

EXERCISE 17**HONOUR KILLINGS****MATERIALS:** Paper, pen, newspaper clippings**TIME:** 30 minutes**AIM:** To increase understanding and appreciation of the term honour killings.
To create awareness of the human rights dimensions of honour killings.**STEP 1:** In small groups of about 5 people, the participants should answer the following questions: Each of the participants is to be given a piece of paper. On each card, they are to write what they understand by 'honour' killings.

The facilitator should collect all the responses and pin them up throughout the workshop room. The facilitator to give participants the opportunity to walk through the gallery, looking at each other's responses.

The facilitator can then lecture on the term honour killings to provide wider and common understanding of the term, as well as its human rights dimensions.

STEP 2: What are the gender consequences of this practice?

The participants should use the table below to answer this question. Firstly, they should add other institutions/persons contributing to the growth of the practice, if any are missing.

Persons/institutions contributing to growth in honour killings	Ways in which they contribute to honour killings	Ways in which they gain/benefit from 'honour' killings
The State		
The Police		
Judiciary		
Father		
Mother		
Community		
Elders		
Schools		
Husbands/men		
Media		

What human rights are violated by 'honour' killings?

STEP 3: In groups of three, read through the newspaper clippings provided and answer the following questions.

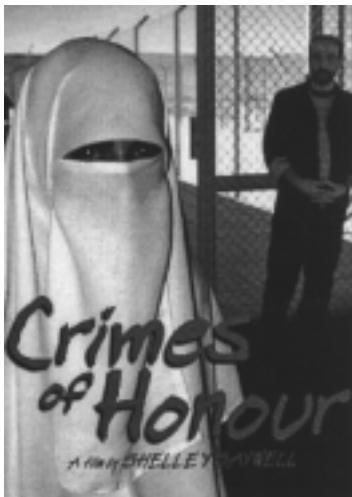
1. What struck you about the articles?
2. How well reported is the issue of honour killings?
3. Whose honour is being protected in these articles?
4. What new /original dimensions can the media add to its reporting of 'honour' killings?
5. How can the media draw attention to the gendered implication of it?
6. How do blood feuds differ from honour killings?
7. What gender issues can you deduce from the practice of blood feuds?

“HONOUR” KILLINGS OF WOMEN

Summary

Honour killings of women can be defined as acts of murder in which “a woman is killed for her actual or perceived immoral behavior.” (Yasmeen Hassan, “The Fate of Pakistani Women,” *International Herald Tribune*, May 25, 1999.) Such “immoral behavior” may take the form of marital infidelity, refusing to submit to an arranged marriage, demanding a divorce, flirting with or receiving phone calls from men, failing to serve a meal on time, or grotesquely “allowing herself” to be raped. In the Turkish province of Sanliurfa, one young woman’s “throat was slit in the town square because a love ballad was dedicated to her over the radio.” (Pelin Turgut, “‘Honour’ Killings Still Plague Turkish Province,” *The Toronto Star*, May 14, 1998.)

Most “honour” killings of women occur in Muslim countries, the focus of this case study; but it is worth noting that no sanction for such murders is granted in Islamic religion or law. And the phenomenon is in any case a global one. According to Stephanie Nebehay, such killings “have been reported in Bangladesh, Britain, Brazil, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Pakistan, Morocco, Sweden, Turkey and Uganda.” Afghanistan, where the practice is condoned under the rule of the fundamentalist Taliban movement, can be added to the list, along with Iraq and Iran. (Nebehay, “‘Honor Killings’ of Women Said on Rise Worldwide,” Reuters dispatch, April 7, 2000.)



Focus (1): Pakistan

Pakistan, where ‘honour killings are known as karo-kari, is probably the country where such atrocities are most pervasive. Estimating the scale of the phenomenon there, as elsewhere, is made more difficult not only by the problems of data collection in predominantly rural countries, but by the extent to which community members and political authorities collaborate in covering up the atrocities. According to Yasmeen Hassan, author of *The Haven Becomes Hell: A Study of Domestic Violence in Pakistan*, “The concepts of women as property and honor are so deeply entrenched in the social, political and economic fabric of Pakistan that the government, for the most part, ignores the daily occurrences of women being killed and maimed by their families.” (Hassan, “The Fate of Pakistani Women.”) Frequently, women murdered in “honour” killings are recorded as having committed suicide or died in accidents.

