

FGM and Sexual Health by Dr. Tammary Esho

Sexuality is a central aspect of being human, and sex is important in our daily lives. It natures intimacy, for pleasure, for expressing love to our partners, and even for procreation. Therefore, in sexual medicine we say that sexual health is a reflection of your general health and well being. Sexual health is a product of our well being affected by our biology, psychology, interpersonal relationships and also social and religious factors. FGM goes against the human sexual health rights by affecting female sexual functioning as well as male sexual functioning. In what ways?

Firstly, FGM removes the only organ of a woman's body that is solely meant for sexual pleasure – the clitoris! So this means that women with this type of FGM will experience lowered libido and sexual arousal due to this loss. The overall effect being no sexual satisfaction will be experienced.

Secondly, women with FGM may experience genital pain due to complications of the procedure. This may happen because of an infibulation that narrows the vaginal opening making it so small that penetration becomes difficult and mostly painful and subsequently sexual pain may be experienced. This sexual pain may not just be experienced by the woman but also with the men. Can you imagine what a man will feel trying to penetrate an infibulated vaginal opening? This may result in injury of the penis through tears and fissures. Sometimes these may also become infected as a complication. These men sometimes develop erectile dysfunction as a result.

Thirdly, on the psychological or emotional level, women with FGM and their partners may get psychological trauma resulting from the pain and injury that happened during the mutilation. This is sometimes associated with a condition known as hypo-sexual desire disorder. Sexual desire is a product of the mind, therefore if a woman is unable to experience sexual pleasure; it will affect her response to sexual stimuli due to the reduced sexual interest. Sometimes this experience can be so bad that they get a condition known as sexual aversion, where they just do not want anything to do with sex period! On the other hand, a man will also get affected on the psychological level due to the fact that he can see the pain that his wife is going through during intercourse or is struggling with. And this might lead him to develop a form of sexual dysfunction as a result of not being able to satisfy his wife.

Fourthly, as a result of sexual problems and dysfunctions, many relationships and marriages have and will failed. This is because there is no physical and mental connection and a build up of intimacy that will take place.

All in all, its crucial to know that FGM will affect the sexual functioning of both the woman survivor and her spouse as well.