Female ;umcision

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DOS an Association for nen in elopment



SWDO Somali Women's Democratic Organization

BARTIS FEMALE CIRCUMCISION IN SOMALIA AND THE SWDO/AIDO PROJECT Chapter 13

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS
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SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF INFIBULATION IN SOMALIA

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n Somalia nearly every woman undergoes one form n Somalia nearly of another, and one form of genital mutilation or another, the majority of genital mudergoing its severest form of genital illumination of gen (around 80%) und ground some sinfication. Even residence abroad does not exempt bulation. Even circumcision, as demonstrated from circumcision, as demonstrated from circumcision. bulation. Even bulation des from circumcision, as demonstrated somali girls from circumcision, as demonstrated by a small survey among Somalis living in England. That study by a small survey among somalis residing in England had had had found that more than 60% of Somalis residing in England had had had, by a sind had had had had found that more than 60% of daughters infibulated (see Attitude of or preferred to have, their daughters infibulated (see Attitude of the preferred to have, their daughters infibulated (see Attitude of the preferred to have, their daughters infibulated (see Attitude of the preferred to have, their daughters infibulated (see Attitude of the preferred to have, their daughters infibulated (see Attitude of the preferred to have, their daughters infibulated (see Attitude of the preferred to have, their daughters infibulated (see Attitude of the preferred to have, their daughters infibulated (see Attitude of the preferred to have, their daughters infibulated (see Attitude of the preferred to have, their daughters infibulated (see Attitude of the preferred to have, their daughters in England toward Circumcision by Anisa of the preferred to have, their daughters in England toward Circumcision by Anisa of the preferred to have the prefer or preferred to have, then days of preferred to have, then days of preferred to have, then toward Circumcision by Anisa Said Somali Residents in England toward Circumcision by Anisa Said Bakar, SOMAC, 1983). It gots the culture, in the conceptualization fibulation is deeply embedded in the culture, in the conceptualization fibulation is deeply embedded in the control of women, and in the fibulation is deeply ellibed to the control of women, and in the psyof "female" versus "male" in the control of women, and in the psychology of the people.

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Most of what I will present here is based on a study and the report

Most of what I will present aspects of Female Circumcision Most of what I will present aspects of Female Circumcision and Inon "Social and Cultural on Social and Cultural on Social and Cultural on Social and Cultural on Social and Infibulation", done with two colleagues, Ms Sacdiya Muse Ahmed, of Somacorch and Documentation Unit of SOMACO fibulation", done with and Documentation Unit of SOMAC, and Ms the Women's Research and Documentation Unit of SOMAC, and Ms the Women's Research and Ms Awa Talle, of the Department of Social Anthropology, University of

Stockholm.

Stockholm.

The study is part of a project on female circumcision being under-The study is part of a factor of the study is part somali National University and the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (SAREC).

As the faculty of medicine is most concerned with the medical aspect of the practice, we collected information on its social and cultural aspects for a more complete and balanced picture.

Till now we have interviewed around 35 women of different age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds as well as a few men. We plan to extend the sample to different groups, including men, practitioners and religious in order to gain insight as to why female circumcision persists. Only by gathering enough baseline information, we feel, can we eventually get rid of this harmful practice.

The women we interviewed were not selected randomly. Most of them

were was necessary because the information we sought was in the so were was necessary because the information we sought was intimate this few women will talk freely and frankly about such issue. This was necessary women will talk freely and frankly about such issues with a and few stranger.

complete stranger. complete strains where asked to speak about their experience we infibulation. They were asked to speak about their experience We talked to the way about their experience with infibulation. They were asked to speak about their experience with infibulation by whom, their feelings after and because with it was performed, by whom, their feelings after and because their marriages (doft). with infibulation, by whom, their feelings after and before the (how it was per their marriages (defibulation, sexual feelings, etc.), their marriages (defibulation, sexual feelings, etc.) operation, describe their attitude toward the practice, and last, to describe their attitude toward the practice.

