

Turning a Crippling Knife into a Healing Knife - The Fight to End Female Genital Mutilation

Kiwelu BL*

Department of Medicine, Tanzania

*Corresponding author:

Bryceson Loti Kiwelu,
Department of Medicine, Tanzania

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1. Short Communication

From October 9th to 11th, 2023, the Ministers of Gender, Elderly, and Community Development of Tanzania hosted a delegation of government officials from various African countries, local and international organization leaders, and other stakeholders at the Julius Nyerere International Convention Centre in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, for the Change in a Generation event, which was aimed at ending Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) for non-medical reasons. During this event, I heard testimonies from young girls and women who had been subjected to, or had narrowly escaped, the misery of FGM.

For centuries, young girls and women in some tribes in more than 20 countries have been subjected to one of four types of FGM, a cruel and dangerous practice that has been passed down through generations. These girls in villages in tribes which embrace this culture are denied their right to attain their life dreams, as some may lose their lives during this brutal act, develop immediate complications such as severe bleeding, infection, and scarring, or are married a few months after the act.

Recent research has revealed an unexpected trend among certain tribes, which is the medicalization of FGM. This has sparked debate, as it could be seen as a way of legitimizing a practice that is a violation of human rights.

All women who undergo FGM are prone to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which results from the act or outcome of the act, as studies show that women who undergo certain forms of FGM are more likely to end up with complications during natural birth, which are detrimental to their health, their newborn baby, and family re-

sources.

Unfortunately, many more young girls are on the line waiting for their turn to be cut, as the practice is championed by parents, grandparents, and community leaders who believe that it is of paramount importance for the girl and community. It is the gateway for initiating a woman into adulthood and traditional rituals. Elderly women are usually the ones responsible for cutting, and they gain their living, praise, and honor from the community as mentors and keepers of the tradition.

It is obvious that there are some valuable information, knowledge, and skills which are worth passing from one generation to the other; however, this can be done without involving FGM. We must keep the knife for something better, as the same knife which is currently used to cause pain, bleeding, and transmit infection to hundreds of innocent girls can be used to prepare meals and feed thousands of girls during initiation ceremonies which may be organized in the same environment but with a different context.

Imagine an initiation ceremony organized in a beautiful village environment and attended by inspirational speakers of various backgrounds, where girls and boys are brought together along with their parents and family members, exposed to an ocean of knowledge such as important values of their tribes, inspired to continue with studies, exposed to new ways of life, technology, reproductive health, sexuality, and sexual rights. This kind of initiation ceremony will make young girls and boys live their dreams to the fullest, while bringing pride and fame to their families and communities.

We must speak out against FGM and work together to ensure that no more girls are subjected to this cruel and unnecessary act. Our

current silence and inaction has led to more than 200 million women in the world being cut, and if the silence continues, the number of those who are cut will increase significantly. Data from Tanzania indicates that 7 to 10 women out of 100 women have undergone FGM, with the regions of Mara, Singida, Musoma, Kilimanjaro, and Arusha leading in maintaining this tradition which degrades women's dignity and violates human rights.

Let us join forces, mobilize resources, and redirect resources to where it matters the most. Let us create connections with those working at the grassroots level on various community interventions to end FGM and other imminent threats to the most vulnerable members of the communities in the world. Our collective voice can be the light that leads us out of the darkness and into a world free from the suffering caused by this inhumane tradition. A world without FGM is possible, and it starts with us - let us be the change we want to see in the world.