

Female Circumcision

between the Incorrect Use of Science
and the Misunderstood Doctrine

Executive Summary



This is an executive summary extracted from the original publication entitled

**"FEMALE CIRCUMCISION (FGM/C):
Between The Incorrect Use Of Science And
The Misunderstood Doctrine"**

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Executive Summary

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In the Name of God the Merciful

Foreword

Praise be to Allah; Lord of the Worlds, and peace and blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad, and upon all his family and companions,

Female circumcision, also known as female genital mutilation/cutting, (FGM/C) is deeply rooted in the history of many nations and peoples. There is a mistaken belief that the debate on FGM/C is a new one, but this is not the case. As far back as 1940, in the Al-Manar Journal, Sheikh M. Rashid Rida responded to a question about FGM/C: "is FGM/C a Fard (compulsory practice of Islam) or Sunnah (Prophet's recommended practice)?"

In addition, the Liwa Al-Islam Journal of June 1951 surveyed the opinions of senior Muslim scholars on this issue, including: Sheikh Ibrahim Hamroush, a member of Al-Azhar Association of Senior Scholars and Chairman of the Fatwa Committee at Al-Azhar; Mr. Abd El-Wahab Khalaf, Prof. of Sharia, Faculty of Law; and Sheikh Mahmoud Bik Al-Banna, also a member of Senior Scholars¹. They were unanimous: FGM/C is a mere matter of habit, which might be abandoned if there is strong scientific evidence that it is harmful.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Muhammad Arafa, Editor-in-chief of Al-Manar and a member of Senior Scholars, endorsed the views of these academics in another article published in Al-Manar Journal in June 1953².

Throughout the long history of debate and argument on FGM/C, the Senior Scholars have relied on medical science to guide their opinion. Therefore, when the dominant medical science of former times backed its usefulness, Muslim jurists declared that it was a Makramah (virtuous deed). The word Makramah negates it as a religious duty (Wagib) or a Prophet-recommended

¹ 1st issue, 5th year.

² the issue, Shawwal 1372 AH, June 1953 AD.

practice (Sunnah); rather, it renders it a matter of habit that has been influenced by people's knowledge and understanding at different times.

It is also well known that jurists have rendered their legal fatwa (opinions) on a variety of different matters according to the views given by experts, scientists and scholars, all of whom have, over the years, informed jurists about the damaging psychological, physical, and social impact of FGM/C on women.

Islam instructs us to respect knowledge. It also urges us to respect and glorify the virtuous deeds of our ancestors. Yet this does not necessarily make it incumbent upon us to reflect all of their views if the grounds upon which these views were based have changed. In addition, it requires us to be guided by their commitment to a proper comprehension of Sharia; as they performed their duty according to a sober-minded approach that is consistent with knowledge ordained by Allah. However, every era in history has its own circumstances and can have its own interpretations of the approaches taken by ancestors – interpretations that may be considered by scholars while they consider the state of their current reality.

Preface

When the first edition of Elimination of FGM/C, Questions and Answers To Religious Leaders by Prof. Dr. Gamal Serour and Prof. Dr. Ahmed Rag'a Abd El-Hameed Ragab of the International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research, Al Azhar University (1426AH – 2005AD), was first released it was shared widely across many circles concerned with this issue. It was used to address questions and queries about FGM/C and was, therefore, added to many reliable internet sources as a credible reference. In recent years, however, several misinterpreted rulings and unscientific facts about FGM/C have surfaced. Therefore, the board of the International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research decided to update this important book through careful review by a committee consisting of the following scholars:

Prof. Dr. Ahmad Omar Hashim	Former President of Al Azhar University
Prof. Dr. Abdullah Al Hussaini Hilal	Former Minister of Waqfs
Prof. Dr. Ali Gomaa Mohamed	Former-Grand Mufti of Egypt

The updated edition takes into account some significant considerations:

1. Questions and clarifications have been reclassified to reflect current developments.
2. Further questions and answers pertaining to the issue have been added.
3. A careful review of the contents of the book has been carried out by a distinguished team of experts.
4. The contents of the book were pre-tested during training programmes organized by the International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research at Al-Azhar University, with different groups of preachers, Imams and female religious leaders, as well as final-year students within the faculties of Al-Azhar University.

