

# Stop Excision!

Excision, or female genital mutilation, is a practice that consists of removing, partially or totally, organs of the female genitalia. It is a very old custom, which goes back far into the distant past. There are 26 African countries where excision is practiced. About 130 million girls and women in the world are excised. The main reason given is to make the woman less sexually sensitive, with the idea of making her more faithful. There are 4 kinds of excision in Mali, of which 2 are most common. The first consists of removing the clitoris, partially or completely. The second consists of removing the clitoris and the little lips.

## Immediate Drawbacks

- The extreme pain felt during the operation & the recovery period, which traumatizes the girl & sometimes leads to a state of shock
- Hemorrhage, which often leads to anemia and sometimes death
- All kinds of infections: gangrene, septicemia (blood poisoning), urinary and vaginal infections, which are sometimes fatal
- Diseases like AIDS and tetanus

## Long-term Drawbacks

- Inability to control one's urine or bowels because of damage to adjacent organs
- Problems in childbirth, especially when the little lips have been cut
- Sterility
- Painful menstruation
- Pelvic infection
- Recurring vaginal infections
- Painful intercourse
- Recurring urinary infections
- Sexual problems
- Formation of hard scars, cysts and abscess

Many countries have outlawed excision: Burkina Faso, Senegal, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Egypt, Kenya, Liberia, Sudan, Niger, Tanzania, Mauritania and Eritrea. Why not Mali?

The struggle against FGM has been going on for over 20 years in Mali. Different groups and individuals have done various projects to try to convince people to abandon the practice. There has been a little progress, but it's very slow. Respect for elders, normally a good thing, is one factor in the slowness. People are afraid to contradict the elders who have lots of power in the families. Also, bad interpretations of religion create an obstacle to FGM's abandonment.

What can we do to give courage to people to protect their daughters? How can we convince the people who think that excision is important to keep?

## What can we do?

- Inform ourselves about the practice and its drawbacks – attend a meeting or lead one
  - Speak out to our circle of family and friends. Say that we are against the practice
  - Collect signatures on the Pledge Against Excision
  - If we know an exciser, tell her we're against it and try to convince her to stop
  - Organize meetings, debates, and discussions to make people think
  - Distribute educational materials already available – this summary, tapes and CDs of Stop Excision
  - Create and distribute new materials, brochures, posters, tee shirts, songs, skits
  - See if we can find groups to take public positions and help them publicize them
  - Think of more things to do
- Keep the Faith! (Bon Courage!)

In the US, contact Healthy Tomorrow, (617) 776-6524 or (617) 666-9757, SusanMcL@StopExcision.net.

In Mali, some of the 45 groups involved in the Pledge Against Excision are: Sini Sanuman, (Pledge headquarters) (223) 222 54 50 or (223) 602 14 11, SiniSanuman@yahoo.fr (in French); Amnesty International; Pivot Group/Health & Population; Holistic Development Africa; APDF (Ass for the Protection, Promotion & Defense of Women); AMSOPT; the City Hall of District I (of Bamako); the Coalition of Participatory Development Committees of District I; the City Hall of District VI; Project/Young People; Centre Djoliba; Group for the Struggle Against Excision of Tomia (Sikasso); Gabriel Touré Hospital; CCA ONG (a network of NGOs); AMPPF (Planned Parenthood of Mali); AIPEF (Islamic Action for the Progress and the Development of the Family); APAF Muso Dambe (a maids' rights group); Pledge Against Excision Clubs in: Kolébougou, Koulikoro Ba, Plateau I, et Plateau II, (in Koulikoro); Woiyo Kondéye; ASACOBABA, (the neighborhood health center in Banconi); Club Sini Sanuman de N'Tomikorobougou; Club Sabou Yuma (the Good Cause Club); Muso Jigi (Hope of Women); Camelion of the Sahel (Koro); Women & Poverty; and CAPE, (the Committee for Action for the Pledge against Excision). Sini Sanuman, is at SiniSanuman@yahoo.fr, (223) 222 54 50, Badalabougou SEMA I, Rue 59 Porte 17, BP:E 3885, Bamako, Mali.

## Quotes from Religious Leaders in Mali on Excision

Circumcision is a “sunna” whereas excision is an optional practice in the Muslim religion. It is just a traditional custom. - **Ousmane Chérif Haidara**, teacher and preacher (the leading Muslim leader in Bamako)

This is the point of view of Islam: Excision is not an obligation and not excising is not a sin. Various health problems can be avoided by abandoning excision such as AIDS and hemorrhage. - **Kady Dramé**, ex-general secretary of AMUPI (a major Muslim group in Bamako)

Long ago we didn't know anything about excision and we'll finish by abandoning it again. Understand us, we are fighting for your health. Africa learned Islam from the Arabs and they don't practice excision. So why do we continue to do it? - **Ibrahim Aly Bodel Omgoiba**, marabout and traditional healer

The Bible says, “The body is the temple of the holy spirit.” Let's not mutilate this body uselessly. - **Pastor Thadée Diarra**, Evangelical Church of Mali

Excision is a custom; it's not an obligation in the Muslim religion. Everything that hurts our health is rejected and condemned by Islam, because it can decrease the number of people who practice the religion, by leading them toward death. - **Ali Coumaré** and **Lamissa Dembélé**, marabouts and professors of Arab

Excision has no importance because it is to wound a person without knowing the extent of the damage. In the Haddis “Zabour,” the prophet Daouda said “To wound a person is to infringe on their right to physical integrity and the perpetrator should be punished in a similar fashion to the act committed. - **Dr. Kassim Ouédraogo**, marabout, traditional healer and president of the Association Yeredon (of traditional healers)