

Story of change "A family willing not to circumcise their daughters"

By: Hassan Ali (Somali Refugee Advocate)

My name is Abow Haji Abdi. I am 30yrs old and second born in a family of five, four boys and one girl who was the last born in the family. We were all born in Kismayu but later fled to Bualle (middle juba region) after the break up of the Central Government in 1991 and the start of the civil strife and clan warfare that became the order of the day and culminated in the death of my father who was the family's bread winner.

Due to the turmoil, hardship and no one to cater for our basic needs, me and my elder brother were forced to look at our family at early age. Things were better of during the UNISOM period, but life became harder after the withdrawal of the international force plus the humanitarian organization in 1993.

To make the matter worse, life within the rural village of Bualle was harsh with outdated, primitive, negative cultural practices very common and highly valued by all members of the community unlike the more liberal and cosmopolitan place we were born.

All this trying times our little sister was the family inspiration and hope, but all this was shattered when on the insistence and advice of our neighbors and clan members she was taken by one of our aunts to an old women who brutally mutilated her using unsterilized old knife on the pretext of circumcising her. Our previous pleas with my elder brother to spare her went into deaf ears as most of community members believed this as a compulsory obligation and a passage to womanhood.

My sister not only bleed profusely during the ritual but the wound become infectious during the recovery days and the quacks masquing as Doctors could not help in treating her thus after along painful period of giving her all kinds of medicine and traditional concoctions made up of herbs, she finally recovered with the grace of God.

Since this ordeal, my sister become withdrawn from the other members of the family and would not joke or laugh, though she would complain to our mother of irritation/pain during urination, but the whole problem started after her first mensuaration period where the twenty four hours preceding the first drop of blood until the end, her painful screams cajoled and holding her navel while bending become the norm in every month.

Apart from the psychological trauma, she will be seen crying and will get nightmares whenever the mensuaration period nears. After many years of suffering my sister was married to a relative on the assumption by some relatives that once the place is opened the pain and suffering will stop, but still this could not become a Remedy to her suffering.

After two years of suffering and disagreement with her husband due to her unwillingness to have sex as a result of the pain, she becomes pregnant. After

nine months we rushed her to Marerey Hospital (outskirt of Kismayu) after she was in labor pain for two days. On reaching the hospital her status was serious and was straight taken to the theatre for a caesarian operation to safe her life, but it was too late and unfortunately we lost both her and the kid.

During our grieving period and up to today the question we often ask ourselves is could our sister be alive now if we could protect her from the circumcisers knife in the first place? Could she have an enjoyable and happy life if FGM was not practiced in the first place? The answer is yes, for the death of our sister can only be attributed to the complications she suffered on the hands of the circumciser's knife where she was not only cruelly mutilated but all her basic rights were violated. Since then I have vowed not to subject my daughters the violation/suffering my sister passed if it means paying with my life.



Abow Haji Abdi with his elder daughter by the name Hibo