

Individual freedom is a principle that should be preceded by constant awareness so that the individual is able to take sound informed decisions

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Is it in line with individual freedom or is it forced by societal norms?

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Are Social Norms Stronger than Individual Freedom?

Executive Summary

Despite the fact that genital female mutilation (FGM) which is partial or full removal of female genitalia, was officially criminalized in 2008; the scale of social norms seems to outweigh that of individual freedom. Penalties and legislations did not seem to make a strong stand in the face of social and at times religious norms whether which happen to be untrue and lack concrete evidence. Still the ghost of FGM haunts a big percentage of Egyptian women.

“%87 of women aged 15 – 49 having undergone the procedure”

From a medical point of view, FGM has not proven to have any medical benefits, on the contrary it imposes risks during child birth as well as other dangerous risks including death.

One has to be aware of the effect of different efforts of NGOs, government and different stakeholders in decreasing the percentage of FGM; still a lot of work needs to be done to further reduce FGM in Egypt.

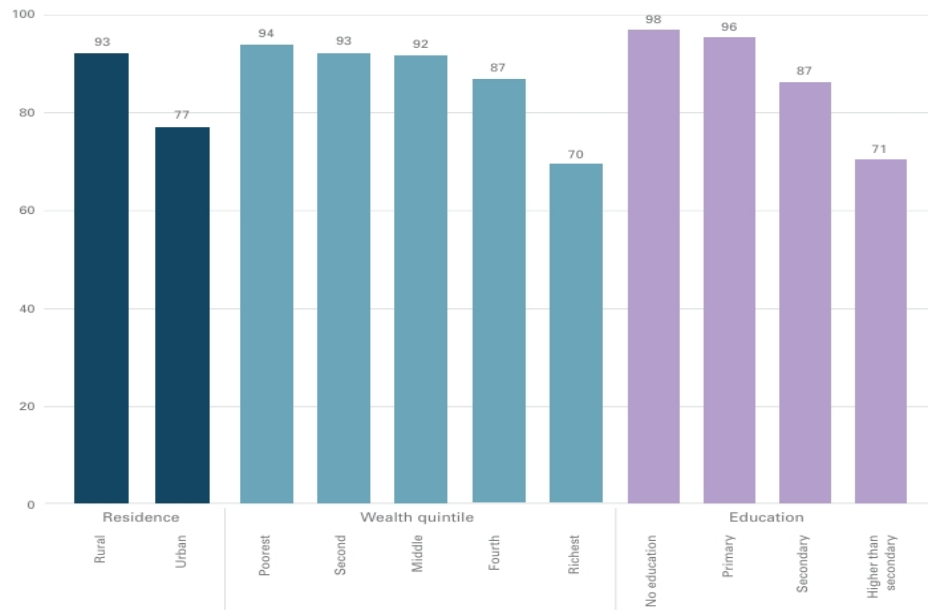
According to UNFPA and UNICEF, in order to end FGM by 2030, which is spread especially among rural areas and among those with modest education and those witnessing poverty as illustrated in the figure below. There needs to be more emphasis on awareness efforts and change of perception especially that there are social and religious misconceptions.

Egypt is unfortunately not on track when it comes to fulfilling the goal of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of eliminating FGM. SDG5 indicates that gender equality is to be achieved along with women empowerment.

Introduction

In addition to it being a major violation of human rights, FGM is performed for non-medical reasons having main consequences for both women and girls, whether physically or psychologically, ranging from childbirth problems to trauma. The religious norms affecting FGM are not restricted to one religion, but could be Christian or Muslim. Either way, there is no evidence that FGM is mandatory by teachings of religion.

The prevalence of FGM is high across many population groups in Egypt, but the practice is somewhat more common in **rural areas, in less wealthy households** and among girls and women with **less education**



► FIG.2 Percentage of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years who have undergone FGM, by residence, wealth quintile and education

As stated by the United Nations Population Fund, the medicalization of FGM does not make it harmless.

Problem of FGM in Egypt

- TRENDS: There has been obvious change in the perception of the Egyptian street concerning FGM especially among young generations, which spreads optimism concerning elimination of FGM.

