

House Bill 2217 Female Genital Mutilation

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Alpha Morrow

The issue of female genital mutilation (FGM) is becoming not only a national one confined to a particular area such as Africa, or Asia or the Mid-East, but a global one reaching not only Europe and the UK, but now here in America. This barbaric practice has roots in cultural tradition, religion, and politics. The practice has far reaching and devastating implications.

Imagine putting your arms around a little girl or hold her on your lap and knowing that one day soon she will be subjected to an unbelievable cruelty. She will be looking forward to a family celebration much like your own children or grandchildren look forward to their birthdays. She has not been taught anything regarding sex or what is about to happen to her. She does not know or understand why the person undressing her is holding a knife, a razor blade, or piece of broken glass. There will be one person to hold her legs, another to hold down her arms, another to do the cutting. The only thing she will be free to do is scream. This is an event she will remember as long as she lives.

FGM is defined as being one of four types from partial removal of the clitoris to the entire external genitalia, each type more invasive than the last, cutting and suturing until only small openings are left for urine and menstrual flow. In some cases even cauterizing the area is a part of the procedure. There is no anesthetic, no antiseptics, and no health benefit whatsoever.

The damages are for some constant pain for years. Others have chronic pain for years going unalleviated. A few bleed to death. (I recall a law against FGM was put on the books after a little girl bled to death in Egypt. There was feigned surprise that such a thing could happen, but just having a law in theory does not stop the practice.) All are subject to infections, ulcers that do not heal incontinence, painful sexual contact, and difficulty giving birth. This practice does even more than permanently removing the ability to experience the fulfillment of her sexuality. It damages her ability to trust, because it was brought on or allowed by those she loved and trusted most, her parents. It splinters relationships between daughters and mothers. Even many years later women may exhibit signs of post-traumatic stress from that experience. She comes to believe that there is something bad about her that needed to be corrected, which is underscored repeatedly in Islam. She becomes more withdrawn, afraid, more likely to be subservient. There is a collective sadness, a shame that comes to a woman in those cultures.

Although World Health Organization estimates 140,000 women and children have undergone this barbaric practice, the truth is, it is most likely much higher. A physician in Egypt told me of 47,000 women interviewed 97% would admit having been mutilated. Because the subject of sex or related topics are taboo in the Middle East, classes are not offered in this field even in the universities. The fact

that the Arab world denies the existence of FGM does not mean it doesn't happen. It is just not discussed which makes reliable statistics impossible to gather.

While Mubarak was president of Egypt there was some indication that the numbers of FGM cases might be decreasing, but as the Muslim Brotherhood exerts more power, the numbers are on the rise. There is no reason to believe this would have the opposite effect in other countries. Some areas especially in villages where education is minimal, the Muslim Brotherhood openly promotes it as a free health service. The lines blur between religion and politics if the women believe they must subject themselves to mutilation in order to preserve virginity before marriage or in order to please their husbands after marriage and thereby go to heaven. As the emigration continues the beliefs follow.

In a city the size of Wichita one physician with an internal med. practice said he had already seen fifty to sixty cases. This would be only the tip of the iceberg when considering what the numbers would be in a gynecology practice.

I was appalled when an educated friend of mine expressed the opinion that if boys had to be circumcised then girls should be also. His obvious misunderstanding of FGM was corrected when I explained that the equivalent for a man would be to remove the penis with a razor blade with no anesthetics, no antiseptics. Please give us not just a law, but legislation with some teeth to be able to prosecute those who do this violence against female children.