and last, to destain going to focus on the magnitude of female cir-In this paper and infibulation in Somalia and its significance to the cumcision and concerned.

people concerned. people collection of people collection of infibulation, and why people first, I will try to explain the situation of infibulation, and why people it despite its harmfulness. Then I will give a brief First, I will dispite its harmfulness. Then I will give a brief overview of cling to it deep of the women interviewed toward the practice, and the attitude say something about how I think the practice, and the attitude the practice, and finally, I will say something about how I think the practice will be combated in the future.

combated in combated in the lives of the majority of Somali Infibulation is very much a part of the lives of the majority of Somali and probably always has been. But there are Infibulation and probably always has been. But there are some changes

here and there between now and in the past. here and difference one can detect nowadays is the tendency to The main other forms of circumcision to infibulation, at least in prefer the other. However, it must be noted that the prefer life. However, it must be noted that there is no distincpeople's act of the Sunna (excision of a small part of the clitoris) and tion between Sunna (excision of the clitoris with tion between the distribution of the clitoris with or without the labia minora) as far as the majority of the people are concerned. Many minora)
times we have come across circumcisers and ordinary women whose concept of Sunna was removal of all the "unclean flesh", which included the clitoris, the labia minora and even parts of the labia majora. To these people anything short stitched is Sunna. That is why one should be very careful of advocating the so-called Sunna form of circumcision.

One significant indication of the recent changes in the attitude of the people regarding the practice is the breaking of the silence surrounding it as many people begin questioning its social and cultural significance and validity. Until ten years or so ago, female circumcision was not at all an area of discussion.

At the moment, since circumcision and infibulation are universal. there is not much difference in the opinions of women of different age groups and socio-economic backgrounds regarding its performance. Every women undergoes it. In a recent survey by the Women's Research and Documentation Unit on marriage and fertility patterns

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in some regions of Somalia supported by UNFPA /UNESCO, there in some regions difference between the mother and their volume described and their volumestations. in some regions of Somalia Suppose the mother and their young was no obvious difference between the mother and their young was no obvious of the daughters were infibulated, against 79% of the daughters were accounted for 210% of the daughters. in some regions difference between their young was no obvious of the daughters were infibulated, against 79% of the daughters: 76% of the daughters. Another thing worth was no of the daughters accounted for 21% of the daughters. Sunna and clitoridectomy accounted for 21% of the mothers. Sunna of the daughters. Another thing worth mention the mothers and 23% of the practice in the urban mothers and 23% of the daughters. Another thing worth mentioning mothers and 23% of the practice in the urban areas and us mothers and 23% of the daughter and the urban areas and the mothers and 23% of the practice in the urban areas and the mothers and 23% of the practice in the urban areas and the mothers and personnel (mostly to the operation). mothers the professionalizing of the professio growing number of male circumstance personnel (mostly trained TBAs and is performed by medically trained personnel apply local anaesthetics and local anaesthetics and local anaesthetics. growing in deficiently trained is performed by medically trained and apply local anaesthetics. As nurses) who use sterile instruments and apply local anaesthetics. As nurses) who use sterile instruments and apply local anaesthetics. As nurses) who use sterile institution in the hospitals is discouraged, it is done in performing circumcision in the practitioner's home. In rural performing circumcision in the practitioner's home. performing circumcision in the practitioner's home. In rural areas the girls' homes or in the traditional way, without anaesthetics the girls' homes or in the traditional way, without anaesthetics and infibulation is done in the traditional way.

stitched with thorns.

Stitched with thorns.

But whether anaesthetics were used or not, all respondents reported

But whether anaesthetics were omplications and later upon me But whether anaesthetics were complications and later upon marriage, painful urination and other complications with regard to penetration

painful urmation and sufferings with regard to penetration, they all shared the same sufferings with regard to penetration, they all shared the same operation is an event of great signification.

