



F E M A L E  
G E N I T A L  
M U T I L A T I O N S :

a t r a d i t i o n  
t o a b a n d o n  
f o r e v e r



*Presidency of the Council of Ministers  
Ministry of Equal Opportunity*



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*Dear Parents,*

*Female genital mutilation is an ancient practice, not justified or envisaged by any religion, and condemned in many countries of the world. This practice causes atrocious suffering and irreparably lacerates those who undergo it for the rest of their lives.*

*You should be aware that when a girl is mutilated she risks serious health problems, and the parents are liable, in our country as in the other EU countries, to severe penalties.*

*You, the parents, should know that there is no obligation, necessity, purpose or advantage in subjecting your daughters to this practice, which is also punishable by law.*

*Why many populations continue this practice is unclear.*

*It is thought that they blindly respect an ancient tradition without asking themselves why.*

*Its origin can be traced back to the age of Egyptian Pharaohs.*

*From there it spread through many African countries, taking different forms in different regions.*

*We believe that the best way to integrate foreigners who have chosen to live in our country is through dialogue and mutual awareness.*



*Therefore, we feel it necessary to explain, also through this leaflet, that there are rights that Italy and the international community consider inviolable, including the right to mental and physical integrity. We understand that it can be difficult to break with an ancient custom, but believe that you care about the health and happiness of your daughters who risk being subjected to a ritual that will indelibly mark their bodies and souls. Your daughters will live in a new millennium, in Italy as Italian citizens. Let's help them face the future with hope and with a smile.*

Ministry for Equal Opportunity





## THE ARGUMENTS PUT FORWARD FOR INFIBULATION ARE UNTENABLE

Over the centuries many different reasons, some contradictory, have been put forward to justify the perpetuation of female genital mutilation.

They differ slightly between populations and geographical areas, but they are all based on religious or superstitious beliefs, traditions and taboos.

The reasons most frequently put forward are the following:

1. It is a religious practice.

***Neither the Koran, Bible nor the Gospel prescribe female genital mutilations. Among the various religions, there are numerous increasing opinions that have decidedly risen up to re-establish that faiths are not involved in these practices.***

2. It perpetuates traditions.

***Traditions are subject to a community's continuous adaptation to social and historic evolution. This is also true of female genital***



*mutilations. By abandoning them, a woman does not betray her own culture, but rather establishes a tie based on new values such as human rights, dignity and a woman's freedom to choose.*

3. It is an important rite of initiation.

*The function of the rite of passage is disappearing everywhere. Holy days and ceremonies during which no blood is shed, peacefully ensure social recognition of the passing to adulthood.*

4. It is hygienic.

*On the contrary, it causes many genital and urinary infections. In order to preserve hygiene, simply wash frequently.*

5. It is aesthetic.

*The idea of doll-like, flat vulva is a traditional concept which finds no confirmation in reality.*

6. Infibulation is necessary to preserve virginity.

*Not true because it can be reconstructed after sexual intercourse (re-infibulation). Rather, it is the education received and individual values that guide sexual choices.*

7. It increases their husbands' sexual desire.

*Not true because it has been proven that men's sexual desire increases if reciprocated by women. Instead, sexual intercourse becomes painful for women who have been mutilated and penetration becomes difficult for men.*

8. It prevents immoral sexual behaviour.

*Not true because it does not stop women from engaging in "irregular" practices.*

## WHAT IS MEANT BY GENITAL MUTILATION

There are different types of female genital mutilation, all harmful, which can be classified into:

**Sunna circumcision** which is performed on the clitoris;

**Clitoridectomy** in which the entire clitoris is excised;

**Infibulation** in which the external genitals are excised and the vaginal orifice is stitched up to allow only for the passage of urine and menstrual blood;

There are also other practices, not clearly specified, that are nevertheless harmful to female genitals.





## CONSEQUENCES FOR GIRLS' HEALTH

Dear parents, you should realise that the consequences of these practices for your daughters' mental and physical health can be very serious indeed.

Irrespective of the type of mutilation, who performs it and under what hygienic-sanitary conditions, it is always an impairment and an affront that will last for the rest of your daughters' lives, and in some cases can even cause death.

***First of all, you should be aware that infibulation, of whatever type, is not a trivial practice, but a real gynaecological operation. Gynaecological surgery which is not done in a hospital by a gynaecologist (or surgeon) puts the patient's life at risk.***

When these mutilations are performed without anaesthesia and without surgical guarantees the girls frequently ***faint and go into shock***, because of the excruciating pain caused by the laceration of the genitals and the ***haemorrhaging*** of the wounds.

