

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION CASES IN BARINGO COUNTY



Kures Primary school madam talking about FGM sharing stories during trainings

During our Sexual Reproduction Health Rights training in Baringo County in the month of May - June 2021, it was clearly observed by teachers participating that Female Genital Mutilation is lively and being carried out secretly in the society but surprisingly it has taken hybrid strategies on how it is being performed.

The female teachers participating in the training said that traditionally, female genital mutilation which is commonly referred to as female circumcision was done to young girls at the age of 14-18 years as preparation for marriage (Earlier/ child marriage). This was a sign of distinctiveness and prestigiousness to parents/the community for a girl to be married when circumcised. Most of the girls preferred undergoing through the practices without second thought about the harm it may cause health wise to them but due to fear of being stigmatized and rejected by potential husband. They fear this more than the cut because the community believes that cut woman is the one who is ready for marriage- marriageability and uncut may take some time for them to get a husband from the community. Also their peers who have

undergone the cut look down on them as inferior and unworthy ladies and it's believed that uncircumcised women and girls are not just vulnerable to verbal abuse they can also be ignored by society and excluded from family activities and community events. Thus, due to desperation of these women, they subsequently agree to be cut so that they can be accepted in the community.

Female Genital Mutilation being illegal in Kenya but it's still conducted underground and secretly in homes to avoid being detected by authorities, some communities have come up with a new strategy of hybrid formula of cutting nowadays. They discovered that most women escape the traditional original age of cutting due to schooling or due to rescue centers that have come up to temporarily shelter the young girls. With this development nowadays, those who escaped it earlier cannot celebrate it much longer since they are cut (circumcised) when giving birth the community uses the midwife to circumcise the lady without their consent.

It was observed that is why most of the pregnant women give birth at home with assistance of midwives but performing other 'traditional rites' circumcision to the lady. The ladies narrated that after this, their husbands find their wives not palatable to them and they look for other women that can satisfy them. More humiliation they are abused by being beaten by their husbands now and then but this wife beating is not seen by society as gender based violence but expressed as a discipline to the wife so no big deal.

Female teachers suggested that to reduce/ end this practice the community should be sensitized both with training in schools the way we are doing and more importantly comprehensive community awareness creation to the old generation and also to young ones who are about to get married to enlighten them on the dangers of FGM to the women and longtime effects of the practices to their health. The young female also should be informed clearly on the issue so that for those who are undergoing secretly due to fear of being rejected for marriage knows the dangers ahead.

The issue of beating a wife as a discipline is a corrective measure to them was brought about by male teachers which means that even with educated teachers they don't want to leave behind some outdated cultural practices such as wife beating, this was due to respecting their culture.

HMDS can advocate to reducing/ end these outdated practice through bottom up approaches where girls in schools should be aware that this practice is a crime/violation of one's right at first place and that they should report such the matter to Authorities. The next level is young men who should be informed of the dangers that women are exposed to during and after the cut. Last at that level it seems that there may be conflict of interest with local administration because they come from practicing community so further trainings are needed to tackle the issue. The other mechanism is the translation of '**THE PROHIBITION OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION ACT, 2011 (FGM ACT 2011)**' to local language so that it can be well understood with locals.













