

# Female Circumcision in Somalia (Overall Review)

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In 1981, an extensive field investigation into female circumcision was conducted in Somalia. This research was authorized by the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine of the National Somali University and the data were collected by three female students of the same faculty.

2497 subjects (comprising women and children) were interviewed, mostly in Mogadishu. We designed a questionnaire to clarify the most significant patterns related to this custom from three points of view: anthropological, medical and sociopsychological. The main results of this research are the following (Table 1):

- the practice of female circumcision, even today, is universal in Somalia; the percentage of circumcised women is 99.3%; infibulation is the commonest type of circumcision used. The age of operation varies from birth to 15 years;
- the custom includes many complications; they are: immediate, post-menarcheal, at marriage and post-partum;
- attitudes of Somali women towards this custom are positive; they favour maintenance of the practice in the country and expect their daughters to be circumcised.

The second part of the research consisted in a detailed analysis of the following points:

- in the *Anthropological sector*: evolution of the excissory custom in Somalia and the methods used to perform it, in an urban environment (Grassivaro Gallo e Marian Abdisamed 1985: 311; Grassivaro Gallo e Viviani, in press).
- in the *Bio-medical sector*: consequences of the operation on the woman's health and the relation between infibulation and sexual maturity (Grassivaro Gallo 1985a: 239).
- in the *Social sector*: opinions about the custom expressed by women and future medical and nursing operators in the field (Grassivaro Gallo 1985b: 133; Grassivaro Gallo 1986a: 71).
- in the *Psychological sector*: what the operation means to girls of school age and what psychological connotations they attribute to the circumcised and non-circumcised woman (Grassivaro Gallo e Moro Boscolo, in press).

A film-strip was also made on this point (Grassivaro Gallo e Viviani 1985; Grassivaro Gallo e Viviani, 1986).

To conclude this research all the material collected in the field and the results obtained from the various elaborations have been put together in a monograph in Italian language (Grassivaro Gallo, 1986b).

Table 1 - *Female circumcision in Somalia: general view of result (1981).*

Total subjects interviewed									
Localities of the Survey	Primary and Secondary School (Benadir)	Hajane Field	Nursing School	Gay and La- foole Colleges Somali National University	Faculty of Medicine (Benadir)	Benadir Hospital (Maternity)	Quarters Gynecological Surgeries (Benadir)	Refugees Camps (Corioley) (Hargeisa)	?
Subjects	Children	unmarried women	unmarried women	unmarried women	unmarried women	married women	married women	married women	unmarried women
Number of Subject	351	252	144	192	58	698	683	29	90
Age of Subjects <i>mean ± S.D.</i>	10.6 ± 2.31	20.0 ± 3.22	18.5 ± 1.63	23.3 ± 2.71	23.2 ± 2.81	26.9 ± 6.27	27.5 ± 7.72	31.3 ± 11.78	19.1 ± 3.48
<i>Educational status (%)</i>									
1. Illiteracy	1)	/	/	/	/	/	66.2	79.3	/
2. Primary	2)	59.0	/	/	/	/	11.3	13.8	/
3. Secondary	3)	41.0	/	/	/	/	9.7	6.9	/
4. High School	4)	/	100.0	100.0	/	/	7.2	/	95.6
5. University Education	5)	/	/	/	100.0	100.0	/	/	/

Table 2 - Female circumcision in Somalia: general view of results (1981).

Anthropological traits										
Localities of the Survey	Primary and Secondary School (Benadir)	Halone Field	Nursing School	Gary and Lafcole Colleges Somali National University	Faculty of Medicine (Benadir)	Benadir Hospital (Maternity)	Quarters Gynecological Surgeries (Benadir)	Refugees' Camps (Corioley)	Hargeisa) ?	
<i>Type of circumcision (%)</i>										
1. Not infibula-	1) 41.0	25.0	2.8	32.8	16.3	34.8	/	8.9	8.9	
2. Infibulation	2) 46.4	72.6	97.2	66.2	83.7	63.5				
3. Not circum-	3) 12.6	2.4	/	1.0	1.7	/	1.6	/	/	
<i>Age when performed (Mean <math>\pm</math> S.D.)</i>	5.9 $\pm$ 2.30	7.0 $\pm$ 1.91	7.6 $\pm$ 1.90	6.3 $\pm$ 2.25	6.8 $\pm$ 2.94	8.6 $\pm$ 2.50	7.4 $\pm$ 3.09	8.3 $\pm$ 1.27	7.4 $\pm$ 1.38	
<i>Place where performed (%)</i>										
1. Urban Area	1) 95.2	86.1	88.0	36.2	62.0	/	10.3	98.9		
2. Nomadic Area	2) 2.4	13.2	6.3	1.7	34.4		89.7	/		
<i>Town or region where per- formed (%)</i>	/		29.2 Mog.	23.4 Mog.		West Gal- beed				
	/		54.0 Mog.	9.0 Mudug	45.8 Mog.	9.5 M. Shab.	/	86.2 Oga- den	61.1 Gal- beed	
<i>(Prevailing)</i>	/		1) 74.6	41.0	59.9	63.8				
<i>By whom performed (%)</i>	/		2) 21.8	59.0	38.0	32.8	86.5	100.0	51.1	
1. Doctor or Paramedical	1) 5.2	24.3	/	/	/	15.5	/	37.9	51.1	
2. Untrained female	2) 54.8	33.3	/							
	3) 6.0	36.1								
<i>Type of suture (%)</i>	/		/		/		/		/	
1. Thorns	1) 5.2	24.3	/	/	/	15.5	/	37.9	51.1	
2. Seam	2) 54.8	33.3	/							
3. Tie of Thighs	3) 6.0	36.1								
<i>Type of mo-</i>	/		/		/		/		/	
<i>ther's Circumcision %</i>	1) 14.3	2.8	24.5	12.1	11.7	/	0.0	8.9	88.9	
	2) 72.6	95.8	71.4	22.4	85.7					
	3) 2.0	/	/	/	/	0.3	/	100.0	/	

