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## Female Genital Mutilation and Domestic Violence among Egyptian Women

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*The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between female circumcision and domestic violence. Results showed that women who suffered from domestic violence and women who experienced genital circumcision shared many low socioeconomic and educational characteristics. Circumcised women were more likely to support continuation of female circumcision, to circumcise their daughters, and to accept the right of husbands to beat their wives.*

### INTRODUCTION

World Health Organization (WHO) convened a technical working group which defined female genital mutilation (FGM) "the removal of part or all of the external female genitalia and/or injury to the female genital organs for cultural or other nontherapeutic reasons" (1982). Domestic violence, also called spouse abuse, intimate partner abuse, battering, and partner violence, involves the physical injury to an individual by someone that he or she knows.

It is estimated that more than 120 million females have undergone FGM and that 2 million more girls are at risk of mutilation each year. FGM has often been referred to as female circumcision and compared to male circumcision. However, such comparison is often misleading. A more appropriate analogy would be between clitoridectomy and penisectomy, in

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which the entire clitoris and penis are removed respectively. Family, honor, cleanliness, protection against spells, insurance of virginity, faithfulness to the husband, and simply terrorizing women to make them fear having sex are among the reasons cited for the practice of FGM.

The practice of FGM predates the founding of both Christianity and Islam. Though confined largely to Muslims, it is also practiced in some Christian communities in Africa and by Ethiopian Jews (Falashas). The main motivation behind the practice seems to be the desire to control women's sexual urges and the belief that circumcision makes a woman more feminine (Wiens, 1996).

### FEMALE CIRCUMCISION RESEARCH

In her study, Khattab (1996) found that rural women in Giza perceived female circumcision as a hygienic and beautifying practice. They considered the removal of a part that would otherwise make them look like men to be beautifying. El-Defrawi, Lotfy, Megahed, and Sakr (1996) described the rate of FGM in Ismailia as reaching 75%, with higher rates among rural and less-educated women. The preservation of morals and customs was the main reason cited for the practice. Sayed, Abd el Aty, and Fadel (1996) found that a total of 67% of the fathers and 92% of the mothers of girls who have undergone FGM in Upper Egypt were illiterate. The most prevalent reason for practicing FGM was that it followed customs and traditions (77%). On the other hand, El-Sheneiti (1998) mentioned that parents requested female circumcision for their daughters mainly due to their belief that it is recommended by Islam. Moreover, they believed that it could prevent the corruption of girls by controlling their sexual drive. Other beliefs were that female circumcision is effective in the treatment of long labia or repeated vulval infection and as a method for coping with a sexually defective husband in the future.

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESEARCH

According to results of the 1995 Egypt Demographic Health Survey (El Zanaty, Hussein, Shawky, Way, & Kishor, 1996), one out of three ever-married Egyptian women has been beaten at least once since marriage (35%). Among women who reported being beaten, 18.3% said they were hurt as a result of beating, 10.2% needed medical attention after beating, and less than half (47.2%) sought help. Pregnancy does not necessarily protect women from beating. Overall, about one third of women who reported ever being beaten were beaten during pregnancy. Most ever-married women agree with the statement that husbands are at least sometimes justified in beating wives (86%). El-Hadad, Mitwali, and William (1998) investigated domestic violence in Egypt by interviewing 100 women attending a Maternal and Childhood Hospital



(MCH) center in Alexandria. The incidence of abuse in that sample was 76%, with three quarters mentioning being yelled at, almost one-half being cursed or called names, and 59% being physically abused by their husbands. In reaction to the abuse, 33% of women left home, 25% thought of leaving but did not, and 40% remained at home and had a negative reaction. Of those who left home, most went to live with their own families (43%). These families provided counseling and reunion assistance for 18%, while 32% received in-laws help. One third of this sample had conflict with husbands over money and 20% had conflicts over children. Women in this study reported that only 8% of their husbands were either drug or alcohol abusers. A history of abuse by their parents existed for 59% and 48% mentioned that they witnessed their mothers being abused. While 60% of these women admitted to hitting their children, 56% of them reported similar behavior by their husbands. The study found that 95% of the sample had low self-esteem, which correlated significantly with physical abuse.

