

ISLAM & FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

WOMEN IN ISLAM SERIES XI

WHAT IS FGM?

Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) refers to the partial or total removal of or other injury to the external female genitalia. FGM is conducted for non medical reasons and has no known health benefits to the women and girls it is performed on.

TYPE I

Partial or total removal of the clitoral glans and/or the clitoral hood.

TYPE II

Partial or total removal of clitoral glans & labia minora, w/ or without the removal of the labia majora.

TYPE III

Infibulation or narrowing of the vaginal opening with a seal by cutting or stitching the labia minora or labia majora.

TYPE IV

Other harmful procedures to genitals including pricking, piercing, or scraping.

FGM/C IN THE QUR'AN

In the Qur'an, there is no mention of FGM/C although some verses exist that proponents of FGM refer to as justification for their support for the practice. However, all of these verses refer exclusively to male circumcision.

“Allah is the One who made the Earth a habitat for you, and the sky as a structure, and Allah designed you, and has perfected your design.”

QURAN 40:64

A number of verses in the Qur'an do exist that condemn any act that negatively impacts the human body, which is a creation of God. These verses, including 40:64 (reference above) and verse 30:30 and 2:195, condemn any act that interferes with the creation of God without reasonable justification. Recognizing that FGM/C negatively impacts the human body, we can infer that the Qur'an does indeed condemn the practice of FGM/C.

THE STORY OF HAJAR

Verse 16:123 of the Qur'an, urges Muslims to follow the way of Prophet Ibrahim (AS), which includes his decision to self-circumcise. However, this applies exclusively to male circumcision. Some Muslims point to a story that tells of the fury Sarah felt when Hajar became pregnant with Ismail. In her rage, Sarah threatened to kill Hajar but Ibrahim (AS) commanded her to pierce her ears and her genitalia. There is little to point to the accuracy of the story and even if true, the female circumcision in the story refers to an act of punishment, not a holy or pure act.

FGM/C IN THE HADITH

“Allah has cursed those who curve their teeth and those elongate their hair with additions and those who change God's creations.”

There is no evidence in any authentic (*sahih*) recorded traditions of the Prophet (PBUH) expressing approval for any practice resembling FGM/C. Furthermore, claims that FGM/C is permissible (*mubaah*) cannot be justified as FGM/C is in direct contradiction with Qur'anic verses and *sahih* Hadith which condemn any harm to the human body.

BUT WHAT IF FGM IS A CULTURAL PRACTICE?

Many proponents of FGM argue that because it is a cultural practice, it should be allowed under Islamic law. However, Islam **forbids cultural practices** that are **a) in conflict with Islamic teachings** and **b) harmful to an individual or the entire community**. This is in line with the early days of Islam, which saw the practice of female infanticide eradicated and the practice of polygamy strictly regulated.

“...even if your fathers did not comprehend anything and they were not properly guided?”

QURAN 21:70

FATWAS ON FGM

2006

A meeting of Islamic scholars from across the Muslim world resulted in a fatwa banning the practice of FGM.

2010

34 Islamic Scholars signed a fatwa banning the practice of female genital mutilation.

2010

In Iraqi Kurdistan, the Kurdistan Islamic Scholars Union issued a fatwa stating FGM was not an Islamic practice.

2018

An Imam in Dublin issued fatwa against FGM in all its forms.

2018

A fatwa in Somaliland forbid FGM and provided compensation to victims of FGM.