For most Somali women, the operation is an event of great significant work early age, the small girl is led to believe For most Somali women, age, the small girl is led to believe that cance. From a very early age, the small girl is led to believe that cance. From a very carry carry and she is unclean and childish. This socialiunless she is inhounted a positive make-believe as a counter-action zation which is geared to a positive make-believe as a counter-action against what otherwise would be expected—psychological trauma, against what outerwise a turning point in the girls' lives. From Infibulation thus becomes a turning point in the girls' lives. From Infibulation that be irreversibly changed and a crucial step has now on their bodies are irreversibly changed and a crucial step has now on their bounds of them as women. It is no wonder, then, been taken in the shaping of the harm in store look for that small girls, unaware of the harm in store, look forward to the day they will be circumcised. This was indicated to us by most of our respondents, who claimed that they themselves initiated the operation. One woman told us that one day she saw some small girls she knew being infibulated. She cried and begged her mother to do her infibulation also.

The pressure from the age group, together with the inculcated notion of the supposedly positive qualities of the infibulated girl, is enough to make the small girl want to be like every one else. This is illustrated by the story of Anab, one of our respondents:

"When my older sister was circumcised, I was too young to remember anything. When girls of my age were looking after the lambs, they would talk among themselves about their circumcision experiences and look at each others genitals to see who had the smallest opening. If there was a girl in the group who was still uninfibulated, she would always feel ashamed since she had nothing to show the others. Every time the other girls proudly showed their infibulated genitals, I would feel ashamed because I was not yet circumcised.

whenever I touched the hair of infibulated girls, they would tell me Whenever I to touch them since I was 'unclean' because I had not yet been not to touch and shaved. circumcised and shaved.

circumcised and circumcised and in the girl's head is shaved or washed in a "After the infibulation, the girl's head is shaved or washed in a "After the "After the shared of purification, but my hair was or was special way as a rite of purification, but my hair was 'dirty'.

special way as a special way as a special way I could not stand it any more. I took a razor blade and went special way I could not stand it any more. I took a razor blade and went one day I could be a fazor blade and went to an isolated place. I tied my clitoris with a thread, and while pulling thread with one hand hand I tried to cut part of to an isolated pulling at the thread with one hand hand I tried to cut part of my clitoris. at the thread at the pain and saw blood coming from the cut I stopped when I felt the pain and saw blood coming from the cut I stopped when I left directly to my paternal aunt (my own mother was dead) and went direction and went direction what I had done. I had heard my grandmother was dead) and told her what I had done. I had heard my grandmother tell how and told her and tried to infibulate herself, in order to hasten the process, she had tried to repeat what my grandmother had her process, she had a line in the prand now I had tried to repeat what my grandmother had done.

and now I had and now I had done.

"After some weeks, I was infibulated together with seven other girls. I "After sollie".

Was seven years old, but some of the other girls were older. After a was seven is were wound healed and the thorns were removed. After a few days to resume my normal work. I felt provide when I few days able to resume my normal work, I felt proud, and whenever was able to some girls asked me if I was infibulated, I did not have to hide my genitals."

genitals.
Unlike today and in the urban areas in Anab's days, girls used to Unlike today the following the state of the a straight, narrow scar (line) with a tiny hole at the lower end. As virginity is usually of great significance culturally and socially and

if for one reason or another the infibulation is broken before marriage, it is considered shameful and the women is thought of as being loose and immoral. All the time she is constantly reminded by other women and girl friends about the importance of her virginity (infibulation) and is told of the punishment she can expect if she loses it.

One woman told us a story of her fourteen-year-old niece, who came from the nomadic area to stay with them in the city. The girl had been infibulated, but part of her infibulation had at some point been broken by accident. The girl's mother had never been bothered by the accident and had never had the operation repeated. One day the niece quarreled with an older girl in the neighbourhood and accused her of being "loose and indecent". The insulted girl asked another woman present to look at the genitals of them both to find out which of them was indeed "loose and indecent". When both girls were examined, the niece was found to be open (she had apparently not been aware of this state herself). From that day on the girl never tired of begging her aunt (the woman who told us the story) to have herself re-infibulated. At last she was sewn anew, and she never felt ashamed again.

