

FEMALE GENITAL MULTILATION (FGM) A CRIME IN EDO STATE
BY HON. JUSTICE N. A. IMOUKHUEDE

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a cultural practice that has been with the Edo People from time immemorial. The cultural belief is that FGM prevents sexual promiscuity and promotes chastity in women. We now know that this myth and a harmful belief that militates against women's health in Nigeria. Culture is dynamic and not static, therefore as we grow as a people, we should easily abandon those beliefs that are harmful, or work injustice to any segment of our society. You all know that previously twins were killed at birth in Calabar because they were regarded as an evil omen. Today the situation has changed because the people were made to realize that such a belief was repugnant. So we in Edo State MUST ALSO CHANGE our beliefs. FGM is now a crime in Edo State. I am glad that in the audience we have traditional birth attendants, members of the Health Sector in the Local Governments, Women Leaders and Market women leaders. This message is for you!

Our most distinguished Professor Okonofua has eloquently informed you of the health risks associated with FGM. I would therefore go straight to an analysis of the Edo State Female Genital Mutilation (Prohibition) Law. This law was passed in 1999 by the Edo State House of Assembly. The objective of the law is to stop circumcision or FGM which sometimes lead to serious bleeding, infection, psychological trauma and in some cases death of the victims.

The FGM Law in section 2 Defines Mutilation as any cutting, incision, damage or removal of any part or the entire female organ. This law therefore deals with female circumcision and not male. You can therefore still circumcise your male-children.

Section 4, lists the principal offenders as::

- i) The person herself who offers herself for circumcision so you cannot tell the court that it is my body and I have a right over i.
- ii) Any person who either forces, entices or causes any person to undergo FGM.
- iii) Any parent or guardian you can't tell the court that it is my child or ward so it is not the government's business. It is a crime against the state.
- iv) The performer of the operation of FGM you cannot therefore claim that I was in my office or house when the child was brought to me.

For the offence of FGM, it is irrelevant that the female consented. Consent is therefore not a defence to FGM , you cannot also plead that it is a tradition of your people (see section 3)

Under Section 5, the people who therefore have the power of arrest are the Police, officers of the Ministry of Health, officers of the Local Government or any other authorized person.

Once the prosecution has proved its case, the penalty is a conviction for not less than 3 years imprisonment or an option of fine for not less than N3,000 or both (Section 7).

Any person who obstructs or assaults any officer in discharge of his duties under this w shall be liable for summary conviction to a fine of N2,000 or 1 year imprisonment or both (Section 9).

Ladies and gentlemen, with this analysis of the law you can no longer claim ignorance for as they say 'Ignorance of the law is no excuse'. I therefore urge you all to take this message to your towns, houses and offices throughout Edo State. Let our people be informed that they will now go to jail for circumcising theirdaughters. Help to eliminate FGM in Edo State.

Thank you.

Nogi Imoukhuede,

Project Coordinator, Women's Rights Watch Nigeria -www.rufarm.kabissa.org

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