### METHODOLOGY

The present study aims to determine the association between female circumcision and exposure of Egyptian women to domestic violence by their husbands. Secondary analysis of survey data gathered in a previous study (El Zanaty et al., 1996) was conducted. The characteristics of both circumcised and beaten women were investigated using tests of significance and odds ratio (OR) with 95% confidence interval (CI). Attitude towards both female circumcision and domestic violence were examined also. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to measure the determinants for the practice of female circumcision and the beating of women by their husbands.

### RESULTS

The analysis of the data showed that circumcised women (Table 1) were significantly younger (2 times), less educated (14 times), not working outside the home (3 times), living in poorer (3 times) and rural (12 times) households, and married to less-educated husbands (9 times) than noncircumcised women. Similarly, ever-beaten women (Table 2) were significantly less educated (3 times), not working outside the home (2 times), living in poorer and rural households and married to less-educated husbands (2.5 times) than the never-beaten women. They were also more likely to be circumcised (4 times) than the never-beaten women.

The circumcised women (Table 3) were strongly supportive of its continuation (OR, 147; 95% CI, 75-96), more likely to have circumcised their daughters (12 times) or to intend to circumcise them (OR, 173), and 7.5 times more likely to accept that husbands are justified in beating their wives.



**Table (1)**  
**Characteristics of study population according to circumcision status**

	Circumcised		Not Circumcised		$\chi^2$	OR
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	p	95%CI
<b>Age:</b>					12.9	1.8
< 30 Years	2610	37.7	53	25.4	<0.001	1.3-2.4
> 30Years	4310	62.3	154	74.6		
<b>Education:</b>					210.9	14.3
Not educated	3136	45.3	20	9.6	<0.001	8.8-23.4
Primary education	1788	25.8	5	2.2		
More education	1996	28.8	182	88.2		
<b>Husband Education:</b>					106.8	9.4
Not educated	2206	31.9	16	7.7	<0.001	5.5-16.3
Primary education	1967	28.4	4	1.8		
More education	2748	39.7	187	90.5		
<b>Economic level:</b>					48.5	2.9
Moderate/low	5791	83.7	113	54.7	<0.001	2.1-4.0
High/ high-moderate	1130	16.3	64	45.3		
<b>Residence:</b>					167.3	12.0
Rural	3795	54.8	19	9.4	<0.001	7.3-19.8
Urban	3126	45.2	187	90.6		
<b>Work:</b>					60.6	3.0
Not working	5845	84.5	133	64.3	<0.001	2.2-4.1
Work for cash	1076	15.5	74	35.7		
<b>Total</b>	6921	97.1	207	2.9	7128	

**Table (2)**  
**Characteristics of study population according to exposure to domestic violence status**

	Ever Beaten		Never beaten		$\chi^2$	OR
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	p	95%CI
<b>Age:</b>					1.7	0.9
< 30 Years	911	36.3	1752	37.9	NS	0.8-1.0
> 30Years	1596	63.7	2868	62.1		
<b>Education:</b>					355.5	3.4
Not educated	1339	53.4	1817	39.3	<0.001	2.8-3.9
Primary education	780	31.3	1012	21.9		
More education	389	15.5	1790	38.7		
<b>Husband Education:</b>					224.7	2.5
Not educated	961	38.3	1261	27.3	<0.001	2.2-2.8
Primary education	855	34.1	1116	24.1		
More education	692	27.6	2243	48.5		
<b>Economic level:</b>					12.4	1.3
Moderate/low	2130	85.0	3773	81.7	<0.001	1.1-1.5
High/ high -moderate	377	15.0	847	18.3		
<b>Residence:</b>					65.4	1.5
Rural	1505	60.0	2310	50.0	<0.001	1.4-1.7
Urban	1003	40.0	2310	50.0		
<b>Work:</b>					103.2	2.1
Not working	2254	89.9	3724	80.6	<0.001	1.8-2.5
Work for cash	254	10.1	896	19.4		
<b>Circumcision</b>					45.8	3.7
Yes	2481	98.9	4440	96.1	<0.001	2.4-5.7
No	27	1.1	180	3.9		
<b>Total</b>	2508	35.2	4620	64.8	7128	