Finally, we would like to extend our thanks to UNICEF for its continuous support. This book is an outcome of this fruitful cooperation.

We pray Allah, the Almighty Lord, that this book is inclusive of valuable responses to questions and queries raised by religious scholars, parents, and persons working in the area of curbing FGM/C, by governmental and non-governmental, local and international organizations, and by physicians, jurists, and other individuals concerned with this issue. We also hope that this book contributes to ending the harmful practice of FGM/C and, therefore, to enabling the fulfillment of the rights of every girl.

Verily, Allah is the grantor of success

Key Facts about Female Circumcision (FGM/C)

The root for the Arabic word "*Khetan*", means the cutting of a special part of a particular organ.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has classified FGM/C as the following³:

- ④ **Type I** : refers to removal of the clitoral hood; i.e. the cutting away of the upper fold of clitoris, which may be accompanied by partial or total removal of the clitoris (clitoridectomy).
- ④ **Type II** : is the partial or total removal of the clitoral hood and the clitoris, and cutting away of the labia minora in whole or in part.
- ④ **Type III** : is the total or partial removal of all external genitalia of a woman, and the suturing or narrowing of the vaginal opening infibulation.
- ④ **Type IV** : is non-classified; e.g. pricking, piercing, or incising the clitoris, labia minora or majora.

FGM/C procedures used to be carried out, and still are in very remote areas, by traditional midwives or circumcisers, using unsterile cutting devices such as: knives, razors, scissors, pieces of glass, or shaving blades. However, families practicing FGM/C have, over the years, shifted to seek the service from staff within the health sector, such as nurses and physicians. WHO and other international organizations have strongly condemned the medicalization of FGM/C and it is criminalized in Egypt and many other countries.

Female circumcision FGM/C is practiced in about 29 African countries and some Asian countries. It is widespread in the region known as the African Sahel, referring to countries located around the equator. Within the Islamic World, FGM/C is practiced only in Egypt, Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti, and some parts of Yemen and Oman. Studies and research conducted in Egypt confirmed that this practice is found across the country, with the highest prevalence found in Upper Egypt.

Efforts to combat FGM/C in Egypt started long ago, and they are both well documented and well known⁴. The first call to end FGM/C dates back to the 1920s, when the Egyptian Physician Association recommended banning FGM/C because of its health impact. This recommendation

³ World Health Organization, 2002.

⁴ UNICEF (2000), Caritas Egypt – FGM in Egypt, documentary report, prepared by Dr. Magdi Helmi.

was backed strongly by senior religious scholars and the Ministry of Health's physicians, and there was significant coverage of this issue in the press.

In more recent times, the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994, highlighted FGM/C on an international level. Continuing efforts on this issue included the 1996 ministerial decree (No. 261) that prohibits physicians from performing FGM/C at public hospitals. In 2003, the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) adopted the 'National Project to fight FGM/C', which is currently under the umbrella of the National Population Council. The project aims to provide a supportive social, political, and cultural environment for the rights of Egyptian females. This includes their right to protection from all forms of violence and discrimination, and the right to enjoy a healthy life and, in particular, psychological health.

Islamic Rulings (*Sharia*) on Female Circumcision (FGM/C)

In 1998, scholars from over 35 Islamic Countries came together at Al-Azhar University, Cairo to discuss FGM/C alongside other issues related to reproductive health. They came to the conclusion that FGM/C is a habit that is non-obligatory⁵ in Islam, given that it has never been mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, and there are no citations in Prophet Muhammad's Hadith containing any evidence of authentic isnad (chain of narration) that could justify a Sharia provision on so important an issue for human life as FGM/C. Further, Muslim jurists have not reached unanimous consent on FGM/C.

Meanwhile, FGM/C cannot be considered a beautification process since, Allah, the Almighty Lord, has created humans in the best stature; Allah is beautiful and likes beauty, as reported by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Allah, the Almighty Lord, described his creation to be in the best form:

﴿لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ﴾ (سوره التين آية 4)

("We have indeed created man In the best of moulds")⁶

Additionally, the removal and cutting away of important parts of the human body means altering the creation of Allah, rather than being a virtuous deed. There is an authentic Hadith

5 Recommendations of international conference on Population and Reproductive Health in the Muslim World: International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research, Al-Azhar University, 1998.