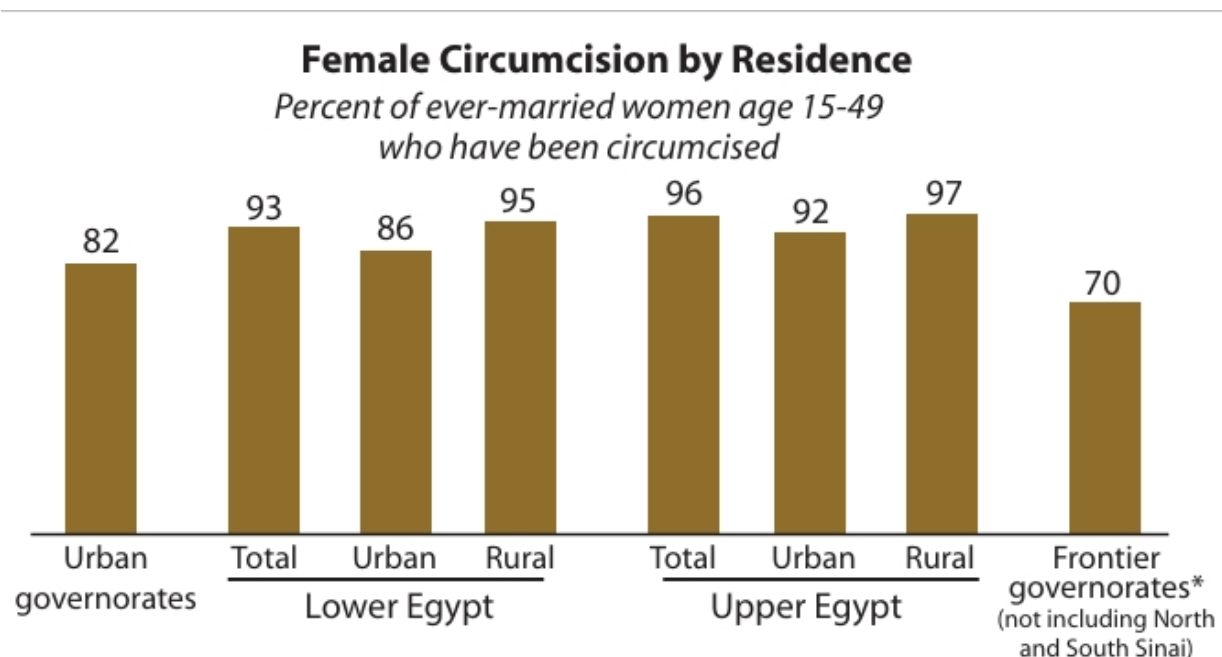
- HEALTH: risks range from childbirth complications and trauma to death. Medicalization of FMG does not make it safe.
- SOCIO ECONOMIC FACTORS: socio-economic factors happen to impact FGM, as it is prevalent in areas with low income levels and low education levels. Hence awareness efforts must be tailored accordingly to suit these target groups.
- RULE of LAW:FGM was criminalized in 2008 followed by penalties that where increased in 2021 to become a minimum of five years and maximum of twenty years in prison for those carrying out FMG, yet more efforts are required by stakeholders.

Recommendations

- Involvement of influencers in change of perception and awareness campaigns
- Design of campaigns *in a simplified manner to suit target group in rural areas.*
- Increase of awareness efforts in general regarding FGM.
- Rule of law concerning penalties concerning FGM and creation of a free hotline to report cases while coordinating to ensure protection for survivors of FGM.
- Ensuring physical and psychological protection for FGM survivors.
- Targeting medical professionals in awareness campaigns.

“Egypt has the highest rate of medicalized FGM compared to other countries, %78 of girls aged 1-14 were cut by medical professionals”

According to UNICEF, almost %72 of procedures are performed by medical professionals.



*One can easily see that rural areas seem to take the lead
in FGM whether in upper or lower Egypt*

Conclusion

Egypt has undergone a lot of effort to reduce FGM, building on these efforts is of high urgency in putting an end to FGM in Egypt; which is possible.

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