**TABLE 1.** Characteristics of Study Population by Circumcision Status

	Circumcised		Not Circumcised		$\chi^2$ <i>p</i> value	OR 95% CI (%)
	No.	%	No.	%		
Age (years)						
< 30	2610	37.7	53	25.4	12.9	1.8
30+	4310	62.3	154	74.6	<0.001	1.3–2.4
Education						
Not educated	3136	45.3	20	9.6	210.9	14.3
Primary education	1788	25.8	5	2.2	<0.001	8.8–23.4
More education	1996	28.8	182	88.2		
Husband's education						
Not educated	2206	31.9	16	7.7	106.8	9.4
Primary education	1967	28.4	4	1.8	<0.001	5.5–16.3
More education	2748	39.7	187	90.5		
Economic level						
Moderate/low	5791	83.7	113	54.7	48.5	2.9
High/high-moderate	1130	16.3	64	45.3	<0.001	2.1–4.0
Residence						
Rural	3795	54.8	19	9.4	167.3	12.0
Urban	3126	45.2	187	90.6	<0.001	7.3–19.8
Employment						
Not working	5845	84.5	133	64.3	60.6	3.0
Work for cash	1076	15.5	74	35.7	<0.001	2.2–4.1
Total	6921	97.1	207	2.9	7128	

Note. CI = confidence interval; OR = odds ratio; *p* = probability;  $\chi^2$  = chi-square.

**TABLE 2.** Characteristics of Study Population by Exposure to Domestic Violence Status

	Ever Beaten		Never Beaten		$\chi^2$ <i>p</i> value	OR 95% CI (%)
	No.	%	No.	%		
Age					1.7	0.9
< 30 years	911	36.3	1752	37.9	NS	0.8–1.0
30+ years	1596	63.7	2868	62.1		
Education				355.5	3.4	
Not educated	1339	53.4	1817	39.3	<0.001	2.8–3.9
Primary education	780	31.3	1012	21.9		
More education	389	15.5	1790	38.7		
Husband's education			224.7	2.5		
Not educated	961	38.3	1261	27.3	<0.001	2.2–2.8
Primary education	855	34.1	1116	24.1		
More education	692	27.6	2243	48.5		
Economic level				12.4	1.3	
Moderate/low	2130	85.0	3773	81.7	<0.001	1.1–1.5
High/high-moderate	377	15.0	847	18.3		
Residence				65.4	1.5	
Rural	1505	60.0	2310	50.0	<0.001	1.4–1.7
Urban	1003	40.0	2310	50.0		
Employment				103.2	2.1	
Not working	2254	89.9	3724	80.6	<0.001	1.8–2.5
Work for cash	254	10.1	896	19.4		
Circumcision				45.8	3.7	
Yes	2481	98.9	4440	96.1	<0.001	2.4–5.7
No	27	1.1	180	3.9		
Total	2508	35.2	4620	64.8	7128	

Note. CI = confidence interval; OR = odds ratio; *p* = probability;  $\chi^2$  = chi-square.