Haemorrhage, which is the most common and most fatal consequence of this operation, is inevitable. In fact, you should know that the clitoris, which is excised, is one of the most vascularised part of the body. If the haemorrhaging is not stopped in time, the girl can die.

And even when the haemorrhaging is not heavy, the loss of blood can go on for days, leading to a serious anaemic condition.

But there are not only short-term risks. Even if the blood loss is contained, there is still the risk of the wound becoming infected.

**Infections** are caused by the lack of necessary hygienic conditions required by all surgical operations. The pain does not stop immediately after the operation. The girls suffer to the point of not wanting to urinate for days after the operation because of the unbearable pain.

Not urinating causes another pathology called **urinary retention**.

Consequently, the urinary tract gets infected adding further risks to the girl's health.

The infections extend to nearby organs, such as the urethra, vagina, rectum etc.

Besides common infections, which often start to fester and turn gangrenous, you should be aware that the girl can die from **tetanus** due to the use of instruments that have not been sterilised, and from **HIV/AIDS or hepatitis** due to repeated use of the same instruments.

If the girl survives the operation, once she becomes adult she may nevertheless suffer from a series of **"long-term"** impairments and illnesses. These can be serious pathologies which reduce the quality and length of her life.





Among these the most frequent are:

***Difficulties in urinating:*** caused by obstruction of the urinary opening or impairment of the urinary tract. Urination can be painful, and consequently, these women tend to urinate as little as possible. This leads to various pathologies of the urinary system, particularly those related to infections.



***Chronic, continuous and recurring infections of the vagina and the internal reproductive organs.***

***Impossibility of having children (sterility):*** usually due to infections that can provoke irreparable damage to the reproductive organs.

***Substantial scars on the vulva (keloids):*** these formations often narrow the vaginal orifice making it impossible to have sexual intercourse and make it difficult for menstrual blood to egress from its natural orifice.

***Perforation or injuries between the vagina and the bladder or between the vagina and the rectum (fistula).***



In these cases sometimes urine and faeces come out of the same orifice.

***Pain during sexual intercourse*** is practically an inevitable consequence, the norm for these unlucky women. Sometimes penetration of the male sexual organ is difficult if not impossible, and in some cases surgery has been necessary to enable sexual intercourse.

But even for those mutilated women who, despite everything have managed to conceive, ***problems reappear during pregnancy and delivery***: they are very common in women who have suffered such impairment. The scar can prevent dilation of the birth channel and cause obstructed labour.

Then there are a whole series of impairments going from the formation of ***genital inclusion cysts*** (cysts provoked by the inclusion of a fragment of material in the scar). Sometimes a mass of nervous tissue is formed in the incision (***neuroma***), where the nerve of the clitoris has been cut. The entire genital area becomes hypersensitive and causes unbearable and constant pain.

## WHAT HAPPENS IN ITALY IF A GIRL IS SUBJECTED TO GENITAL MUTILATION

New legislation recently passed by Parliament defines female genital mutilation a crime.

In particular, the terms of imprisonment range from four to twelve years for those who provoke female genital mutilation.

Female genital mutilation includes clitoridectomy, excision, infibulation and any other practices causing the same type of effects.



The terms of imprisonment for causing other injuries to female genital organs (different than those previously mentioned) and bodily or spiritual sickness range from three to seven years. The sentence is reduced by one-third in the event of minor injuries.

Punishment is increased by one-third when these practices cause harm to a minor or are committed with the goal of profiting from them.

These provisions are also applied when such practices are committed abroad by Italian citizens or foreigners residing in Italy or when harm is caused to an Italian citizen or foreigner residing in Italy.





## CONCLUSIONS

Infibulation, like all genital mutilations, causes serious harm to your daughters.

These practices have been condemned by numerous governments of the world as well as the World Health Organisation.

In our country they are severely punished by the criminal law.

They are traditions that cause pain and suffering in those subjected to them and must be eradicated forever for the good of your daughters.

Health and family counselling structures as well as associations for immigrant women are at your disposal for consultation, advice and support in these matters.

We therefore invite you to turn to your local health unit or nearest family counselling centre should you require any further information or assistance.


For further information, consult the Italian Ministry for Equal Opportunity's web-site: [www.pariopportunita.gov.it](http://www.pariopportunita.gov.it)











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