

PREVENT FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

by Karen E. Kun

Between 85 million and 115 million women and girls currently alive have been subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM). Each year, approximately two million girls undergo FGM, which translates into 6,000 new cases a day, five per minute. The incidence continues to increase due to population growth, exportation of the practice through immigration, and because it is viewed as a prerequisite for marriage—primarily because it is thought to ensure virginity and is a means to control sexuality.

FGM has serious ramifications for girls' and women's health. Immediate effects from FGM include infection, shock, swelling, hemorrhage, and accidental damage to the surrounding urethra, vagina, or rectum. Long-term effects can include urinary tract complications, chronic pelvic infections, infertility, and obstetric complications. Moreover, its implications for pregnancy are serious. The World Health Organization estimates that women subjected to FGM are twice as likely to die in childbirth as FGM can damage the reproductive tract and cause scarring, increasing the risk of obstruction and hemorrhage in labor.

In addition, FGM may be linked with a greater risk of HIV transmission in four ways: the use of unsterilized instruments such as knives or blades in its performance; blood transfusions due to tearing and bleeding during childbirth; a higher incidence of anal intercourse since anecdotal

evidence indicate that some women who have been subjected to FGM find it more comfortable than vaginal penetration.

To date, studies exploring the correlation between FGM and enhanced risk of HIV infection are noticeably absent from medical literature. Given the magnitude of HIV infection in the sub-Saharan Africa, research on any practice which may increase the risk of transmission must be prioritized. The WHO and other medical and health-related organizations must lead in advocating for the performance of such research, as it has been ignored for too long, and the implications of this neglect are immense.

Increased financial support is needed if sub-Saharan, African nations, grassroots women's groups working throughout the region, and the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices (an umbrella group with national committees in 24 African countries) are to eradicate FGM and other harmful traditional practices and increase the use of beneficial practices.

Enhanced cooperation and better integration must also ensue between non-government humanitarian organizations, national governments, UN bodies, health researchers, advocates, and other concerned individuals if FGM is to be successfully combatted. Countries that provide developmental assistance to nations where FGM is practiced should also call for the integration of education on the dangers of FGM into maternal and child health courses, primary care, family planning, and HIV prevention



efforts that they are funding. Such an integration would go far in disseminating knowledge about the serious health ramifications of FGM.

Individuals of all races, cultures, and nations must unite in the campaign against FGM. Only by enhancing the moral, financial and technical support for groups such as the Inter-African Committee and other indigenous groups that educate people about FGM's negative effects, only through enhancing the cooperation between NGOs, government agencies, researchers, and advocates, and only through integrating the message about the negative effects of FGM into community health programs will the campaign against FGM succeed.

From the Women's International Public Health Network, Summer 1995

From the E-mail

HUMANITARIAN SEXTOURISM?

It is an open secret that also in Zenica prostitution is increasing. We are alarmed by the fact that this concerns especially young women and girls sometimes not older than 14 years. The places for making

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contact are known: the vicinity of big hotels like Hotel International, Metallurg, Dom Penzionera, and other central places like the main bridge or Radakovo.

It seems that most clients are Internationals, i.e. male members of humanitarian and other international organisations whose task it should be to help improve the living conditions in Bosnia. Instead, by buying sex they take advantage of economical need and inexperience of young women and girls. This fact itself is a scandal. It is outraging considering that thousands of women have been subject to rape, sexual violation and torture in this country during the war.

The increase of prostitution is a typical symptom of post war times. Especially in places where there are a lot of international male staff and soldiers. This is known from other countries like Germany or the Philippines, where women and girls are forced to prostitute themselves in order to survive.

Medica will start to monitor and observe the situation in Zenica. We ask all organisations working with women and girls to provide us with whatever information they have on this subject to mobilise their donators and head offices for setting up income generating projects especially for women and girls.

Last but not least we urge all head of offices to look into this matter with due care and dismiss immediately all male staff members having sex with minors or taking advantage of the miserable situation of many women in Zenica. Sexual exploitation is not a matter of

privacy!

Contact apcadmin@ax.apc.org or the Association for Progressive Communication International Secretariat, Rua Vicente de Souza, 29 Botafogo, Rio de Janeiro, RJ 22251-070 Brazil

A FILIPINA BATTERED IN KOREA

(The following is excerpted from a letter that came into our office that dramatizes the lack of protection for Filipinas married to men in South Korea.-Ed.)

"On 10 November 1995, my friend Mylene Luminarias-Park, a Filipina based in Tejon, Korea, almost lost her life. Her Korean husband, Chan-gyu Park had repeatedly banged her head to the wall and a steel door, slapped her several times, dragged her by the hair out of the house while trying to undress her, tried to choke her and throw her down the stairs, and almost forced her to jump from the fourth floor of their apartment building.

"Irked by his lack of concern at their son's illness, Mylene had berated her husband and told him that it might be best for her and the child to go home to the Philippines. The argument continued until the following morning. At this point, her husband brought up the subject of divorce, which they had been discussing for the past few months. When she inquired about the son, he told her that she would have to ask the judge. Knowing fully well that Korean courts would favor the father, Mylene insisted that he give her their son's passport.

Wanting to avoid further arguments, she asked him to leave the house and not to come back unless he could give her the necessary papers.

"Later that evening, Mylene's husband returned drunk and with a male companion. Mylene was on the phone with her friend when his husband started arguing with her again, with his friend joining him. Not wanting to argue, Mylene locked herself in the bedroom with her son. Her husband, enraged, kicked down the door and began beating her. While he beat her, Chan-gyu Park also repeatedly threatened to make true his earlier threats to commit suicide by jumping off the fourth floor and taking her along with him. Thinking of her child, Mylene tried to hang on to anything she could hold on to.

"It was a good thing that Mylene, fearing for her safety, did not hang up the phone so her friend could hear what was going on. After hearing what was going on, Mylene's friend left her dormitory residence and summoned the police.

"The police arrived only to first ask for Mylene's name, nationality and passport. They were more concerned about her husband whose foot was bleeding because he shattered their glass sliding door. By this time too, Chan-gyu's sister and Mylene's friend had also arrived. The sister lived nearby and immediately became worried about her brother's self-inflicted injuries. As Mylene



Sandra Torrijos