6 Surat Al Tin, Verse 4.

by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) pointing out that ("*Allah curses those who change His creation*»). *Muslim scholars said it is an agreed-upon Hadith*".

"لعن الله المغيرات لخلق الله" متفق عليه عن ابن مسعود.

Unlike the *Fard* (religiously enjoined act), *wajib* (religiously recommended duty), and *Sunnah* (Prophet Muhammad's deed), a *Makramah* (virtuous deed) is not obligatory. Further, Sharia recognizes the principle that whenever a particular practice is proven by careful examination and research to be damaging to health or to have a negative influence on morals, it must be prevented on the grounds of its harm.

In addition, Islamic rulings are laid down to benefit the people and to prevent any harm that could be imposed on them. For example, Allah said to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in Qur'an

﴿أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَسَالَتْ أَوْدِيَةٌ بِقَدَرِهَا فَاحْتَمَلَ السَّيْلُ زَبَدًا رَابِيًا وَمِمَّا يُوقِدُونَ عَلَيْهِ فِي النَّارِ ابْتِغَاءَ حُلْيَةٍ أَوْ مَتَاعٍ زَبَدٌ مِثْلَهُ كَذَلِكَ يَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْحَقَّ وَالْبَاطِلَ فَأَمَّا الزَّبَدُ فَيَذْهَبُ جُفَاءً وَأَمَّا مَا يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ فَيَمْكُثُ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَذَلِكَ يَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ﴾ (سورة الرعد آية 17)

("...Thus doth Allah (by parables) Show forth truth and Vanity. For the scum disappears like froth cast out; while that which is for the good of Mankind remains on the earth...")

(Surat Ar-Ra'd verse 17)

Moreover, Islam forbids inflicting harm upon health. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) says:

"لا ضرر ولا ضرار" اخرجہ الدارقطني

*("There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm.")*⁷

There is no practice in Prophetic Sunnah called 'Sunnah-based FGM/C'. Further, Prophet Muhammad's biography, which encompasses all details and acts that took place in his life and the lives of his family members, contains no reference or evidence that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) allowed the circumcision of his daughters, wives, or any of his female relatives.

Norms are considered important sources for Islamic jurisprudence. FGM/C is a norm in some countries but if proven harmful, it falls under the Islamic ruling of "***There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm***". FGM/C is not, therefore, religiously acceptable for a girl, because there is, first, no evidence that it was practiced by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and, second, it involves the risk of harm that is discouraged by an authentic Hadith that invokes a basic general rule that spans the generalities of this true religion, Islam.

⁷ Narrated by al-Daraqutni in his sunan Kitab Al-Bayou' 3/77, P. 288, about Abu Saeed al Khudri, and narrated by Al-Hakim in al-mustadrak Kitab Al-Bayou' 2/66, P. 2345, about Abu Saeed Al Khudri, was announced authentic Hadith by Al-Hakim and backed by Imam Az-Zahabi.

Islamic doctrine considers -- "all matters to be permissible" -- as a sound jurisprudential doctrine, but only to the use of objects created for us by God; e.g. water, trees, and various land resources. However, in any matter that affects the human body, property, honour and reputation the original rule is one of prohibition rather than permission. FGM/C is an assault on the body of a little girl by injuring or cutting. It is not, therefore, permissible. On the contrary, it is prohibited by Sharia and law, since the original rule is that anything that could assault bodies, properties, or honor is not permitted and is, therefore, prohibited.

There is a frequently-quoted Hadith purporting that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is reported to have said:

"الفطرة خمس: الختان، والاستحدا، وشف الإبط، وقص الشارب، وتقليم الأظفار" أخرجه البخاري
("Five things represent fitrah [basic good of human nature]: Circumcision, shaving pubic hair, trimming the moustache, clipping the nails, and removal of armpits".)⁸

The origin of this important and relevant Hadith is what was reported by Imam Malik in Muwatta, volume 12, P. 5: that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) was the first person to be circumcised⁹. However, male circumcision differs from female circumcision. Male circumcision is the removal of an excess part of the male organ. Male circumcision has been proven to provide protection from several diseases, including Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), as confirmed by WHO¹⁰. In stark contrast, female circumcision extends to the parts that create sexual pleasure and fulfill women's right to enjoy their marital sexual life.