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Many educated men we talked to in Mogadisho also claimed that wife. The many educated men "non-virgin" (open) girl as their first wife. The many educated men "non-virgin" could never be sure of "part is why men prefer to the many could not take a "take a Many educated men we talked to in mosadish also claimed that wife. The many educated men "non-virgin" (open) girl as their first wife. The they could never be sure of "who had they could not take a "non-virgin" they could not take a that they men prefer to penet they could not take a that is why men prefer to penet they could not take a that is why men prefer to penet. Many educated mer "non-virgin toper, gar as their first wife. The who had they could not take a "non-virgin they could never be sure of "who had they could not take a that they could never be sure of "who had they could not take a "non-virgin toper, and they could never be sure of "who had they could not take a "non-virgin toper, and they could never be sure of "who had they could not take a "non-virgin toper, and they could never be sure of "who had they could not take a "non-virgin toper, and they could never be sure of "who had they could not take a "non-virgin toper, and they could never be sure of "who had they could not take a "non-virgin toper, and they could never be sure of "who had they could not take a "non-virgin toper, and they could never be sure of "who had they could not take a "non-virgin toper, and they could never be sure of "who had they could not take a "non-virgin toper, and they could never be sure of "who had they could not take a "non-virgin toper, and they could never be sure of "who had they could not take a "non-virgin toper, and they could not take a "non-virgin toper, and they could not take a "non-virgin toper, and they could never be sure of "who had they could not take a "non-virgin toper, and they could not take a "non-virgin t Many could not take that they could not take was that they men prefer to penetrate that they could not take that is why men prefer to penetrate the they could not take was that is why men prefer to penetrate the they could not take that is why men prefer to penetrate the they could not take that is why men prefer to penetrate the they could not take that is why men prefer to penetrate the they could not take that is why men prefer to penetrate they could not had been they could not take that is why men prefer to penetrate they could not had been they could not take that is why men prefer to penetrate they could not had been they could not take that is why men prefer to penetrate they could not take they could not tak they they expressed them". That is will they they expressed them where infibulation is done surgically, way there before themselves or, where infibulation act on his behalf are female relatives of the husband usually act on his behalf are female relatives of see if is intact. way there belove or, where he was act on his behalf and been themselves of the husband usually act on his behalf and infibulation to see if is intact.

some female relatives of the Sunna operation, a husband;

some fifth the infibulation to see if is intact.

some remarcation to see if is intact. inspect the inner had the Suma girl has had to be operated on if the woman has had. Also, if a young girl has had to be operated on informed before hand. Also, if a parents are given a written deal informed before hand. She and her parents are given a written deal informed before hand. She and her parents are given a written deal informed before hand. She and her parents are given a written deal informed before hand. She and her parents are given a written deal informed before hand. She and her parents are given a written deal informed before hand. She and her parents are given a written deal informed before hand. She and her parents are given a written deal informed before hand. If the woman hand. Also, if a young of the woman hand. Also, if a young of the woman hand. Also, if a young of the woman hand her parents are given a written declaring informed before hand. Also, if a young of the woman hand her parents are given a written declaring informed before hand. Also, if a young of the woman hand her parents are given a written declaring informed before hand. Also, if a young of the woman hand her parents are given a written declaring informed before hand. Also, if a young of the woman hand her parents are given a written declaring informed before hand. Also, if a young of the woman hand her parents are given a written declaring informed before hand. Also, if a young of the woman hand her parents are given a written declaring informed before hand. Also, if a young of the woman hand her parents are given a written declaring informed before hand. Also, if a young of the woman hand her parents are given a written declaring informed before hand. Also, if a young of the woman hand her parents are given a written declaring informed before hand. Also, if a young of the woman hand her parents are given a written declaring informed before hand. Also, if a young of the woman hand her parents are given a written declaring informed before hand. Also, if a young of the woman hand her parents are given a written declaring informed before hand. Also, if a young of the woman hand her parents are given a written declaring informed before hand her parents are given a written declaring informed before hand. Also, if a young of the woman hand her parents are given a written declaring informed before hand.

