

Attitudes of youths towards female circumcision in Nigeria: Implications for future practice

Female circumcision, the traditional operations that involve cutting away parts of the female external genitalia or other injury to the female genitals, whether for cultural or any other non-therapeutic reason; the practice persists despite a growing body of knowledge about its health and psychological harm. In recent times, efforts had intensified locally and internationally to eradicate this cultural practice. Legislations were made in several countries to prohibit the practice while many other countries embark on massive campaigns in the media to educate their citizenry. The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo also highlighted the issue in its conference. At the time the circumcision is carried out, pain, shock, haemorrhage and damage to the organs surrounding the clitoris and labia can occur. Afterwards urine may be retained and serious infections develop. A possible additional problem resulting from all types of female circumcision is that lasting damage to the genital area can increase the risk of HIV transmission during intercourse (Lightfoot-Klein, 1989; Amnesty International, 1997). The 2003 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NPC, 2004) showed that the practice was common in southern part of Nigeria especially among the Yorubas and Igbos where 60.7% and 45.1% of women reported that they have been circumcised respectively.

Circumcision among the Yorubas, and in many parts of Nigeria, is done almost universally during infancy, when the infants absolutely have no say on whether or not they are circumcised. It is thus obvious that the attitude/disposition of the youths towards female circumcision will be an important factor for the eradication or perpetuation of the harmful traditional practice. Are the youths supportive of female circumcision? Would they circumcise their daughters?

The data for the study was obtained from the last published DHS survey in Nigeria, NDHS 2003. Analysis for the paper was based on 1563 females and 401 males aged 15-24 years who have heard of female circumcision.

The study found that more than three-quarter of the female respondents reported not to have been circumcised. There are however regional variations; a higher proportion of those circumcised are from southern Nigeria with the southwest being the region with the highest proportion of 63% compared to only 2% in the northeast. At least a third of the females in the south-south and south east regions have been circumcised. In contrast, there is no region in the northern part of the country with as much as a quarter of the women having undergone circumcision. The region of residence was a significant factor ($p < 0.05$) in female circumcision. On the intention to circumcise daughters in future, the proportion that wish to continue the practice reduces with educational level, place of residence (urban/rural), and the geographical

region of residence. Most of the respondents said they would not circumcise their daughters in future.