One Hadith that is often quoted, known as Umm Attiyah's Hadith; reported that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) addressed her saying

"يا أم عطية: أَسْمِي وَلَا تَنْهَكِي، فَإِنَّهُ أَسْرَى لِلْوَجْهِ وَأَحْظَى عِنْدَ الزَّوْجِ"¹¹ أخرجه أبو داود
("O Umm 'Atiyah, when you do circumcise, restrict yourself to cut a minute part and do not excise. That will be far more pleasant for the wife and satisfying for the husband".)¹²

8 Reported by Imam Bukhari in Sahih Al-Bukhari Book (Abridged Collection of Authentic Hadith) – Dress Book – Nail clipping section, 4/ 59, H 5891, citing the narration of by Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him. It was also reported by Imam Muslim in Sahih Muslim– cleanness Book– instinct characteristics section, 1/ 221, H 257, citing the narration of by Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him.

9 Reported by Imam Malik in his Muwatta Book, Section titled Prophet Muhammad's Personality, 2/ 703, about Saeed Ibn Al-Musaib.

10 WHO: Voluntary medical male circumcision for HIV prevention, Fact sheet: July 2012.

11 أخرجه أبو داود في سننه: كتاب الأدب- باب ما جاء في الختان 370/4 ح 5271 - وقال أبو داود: روى عن عبيد الله بن عمرو عن عبد الملك مبعناه وإسناده - قال أبو داود: وليس هو بالقوى وقد روى مرسلًا، قال أبو داود ومحمد بن حسان مجهول، وهذا الحديث ضعيف، والبيهقي في السنن الكبرى - كتاب الأثرية - باب السلطان يكره على الاختتان 324/8 وقال البيهقي: هذا حديث ضعيف.

12 Reported by Imam Abu Dawood in his Sunan – Al-Adab Book – Circumcision Section 4/ 370, H 5271. Abu Dawood said: it was reported by Obaid Allah Bin Amro about Abdul Malik on its meaning and isanad, yet it is not a strong reporter, and it was narrated loosely. Abu Dawood and Mohamed Bin Hassan Majhoul, It is a weak Hadith, and Imam Bayhaqi in "Sunan al-Kubra" – Al-Ashriba Book, section titled "The ruler enforces circumcision" 8/ 324, and Bayhaqi said: this is a weak Hadith.

In fact, all reporters of this Hadith narrated it by weak isnad (chain of transmission), as outlined by Al Hafiz Zin El-Din Al Iraqi in his comment on Imam Ghazali's 'Revival of Religious Sciences' (1/148). Further, Imam Abu Dawood commented on this Hadith saying "it was reported by Obaid Allah Bin Amro about Abdul Malik on its meaning and isnad, yet it is not a strong reporter, and it was narrated loosely. It is a weak Hadith"¹³.

According to another Hadith, it is reported that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said

"الختان سنة للرجال مكرمة للنساء"

("circumcision is Sunnah for men and Makramah [virtuous deed] for women").

This Hadith, is also weak, as stated by Al Hafiz Zin El-Din Al Iraqi in his comment on Imam Ghazali's 'Revival of Religious Sciences'. In his book Talkhis al-Habir fi Takhrija hadith al-Rafi'i al-Kabir, Ibn Hajar also asserted that this Hadith is weak, citing the relevant opinion of Imam Al Baihaqi (it is very weak), and the opinion of Ibn Abdul-Barr's in al-tamhid lima fil Muwatta min ma'any w asani'd, that its narration is untrustworthy, and that it is, therefore, unreliable^{14 15}.

Another Hadith reported by Ibn Abdullah involves an order directed to the wives of Al-Ansar (Medina's Muslims) to perform circumcision. This Hadith too, is weak. Imam Al-Shawkani states on the narration of Abi Naiem – one of its reporters – Mandal ibn Ali, that it is weak, and on the narration of Ibn Udai Khalid Ibn Amro Al-Qurashi, that it is weaker than Mandal¹⁶.

In authentic Sunnah, there is a Hadith reported by Aisha (May Allah Bless Her) that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

"إذا التقى الختانان فقد وجب الغسل"¹⁷ أخرجه البخاري

("If the two circumcised met [referring to a sexual relation between a man and a woman] the ritual of ablution is a must")¹⁸.