**Table (3)**  
**Attitude towards Female circumcision & Domestic violence**  
**According to circumcision status**

	Circumcised		Not Circumcised		$\chi^2$	OR
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	p	95%CI
<b>Female Circumcision:</b>					1128.2	147
Continued	5830	84.2	10	5.0	<0.001	75.3-196.0
Stopped	726	10.5	183	88.4		
Does not know	365	5.3	14	6.6		
<b>Circumcised any daughters (n 5209)</b>					81.2	11.9
Yes	2562	50.3	9	7.6	<0.001	5.8-25.2
No	2532	49.7	106	92.4		
<b>Intend to circumcise daughter (n 2638)</b>					411.8	173.3
Yes	2004	79.2	3	2.8	<0.001	52.8-687.2
No	374	14.8	97	91.5		
Does not know	153	6.1	6	5.7		
<b>Husband is justified to beat wife</b>					263.4	7.5
Yes	6059	87.5	100	48.5	<0.001	5.6-10.1
No	862	12.5	107	51.5		
<b>Total</b>	6921	97.1	207	2.9	7128	

**Table (4)**  
**Determinants of exposure to domestic violence**  
**Multiple regression analysis**

	B	P value	OR
Poor household	0.1939	0.0055	1.2
Uneducated woman	0.3477	0.0001	1.4
Uneducated husband	0.2090	0.0001	1.2
Not working woman	0.4317	0.0001	1.5
Circumcised woman	0.7259	0.0007	2.1



**TABLE 3.** Attitude Towards Female Circumcision and Domestic Violence by Circumcision Status

	Circumcised		Not Circumcised		$\chi^2$ <i>p</i> value	OR 95% CI (%)
	No.	%	No.	%		
Female circumcision					1128.2	147
Favor	5830	84.2	10	5.0	<0.001	75.3-96.0
Oppose	726	10.5	183	88.4		
Unsure	365	5.3	14	6.6		
Circumcised any daughters ( <i>n</i> = 5209)				81.2	11.9	
Yes	2562	50.3	9	7.6	<0.001	5.8-25.2
No	2532	49.7	106	92.4		
Intends to circumcise daughter ( <i>n</i> = 2638)					411.8	173.3
Yes	2004	79.2	3	2.8	<0.001	52.8-687.2
No	374	14.8	97	91.5		
Unsure	153	6.1	6	5.7		
Husband is justified in beating wife				7.5	263.4	5.6-10.1
Yes	6059	87.5	100	48.5	<0.001	
No	862	12.5	107	51.5		
Total	6921	97.1	207	2.9	7128	

Note. b = beta level; OR = odds ratio; *p* = probability,  $\chi^2$  = chi-square.

Table 4 shows that female circumcision has a double influence on women's exposure to domestic violence. Other socioeconomic factors as low income, lack of parental education, and nonworking women, all have less association with domestic violence than does female circumcision.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Refaat and Dandash (1998) found that Egyptian women are moderately empowered and moderately protected from violence, with the prevalence of domestic violence being 35%. The rate is higher in rural areas and among lower-income classes or less-educated groups. Moreover, it is still a fact that 40% of the beaten women were from urban areas, 16% had more than primary education, and 28% were married to educated husbands. Fifteen percent were living at high economic levels and 10% were working for cash, which

**TABLE 4.** Determinants of Exposure to Domestic Violence Determined by Multiple Regression Analysis

	B	<i>p</i> Value	OR
Poor household	0.1939	0.0055	1.2
Uneducated woman	0.3477	0.0001	1.4
Uneducated husband	0.2090	0.0001	1.2
Nonworking woman	0.4317	0.0001	1.5
Circumcised woman	0.7259	0.0007	2.1



implies that socioeconomic conditions alone do not account for the problem. The same socioeconomic conditions applied for those who were circumcised.

The psychological and sexual impact of FGM has been discussed in the literature (Karim, 1997), with Khaled and Vause (1996) considering it as a form of continuous abuse. The present study showed the same influence of female circumcision on exposure to domestic violence. The circumcised women were mostly supportive of its continuation and a majority intended to circumcise their daughters who agreed with many results. The net result of multiple regression analysis showed that the strongest determinant of domestic violence is female circumcision rather than other low socioeconomic factors. The study concludes that female circumcision is independently and strongly correlated with women's exposure to domestic violence.

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