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for aesthetic and protection reasons. circumcion and protection read in their attitudes toward infibulation, for aesthetic and protection their attitudes toward infibulation.

The women interviewed varied in their attitudes toward infibulation.

The women out to be ardent defenders of the custom and claimed out to be ardent defenders. The women interviewed varied in the custom and claimed the women interviewed varied in the women interviewed varied va Some turned out to be ardered they would "run away and become that if girls were not infibulated they doubtful, but thought that circumstated they women were more doubtful, but thought that circumstated they women were more doubtful, but thought that circumstated they would "run away and become that if girls were not limbulated doubtful, but thought that circum-loose". Other women were more doubtful, that is our way") in specessary ("We Somalis do it, that is our way") in specessary loose". Other women were made somalis do it, that is our way") in spite of cision was necessary ("We Somalis do it, that is our way") in spite of cision was necessary (we go state of all the pain inflicted on the girls. Still other women forcefully rejected all the pain inflicted and ridiculous". the practice as "brutal and ridiculous".

the practice as brutar and the practice as bruta The last category companies to alternative female roles, have come higher education and exposure to alternative female roles, have come higher education and of nemotice come to question the soundness of the operation and of penature come to question the sound who therefore are latently opposite ones whose personal cape who therefore are latently opposed to the negative indeed, and who therefore are latently opposed to the

practice.
These non-educated women, however, have access to few alternative female roles except the traditional ones, which means that most of them have few other options but to adhere to the prevailing norm.

We have seen that the practice of female circumcision and infibulation is very deep-rooted and is part and parcel of the lives and "psychology" of the Somali masses. We have also seen that many different cultural pressures are at the base of the continuation of the practice, and it is easy to feel one is up against an unyielding obstacle. However, through the interviews we conducted and through numerous discussions with other Somalis, it is our firm impression that a large part of the Somali population, especially in the towns, are now ready for assessing and eventually revising the practice of female circumcision.

With this glimmer of hope and with these changes in the attitudes of the people, it is hoped that positive changes will come.

proposition of help in combating female circumcision:

In the of help in combating female circumcision: onclusion; combating female circumcision; will be of help in combating female circumcision;

of help in the practice especially on small girls to mine at which age to begin education concerning circumstance of the practice especially on small girls to mine at which age to begin education concerning circumstance. More research age to begin education concerning girls to determine kind of information is needed to be included a different grades. Other grades to be included in the different grades. determine at what kind of information is needed to be included in the and what for different grades. Other groups that should in the and what kind for different grades. Other groups that should in the curricula include uncircumcised girls and communities (like percent) curricula include uncircumcised girls and communities (like Barawa) searched in searched in searched girls and where women undergo the mildest Sunna.

where women are Muslim and Islam is crucial to the Somalis and Islam is crucial to the Somalis Almost all service of identity. Since many people (especially women) for their series circumcision as an obligation in Islam, an intensive regard female regarding this matter should be launched by religious

people. people.

It would also be very helpful if non-circumcised Muslim women It would also wisit and share with the Somali masses through from other two Democratic Organization network, mass media, the Somali we specially useful where women believe that reality. This and other income and other man other women believe that all Muslim would be especially useful where misconceptions about would be cor where misconceptions about uncircumcised women are prevalent.

cised wollier a minor percentage of the population is aware of some of the Since a find of some of the complications which result from the practice, intensive health complication should be given to the different groups of the masses.

education will not be very effective at this stage, but still it can help in certain cases as it will serve as a basis for implementation help in the appropriate time. For this reason the Government should pass legislation prohibiting female circumcision.