Table 3. Female circumcision in Somalia: general view of results (1981).

	Medical traits								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Localities of the Survey	Primary and Secondary School (Benadir)	Halané Field	Nursing School	Gavr and Lafoole Colleges Somali National University	Faculty of Medicine (Benadir)	Benadir Hospital (Maternity)	Quarters Gynecological Surgeries (Benadir)	Refugees, Camps (Corioley)	?
Immediate complications at circumcision (%)	/	33.3	22.2	25.5	8.6	19.8	/	31.0	7.8
(Haemorrhage and pains as pre- vailing)									
Second infibula- tion	/	5.2	2.8	12.0	3.4	6.0	/	0.0	0.0
(Because first infibulation fails)									
Age at me- narche (mean $\pm$ S.D.)	12.5 $\pm$ 1.91	14.4 $\pm$ 1.62	14.4 $\pm$ 1.31	14.3 $\pm$ 1.78	13.9 $\pm$ 1.61	14.8 $\pm$ 1.72	14.3 $\pm$ 1.72	15.2 $\pm$ 1.46	14.6 $\pm$ 1.36
Complications at menarche (%) (Dysmenorrhea as prevailing)	/	45.2	37.5	38.5	8.6	25.2	/	17.2	17.8
Days of absence from work (%) (mean $\pm$ S.D.)	/	3.4 $\pm$ 1.31	2.6 $\pm$ 1.05	1.9 $\pm$ 1.19	1.5 $\pm$ 0.70	3.3 $\pm$ 1.87	/	5.0 $\pm$ 2.44	/
Complications at marriage (%) (painful pe- netration as pre- vailing).	/	/	/	/	/	47.7	/	75.9	/
Penetration (%)									
1. Natural	/	/	/	/	/	1) 80.9	/	31.0	/
2. Instrumental	/	/	/	/	/	2) 17.4	/	58.6	/
Type of instru- ment (%)									
1. Razor	/	/	/	/	/	1) 4.3	/	27.6	/
2. Knife	/	/	/	/	/	2) 3.9	/	13.8	/
3. Scissor	/	/	/	/	/	3) 9.2	/	17.2	/
Complications at delivery (%) (Episiotomy as Prevailing)	/	/	/	/	/	49.1	/	75.9	/
Reinfibulation after delivery (%)	/	/	/	/	/	50.0	/	79.3	/

Table 4 - *Female circumcision in Somalia: general view of results (1981).*

<i>Psychological traits</i>								
<i>Localities of the Survey</i>	1 Primary and Secondary School (Benadir)	2 Hajane Field	3 Nursing School	4 Gayr and Lafoole Colleges Somali National University	5 Faculty of Medicine (Benadir)	6 Benadir Hospital (Maternity)	7 Quarters Gynecological Surgeries (Benadir)	8 Refugees' Camps (Corioley) ?
<i>Foreseen cir- cumcision for daughters (%)</i>								
1. Not infibulation	1) 67.1	54.9	66.1	13.8	42.4	/	17.2	32.2
2. Infibulation	2) 13.9	40.3	7.3	0.0	39.0	/	82.8	53.3
3. Not circumcision	3) 8.3	2.1	15.6	48.3	5.9	0.0	0.0	12.2
<i>Presence of positive aspects in the circum- cision (%)</i>								
/	/	51.4	/	20.7	42.7	/	96.6	22.2
<i>Absence of ne- gative aspects of the circum- cision (%)</i>								
/	/	65.3	/	5.2	64.0	/	86.2	14.4
<i>Favourable opinion on the preservation of the practice (%)</i>								
/	43.3	90.3	62.0	13.8	83.0	/	93.1	64.4

NOTICE: in the sum of the percents, the completion is constituted by the percent of no given answers.

## References

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