



MWIA CASE STUDIES

CULTURAL VIOLENCE

Case 2 1: Female Genital Mutilation in Kenya

Objectives

- To show how cultural practices violate the rights of girls

Narrative Case

** At the end of the case study you can find "Learning points" related to information presented in the narrative case, denoted by numbers in square brackets.*

The UN convention on the rights of children define this group as those aged under 18 years. One ethnic grouping in Kenya honours the rites of passage for adolescent boys by unfortunately violating the rights of girls.

Mwandi is fifteen years old. She has known since she started her menses at the age of 12 years that she was destined for something special. Her mother kept a close eye on her and did not allow her to spend nights away from home at her friend's houses like other girls. Early one morning her mother woke her up and after she had bathed dressed her up nicely and took her to a strange hut in the nearby village where she was told to lie on a bed and keep her legs open. [1] Before she could scream, she felt a sharp excruciating pain down below after which she felt the sting of some herbal preparations. [2] She was told to keep her legs together. That was the beginning of the end of her childhood. Two weeks later when it had all healed up her mother gave her some special fragrant herbs to

bathe with and told her she had to be good as she was going to bring honour to their family.

Later she learnt that 'warrior' boys are confined in a camp for various rites. Tradition and culture means girl children are circumcised and given to 'warriors' as sexual companions.

There was no protection offered against sexually transmitted infections when she developed sores and was later told at the clinic that she was HIV positive. [3] Treatment consisted of herbs that her mother procured from a medicine man. [4]

If girls get pregnant, because these relationships are outside marriage, the mother of the girl has to find a way of aborting the foetus. This is done by crushing the head of the foetus against the girl's pelvis. Mwandi was brought to the clinic by an aunt who visited the village and noticed the severe pain and extreme bleeding (menorrhagia) she was having. [5,6]

Learning Points

- [1] Perpetrators are primary care givers, parents, teachers and close relatives in Kenya and many other countries where culture and tradition are the predominant reason for a large number of practices that are harmful and violent especially to girls.
- [2] Female genital mutilation is believed to help control sexual urge in young girls and keep them chaste. The same tradition and culture is however throwing these virgin girls at young men to whom they are not married.
- [3] There is no sex education of either young men or the young women to protect them against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or pregnancies.
- [4] There is a lack of healthcare available for those who get STIs.
- [5] Women doctors must be aware of these practices and use every available opportunity to educate their patients on the dangers of these practices and the continued violations of the rights of children especially girls.
- [6] Women doctors need to work with community opinion leaders to offer education on the effects and outcomes of these harmful practices.

References

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