



Female Genital Mutilation: The Risk of It Being Introduced in Cape Verde

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Young People Against Prostitution and Human Trafficking:

The Greatest Violence Against Human Beings

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Thank you very much everyone, it is a great opportunity for me to be here.

I would like to tell you about the organization that I represent, called “Laço Branco”. It is really new, it has been around for only five years, and it is formed by men and women from different walks of life. This organization has several purposes that it pursues, which are of course related to advocacy and the fight against gender-based violence.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

I would like to tell you about female genital mutilation. I am from Guinea-Bissau and this problem is still affecting my country. In Cape Verde it does not yet exist. Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a practice that involves the total or partial removal of the female genital organs. This practice has nothing to do with medical or therapeutic ends, but it is real violence, because it is an attack to the body of the woman or the girl without any permission being requested. Once they have been attacked, they are subjected to the communities or villages where they live, and this something agreed upon by the members of the community and the members of the family of the girl or woman in question who decide on the practice.

This practice is performed at present. Nobody knows when or how it came about. In some Muslim societies, which is the case of my original country, it is the elderlies of the communities who say that it is a practice that has to be performed on women. Once this practice is performed, women and girls suffer terrible consequences from a health point of view. Sometimes the consequences involve bleeding a lot during the mutilation and during the stitching up.

Prevalence of FGM in certain African countries:

- Burkina Faso 78%
- Cameroon 15%
- Central African Republic 35%
- Ivory Coast 44.5%
- Chad 40%
- Djibuti 90% to 98%
- Eritrea 95%
- Ethiopia 73% to 90%
- Guinea Bissau 45%
- Somalia 99%
- Sudan 90%

There are three different types of mutilation – actually four – that have been classified by the World Health Organization:

I - Clitoridectomy (involving the removal of clitoris, partial or total)

II – Excision (includes the partial or total removal of the labia of the woman or girl)

III – Infibulation (which is considered the most severe of the three. It involves the removal of the clitoris of the woman, and after that, these women are stitched up in a very brutal manner, because their flesh is exposed to the pain without any anesthesia performed at all) and

IV – All other nefarious practices performed on female genital organs for non medical reasons, for example: perforation and cutting.

Some of these women lose so much blood that they die, and those who survive the practice suffer from very severe consequences because of what they live through: they have terrible labor pains, when they deliver children it is unbearable – not to mention sexual intercourse, which is very difficult. There is also the problem that traditionally those who practice infibulation are elderly women who are obviously not trained for that. Then we have the fourth type of FGM, which involves all types of perforation that pierce the sexual organs of women, which is of course extremely unhealthy and painful.

So these are the types of FGM: the first one includes the partial or total removal of the clitoris; the second is the removal of the labia minora and of the clitoris of the woman; the third type is infibulation, which consists in the removal of the whole clitoris and the labia majora and minora and then the stitching up.

Now, I have already mentioned that those who perform this practice do not really know what they are doing. I have carried out research over three months and the women I interviewed said, “This is part of our culture, it is our tradition, we have to practice this, we have to subject girls to it”. And they keep doing it in these villages, even though they have no idea why they are doing it. They just perform it.

Why did this practice come into being? Women say that a woman who has not gone through mutilation is not a good woman. She is not perceived as a woman in society, she is discarded, she is an outcast, she is considered a prostitute in her society, she cannot say anything, she is not listened to.

This being the case, I would like to show that this practice is still performed in my country, Guinea-Bissau. There are laws that prohibit and ban this practice, but it does not matter, because it continues to be performed on very young girls. In my country, although a ban was introduced three years ago, there are still very young girls who are mutilated and infibulated. You can imagine how painful it is to go through this, especially for infant girls.

Last month I saw a report in my country showing how three very young girls were subjected to mutilation. They bled copiously. The elderly woman who performed it said that these girls were women so they had to go through the practice. The girls were taken to hospital, because they kept bleeding. The hospital contacted the police, who in turn contacted institutions that fight against this practice, and simply asked the elderly woman, “Why did you do it?” With a very normal face the elderly woman said, “I did it because it is part of my culture. I still honor my traditions and give these traditions continuity”. This is very sad.

In Cape Verde we do not have this practice. However, there is the risk that we will have it there too, because we do have very large communities of Muslims, and we know that they still perform this practice and they actually export the practice to wherever they go, to any country they migrate to. We even have it in Europe and in the United States and in several other countries. It is kind of hidden, but it is out there.

These are the suggestions and recommendations that I would like to give, as far as genital mutilation is concerned: that the local authorities of the countries where this practice exists should be further engaged. They need to form a network. Of course legislation is important, but it is not implemented. There has been a law in my country for three years, but it is not being implemented. Law enforcement needs to work with communities and local authorities. These elderly ladies who perform mutilation need educating because the communities they belong to are very poor and do not have any quality education. Therefore, it is necessary to make a huge effort to provide education on this practice. In Cape Verde, national authorities should work to make sure that the legislation does not allow for this practice if it were to ever enter the country because the Muslim community seems to be growing immensely within the country so there is this risk. This being said, I think we all need to speak out and ask this violence to stop, because this is a very severe form of violence against women.

Thank you.