This Hadith is by no means reliable as evidence for FGM/C. The linguistic expression in this context refers to two persons, or matters using the most pronounced one of them; does not

¹³ Sunan Abu Dawood with their explanation A'n Al-Ma'boud, 13/ 125 - 126. Scholars said: This Hadith was reported by Jaber Ibn Zaid and mawqof Alih, and was reported by Abu Dawood in his Sunan, and Mohamed Ibn Hassan said it was weak.

¹⁴ A'n Al-Ma'boud fi Sharh Sunan Abi Dawood" by Shams Al-Shaq Al-Azeem Ayadi, 14/ 124.

¹⁵ Imam Shawkani said in Nil Al-Awtar, volume 1, P. 139, "... This Hadith was reported by Ahmed, and was reported by Al-Khalal about Shadad Ibn Aws, and was reported by Imam Bayhaqi citing the narration of Hajaj Ibn Artah, about Abu Mulaih, about Usamah, about his father. Hajaj said: misleading Hadith, and Qutadah was confused about it and said: it is weak Hadith.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ أخرجه البخاري في صحيحه - كتاب الحيض - باب إنما الماء من الماء / 1 271 - 272 ح 349. وأخرجه مالك في الموطأ - كتاب الطهارة - باب الغسل إذا التقى الختانان 66/1.

¹⁸ Reported by Imam Bukhari in Sahih Al-Bukhari, menstruation book, section of "water comes from water", 1/ 271 - 272, H 349, and was reported by Imam Malik in Muwatta, cleanness book, section of "ablution when the circumcised organs meet", 66/1.

mean that both persons or objects are the same. This classical stylistic form has been used in other cases for objects and persons that are not necessarily similar.

Ibn Udai cited a Hadith about Nafie. This was reported by Salem Bin Abdullah Ibn Ummar and Al-Bazar, both of whom cited the narration of Ibn Ummar that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

"يانساء الأنصار اختضبن غمسا واخفُضن ولا تنهكن، فإنه أحظى عند أزواجكن وإياكن وكفران المنعم"
(O Wives of Al-Ansar, circumcise slightly without exaggeration, because it is more pleasurable for your husbands, and beware of ingratitude for the grantor).¹⁹)

This Hadith was cited by Al-Haithami in 'Al-Mujama' (5/171 – 172), who said it was reported by Mandallbn Ali, who is a weak reporter, and a weak Hadith is not reliable for deriving any Islamic (Sharia) ruling.

Similarly to historic scholars, our venerable scholars in the modern era have also expressed their respective opinions on this issue, including His Eminence sheikh Mahmoud Shaltout, Former Imam of Al-Azhar; Sheikh Muhammad Ibrahim Salem, President of Supreme Sharia Court, in the Liwa Al-Islam journal, in June 1951²⁰ ; Sheikh Abdul-Wahab Khalaf, Professor of Sharia, Faculty of Law; and His Eminence Sheikh Hassan Ma'moun, Former Grand Imam of Al-Azhar. Therefore, Islamic scholars have prohibited FGM/C and have considered it an act of violence against women.

Medical and Scientific Aspects of Female Circumcision (FGM/C)

Medical practices are governed by a set of ethical principles that are included in the Hippocratic oath. These ethical values are derived from the primary principles of divine religions, based on dignity, justice, and respect for an individual's freedom of choice guided by full knowledge. These ethical values include: the sharing of benefit and the prevention of harm, justice, and freedom to make decisions based on prior knowledge. Therefore, if we apply these ethical values to FGM/C, we discover the following:

- FGM/C has no health benefits; rather, all types of female circumcision FGM/C carry great harms.

¹⁹ Reported by Ibn Udai in "alkamil fi da'fa' al-rijal fi tarjamat Khalid Ibn Umro Al-Qurashi Al-Sa'di, 3/ 457

²⁰ 1st issue of year 5.



- There are no medical reasons to perform FGM/C, so calls for physicians to examine girls to determine whether they 'need' circumcision or not lack any credibility.
- An expert and skilled physician must adhere to medical ethics and it is not, therefore, permissible to carry out a procedure that is medically criminalized.
- It is not acceptable for physicians to comply with demands from parents or from girls themselves to perform FGM/C, as physicians know that young girls are not fully aware of the possible long-term implications. There is also a moral, psychological and legal responsibility that applies to anyone who agrees to follow through with this procedure as they are responsible for a minor.
- It is wrong to assume that some types of FGM/C do not lead to complications. Studies have shown the occurrences of complications, severe bleeding, nervous shock, (which may lead to death in some cases) acute inflammations, and urinary or faecal problems as well as psychological effects. In the long-term, a girl may suffer from sexual and reproductive problems, resulting from inflammation of her Fallopian tubes and difficulty during childbirth – the result of the narrow vaginal opening and perineum, which causes bleeding and tearing in the perineum tissues and harms both mother and baby during childbirth.

