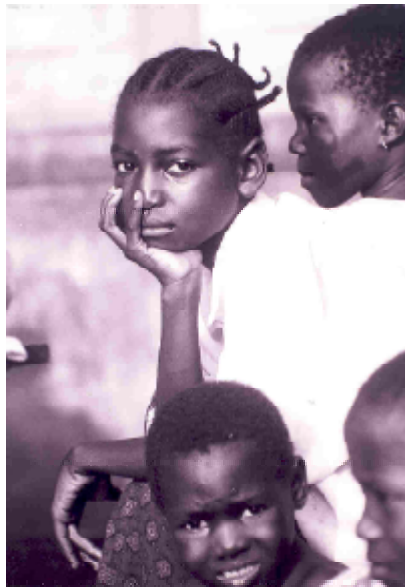


- FGM was also placed high on the agenda at the Beijing Women's Conference in 1995, and the *Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action* called for governments to eradicate all forms of violence against women including FGM.
- In April 1997, three UN agencies - the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund, unveiled a Joint Plan to bring about a major decline in FGM within ten years and to completely eradicate the practice within three generations. The plan focuses on educating the public and lawmakers on the need to eliminate FGM, and to encourage every African nation to develop and enforce national plans to stop FGM.



Faces of Nigerian children

References

1. Female Genital Mutilation: A human rights information pack, Amnesty International, 1997
2. Female Genital Mutilation: The Practice, World Health Organisation, 1999
3. *Female Genital Mutilation: Prevalence and Distribution*, World Health Organisation fact sheet
4. *Archetypal Fears & Female Circumcision*, Margit Cleveland, RMS Media Services, 1999



ABOUT FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

THE FACTS AND FIGURES

Female Genital Mutilation is a common problem in approximately 28 countries in Africa. In about 85% of these countries, genital mutilation takes the form:

- *Clitoridectomy* (where all or part of the clitoris is removed) or
- *Excision* (where all or part of the labia minora is cut)

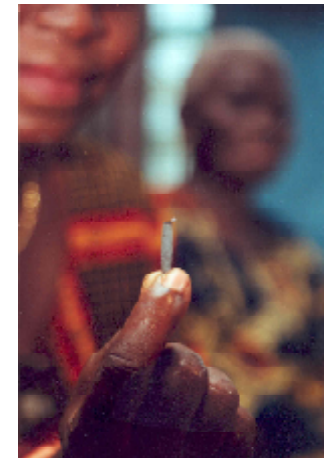
About 15% of the cases of genital mutilation in Africa are of the most extreme form called *infibulation* in which all or parts of the external genitalia are removed followed by the stitching and narrowing of the vaginal opening.¹

International figures on FGM

According to figures released by the World Health Organisation, about 50% of Nigeria's female population is mutilated with the most common forms being clitoridectomy, excision and, in the northwest, some infibulation.²

The most common reasons given for female genital mutilation, also called *female circumcision* is as follows:

- It is an important rite of passage for girls in to womanhood and that it prevents women from being promiscuous.
- In some communities, it is believed that if a baby's head touches the clitoris during childbirth, that either mother or child will die.
- Other communities view uncircumcised women as slaves.
- Most Nigerians who support the practice say it is because of *tradition*.



A typical circumciser's knife

National figures on FGM

In a national survey conducted by Research & Marketing Services (RMS) in 1999 with a sample of 5000 respondents spread across all 36 states in Nigeria, the prevalence of FGM was highest in the following states:

- Ekiti (89%)
- Edo (88%)
- Ondo & Kwara (83%)
- Ebonyi (76%)
- Bayelsa (72%)

The RMS survey found an approximate national prevalence rate of 40%.³

THE EFFECTS OF FGM



Dramatisation of the pains of circumcision by PSW

The effects of FGM are very grave. FGM can cause the following:

- Extreme pain
- Hemorrhage
- Damage to the organs surrounding the clitoris and labia.
- Chronic infections can occur
- Intermittent bleeding
- Abscesses and tumors.
- Urinary tract infections
- Kidney damage
- Stones in the bladder
- Urethra can occur
- Infections of the reproductive tract resulting from obstructed menstrual flow
- Excessive scarring
- Keloids
- Cysts
- Infertility are further possible effects of FGM
- More painful and prolonged labor accompanied by first to third degree tears.¹

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS TO ERRADICATE FGM

- In 1984, the Nigerian arm of the Inter-Africa Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (AIC) was set up. Over the years, the AIC have focused their efforts on training, information campaigns and advocacy, and have received support from the Ministries of Health, Education and Information.
- In 1994, the United Nations came up with a Plan of Action based on two regional seminars held in Burkina Faso and Sri Lanka. The Plan of Action calls FGM a human rights violation and "an expression of the societal gender subordination of women" and encourages governments to take a variety of measures to bring the practice to a stop.