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This brochure was developed with the aid of information and resources from:

United Nations Population Fund

Amnesty International

World Health Organization

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health

This brochure was developed with funding from the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement.

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Female Circumcision



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Every culture has practices that have been passed down for many generations and are seen as normal or necessary. Certain practices, however, are not accepted in other countries. *Female Circumcision* (or Female Genital Cutting) is against the law in the United States because it is viewed as dangerous and unhealthy. Preserving your culture and identity for your children is important, but it also is important to understand the medical and legal consequences of having a female child circumcised.

WHAT IS FEMALE CIRCUMCISION?

Female circumcision is a cultural practice carried out in many countries, mostly in Africa. There are different beliefs as to why female circumcision is necessary. Some say circumcising girls is necessary for hygiene, to preserve a girl's virginity until marriage, for religious reasons and as a way to bring girls into womanhood. Female circumcision involves the removal of part or all of the female genitals, and it is most commonly performed on girls between the ages of 4 to 14.

WHAT IF MY RELIGION REQUIRES IT?

Neither the Bible nor the Koran says that a female must be circumcised. In fact, many religious leaders believe it to be harmful to the body, which should be protected. Many religious leaders have called female circumcision "a serious infringement to the physical, psychological and moral integrity of women and children."

WHY IS FEMALE CIRCUMCISION HARMFUL?

Female circumcision is harmful and has been made illegal in the United States because of many health risks. Immediate complications from the procedure can include severe pain, heavy blood loss, infection, and in extreme cases, death. Long-term effects include scarring and tearing between the vaginal and anus which cause problems with fertility and delivery, as well as chronic infections such as urinary tract infections, which makes urinating painful and difficult. Additionally, there is an increased risk of becoming infected with HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. There also is a risk of mental and emotional stress particularly for younger girls who undergo the procedure.

WHAT LAWS PROHIBIT FEMALE CIRCUMCISION?

In the United States, federal law makes it illegal to circumcise a female minor (a girl under the age of 18). Several states have laws that make female circumcision illegal at any age, and many others have laws that punish parents who allow their daughters to be circumcised. Internationally, most countries have made female circumcision illegal, including many countries in Africa. Global attention is increasingly focused on the medical and emotional risks of female circumcision, led in large part by African women's groups.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ON FEMALE CIRCUMCISION?

For more information on female circumcision, please visit:

Population Action International at
<http://www.populationaction.org/>

Equality Now at
<http://www.equalitynow.org/>

Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices at
<http://www.iac-ciaf.com/>

PATH at
<http://www.path.org/files/FGM-The-Facts.htm>

United Nations Population Fund at
<http://www.unfpa.org>

US State Department at
<http://www.state.gov>