Many women in countries where FGM/C is practiced believe that it is a necessary process and it is part of developing to be a female. In addition to these misconceptions, and others that indicate its necessity according to Sharia, women often suffer from any resulting complications in silence.

The General Assembly of the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) endorsed a resolution to consider FGM/C as violation of the provisions of Convention of Child Rights (CRC) and a breach of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It also called for greater efforts and procedures to eradicate all traditional practices involving violence against both children and women. In 2012, the Egyptian Society of Gynecology and Obstetrics issued a statement to emphasize the same recommendation.

Female Circumcision and Marital Sexual Relations

Islam orders that complete sexual activities take place within wedlock, and depicts these as acts for which both spouses are rewarded. Before sexual intercourse, it recommends dalliance, kind treatment and sexual arousal, and orders husbands and wives to wait for the fulfillment of orgasm for each other.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) says:

"لايقعن أحدكم على امرأته كما يقع البعير"

("Nobody of you should have sexual intercourse with his wife like animals; they should have a messenger." They said "O Messenger of Allah, what is the messenger?" He said "kisses and kind words".²¹⁾

Although FGM/C has varying effects on sexual relations, as well as on the extent of the psychological shock women suffer from this practice, depending on the type of FGM/C performed, all types of FGM/C have negative effects.

The brain controls sexual desire, so if we aim to control desire, we have to address the workings of the mind through the cultivation of virtuous values, rather than removing the clitoris²². The procedure of FGM/C does not stop sexual desire, but undermines the extent of sexual pleasure and, therefore, denies sexual fulfillment to some women during their marital relations, which is a right that is granted to all married women. FGM/C could also delay sexual response, with an obvious influence on the sexual fulfillment of both the wife and the husband.

²¹ Narrated by Al-Dulaimi in Musnad Al-Fardos

²² Ahmed Ragab 2003, 'Towards a comprehensive Alternative Vision to Eradicate FGM', Edited by Gamal Abu Al-Sorour, WHO.

Misconceptions about Female Circumcision (FGM/C)

Female external genitalia are soft tissues that do not cause any impediments at all in marital relations; rather, they aid easier intercourse as well as easier childbirth. Female external genitalia contain varying types of glands, which produce secretions that have multiple uses; e.g. skin protection and moistening, fissure prevention, protection from microbes, and moistening the vaginal opening to facilitate sexual intercourse. These secretions themselves do not cause bad odours, but rather failing to wash these organs with water, causing dirt and microbes to accumulate.

The belief that if women are not circumcised their clitoris will grow to be as large as a man's organ is groundless, and is scientifically untrue. There is no indication of any woman anywhere in the world, or in any medical reference source, whose clitoris has grown until it has become as long as a male's organ because she was not circumcised.

Mistaken Social Beliefs about Female Circumcision (FGM/C)

Some people believe there is a relationship between FGM/C and puberty. However, this harmful practice does not play any necessary role in the transition a girl makes from childhood to adulthood. In fact, FGM/C often takes place before puberty in Egypt and in some other countries. This misconception of a link between FGM/C and puberty is based on a number of mistaken social beliefs:

- that FGM/C is customary and traditional;
- that FGM/C is a ceremonial step to move into womanhood
- that it safeguards a girl's virtue and virginity, as the woman becomes loyal to her husband and does not seek excessive sexual relationships;
- that the female external organs to be removed are unclean;
- that FGM/C is 'cosmetic' surgery, because if a girl is left without circumcision, her female clitoris will grow to become as long as a male's organ;
- that FGM/C is essential for marriage and pregnancy to happen;
- that FGM/C is a religious duty.

All of these beliefs are wrong. Community pressure is, in fact, the key reason for the continuation of this practice; some families that refuse to practice FGM/C face many obstacles and problems. Family members and other families place considerable pressure on mothers to perform FGM/C. Fearing that the community will reject their uncircumcised daughters, mothers find themselves pushed to go along with the practice. In such cases, physicians and religious leaders have a significant role to play in fighting the social pressure that allows the practice to continue.

