first stemmed out of ignorance. People don’t seem to be able to distinguish between religion and traditional practices. They tend to see them as one and the same.

Tackling the secrecy that allows cutting to continue is a must in order to stop it! In the old days, genital cutting was an initiation rite for girls, to prepare them for their future. These days, it has become a controversial issue, as it should be and those still sticking with the barbaric mindset have sought to practice it in hidden places.

Lastly, we as a nation, need to keep pushing for FGM to be banned. It is a violation of children’s rights and human rights in general. The right to good health and the freedom to make your own choices. It also violates a child’s right to be educated because if the wound of the cut becomes infected, the girl will fall ill and be unable to attend school.

Conclusively, there is an urgent need for the abolition of this unhealthy practice. A multidisciplinary approach involving legislation, health care professional organizations, empowerment of the women in the society, and education of the general public on this phenomenon. The dangers and undesirability of it is paramount. If this can be done, I believe it will serve as a necessary reduction of the many undesirable problems of present society and Nigeria as a whole.