Female Circumcision (FGM/C) from a Legal Perspective

On February 2013, the Supreme Constitutional Court of Egypt confirmed the Law of Criminalization of FGM/C by refusing an action filed to revoke the Law for being in violation of Clause 2 of the 1971 Egyptian Constitution.

Legislators and Muslim jurists have approved that any cutting away of the labia necessitates full "*Diyah*" (money that is given to the person against whose body or soul a crime has been committed)²³. There are several views in this respect; one of which permits retribution for the removal of the labia, while the second view renders "*Diyah*" that is sufficient for technical considerations related to the execution of retribution²⁴.

Egyptian law considers FGM/C as an act penalized under Article 240 of the Penal Code, which carries a prison sentence of three to five years to whoever "inflicts an injury or assault upon a third party, which results in removal or loss of a body organ...or an irremediable permanent scar..."²⁵.

The law has not discriminated between FGM/C perpetrators on the basis of their titles, positions, or professions: physicians are treated like any other FGM/C perpetrators, as the legitimization of the exercise of their profession does not apply in cases of FGM/C. Indeed, physicians may be subject to more severe punishment in the majority of cases, given that their action is seen as premeditated, resulting in little or no mitigating circumstances.

²³ Almahali of Ibn Hazm 10/ 456, he cited the relevant opinions of scholars, and disagreed with them, stating that retribution must be enforced upon the deliberate perpetrator.

²⁴ Ibn Qudamah's al-Mughni 12/ 158 and 11/ 546.

²⁵ UNICEF 2000, Caritas Egypt – FGM in Egypt , documentary report, prepared by Dr. Magdi Helmi, p. 120.

Social Partnership to End Female Circumcision (FGM/C)

The curbing of FGM/C requires social partnership among many influencing groups including experts, scholars, physicians, decision-makers, government authorities, parents and the mass media. The questions and answers provided in this book suggest a set of key messages and actions to important partners in the fight to end FGM/C in Egypt.

🌐 To Religious Scholars

The responsibility assigned to you by Allah, the Almighty Lord, is considerable. It is essential for you to be fully aware of, and familiar with, all aspects of FGM/C before giving your opinion. *Fatwa* (Islamic opinion) could influence the life and lifestyles of many people. Islam has come down to guide mankind and render them satisfied. Magnanimous principles of Islam guide us to the right path, and guarantee good upbringing as well as adherence to the objectives of virtue, ethics, and Islamic morality, which are by no means associated with Female Circumcision (FGM/C).

🌐 To Physicians Performing Female Circumcision (FGM/C)

When performing FGM/C, you carry out an act in violation of the law and of medical ethics, as well as your professional moral conscience. You perform an act that you were not professionally trained to carry out, although you are certainly and fully aware of the functions performed by the parts to be removed, and the irremediable, life-long and harmful consequences. Therefore, it is your moral and professional duty to talk to those who ask you carry out FGM/C about the grave risks associated with the practice. It is a part of your ethical commitment.

🌐 To Decision-Makers and Government Organizations

The lack of information about the anatomy and physiology of the reproductive system and sexuality has contributed to the spread of false information. Providing reproductive health information in schools would help to rectify this situation and would help to improve the health status of entire communities. At the same time, the enforcement of laws that criminalize FGM/C and penalizing the perpetrators would help to relieve the suffering of many men and women, as men, too, are badly affected by this practice.

🌐 To Parents: Mothers & Fathers and Communities

Parents do their best to secure happiness, joy, health, and a promising future for their children. However, the false belief and misconception that FGM/C benefits daughters actually causes harm, disfigurement, and health risks to girls. It has a negative effect on their health and their state of mind, as well as their future life. Therefore, parents are advised to perform their

duties properly, and provide an upbringing that is religiously sound. This requires building close relationships with children, as well as passing the right and positive values down to them. There is no benefit nor room for FGM/C in such relationships, nor would it lead to better children.

To The Media

All audio, video, broadcast, and print media should shed light on the true and negative facts about FGM/C, through citing opinions of Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, as well as physicians. Facts should be publicized with a view to guiding people and families, and keeping them aware of ongoing religious and medical evidence against FGM/C.