One of the most notorious “honour” killings of recent years occurred in April 1999, when Samia Imran, a young married woman, “was shot in the office of a lawyer helping her to seek a divorce which her family could never countenance.” According to Suzanne Goldenberg, Samia, 28, arrived at the Lahore law offices of Hina Jilani and Asma Jahangir, who are sisters, on April 6. She had engaged Jilani a few days earlier, because she wanted a divorce from her violent husband. Samia settled on a chair across the desk from the lawyer. Sultana, Samia’s mother, entered five minutes later with a male companion. Samia half-rose in greeting. The man, Habib-ur-Rhemna, grabbed Samia and put a pistol to her head. The first bullet entered near Samia’s eye and she fell. “There was no scream. There was dead silence. I don’t even think she knew what was happening,” Jilani said. The killer stood over Samia’s body, and fired again. Jilani reached for the alarm button as the gunman and Sultana left. “She never even bothered to look whether the girl was dead.”

The aftermath of the murder was equally revealing: “Members of Pakistan’s upper house demanded punishment for the two women [lawyers] and none of Pakistan’s political leaders condemned the attack.

... The clergy in Peshawar want the lawyers to be put to death” for trying to help Imran. (Suzanne Goldenberg, “A Question of Honor,” *The Guardian* (UK), May 27, 1999.)

According to Goldenberg, “Those who kill for honour [in Pakistan] are almost never punished. In the rare instances that cases reach the courts, the killers are sentenced to just two or three years. Hana Jilani [the Lahore lawyer who witnessed Samia Imran’s murder] has collected 150 case studies and in only eight did the judges reject the argument the women were killed for honour. All the other [perpetrators] were let off, or given reduced sentences.” (Goldenberg, “A Question of Honor.”)

A human-rights report published in March 1999 stated that honor” killings took the lives of 888 women in the single province of Punjab in 1998 (Hessian, “The Fate of Pakistani). Similar figures were recorded for 1999. In Sindh province, some 300 women died in 1997, according to Pakistan’s independent Human Rights Commission. (Goldenberg, “A Question of Honour.”) It is unknown how many women are maimed or disfigured for life in attacks that fall short of murder. Pamela Constable describes one such case: Zahida Perveen’s head is shrouded in a white cotton veil, which she self-consciously tightens every few moments. But when she reaches down to her baby daughter, the veil falls away to reveal the face of one of Pakistan’s most horrific social ills, broadly known as “honour” crimes. Perveen’s eyes are empty sockets of unseeing flesh, her earlobes have been sliced off, and her nose is a gaping, reddened stump of bone. Sixteen months ago, her husband, in a fit of rage over her alleged affair with a brother-in-law, bound her hands and feet and slashed her with a razor and knife. She was three months pregnant at the time. “He came home from the mosque and accused me of having a bad character,” the tiny, 32-year-old woman murmured as she awaited a court hearing ... “I told him it was not true, but he didn’t believe me. He caught me and tied me up, and then he started cutting my face. He never said a word except, “This is your last night.” (Constable, “The Price of ‘Honour’,” *The Gazette* (Montreal), May 22, 2000.)



Perveen’s husband stated in court at “What I did was wrong, but I am satisfied. I did it for my honour and prestige.” Often burning or scarring acid are the preferred weapons to the men committing such crimes. ‘The Progressive Women’s association, which assists attack victims, tracked 3,560 women who were hospitalized after being attacked at home with fire, gasoline acid between 1994 and 1999,” according to Constable. About half the victims died. Lawyer and women’s activist Nahida Mahbooba Elahi states that “We deal with these cases every day, but I have seen very few convictions. The men say the wife didn’t obey their orders, or was having relations with someone else. The police often say it is a domestic matter and refuse to pursue the case. Some judges even justify it and do not consider it murder.” (Constable, “The Price of ‘Honour.’”) Such crimes

are also rife in Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan, where some 2,200 women are disfigured every year in acid attacks by jealous or estranged men. (Ellen Goodman, “How Long before We Take the Honor out of Killing?” *The Washington Post* [in the *Guardian Weekly*, April 6-12, 2000.]

In August 1999, an international furore erupted when the Pakistani Senate rejected a resolution by former Prime Minister Benazhir Butto to condemn “honour” killings in the country. (See Zaffer Abbas, “Pakistan Fails to Condemn ‘Honour’ Killings”, *BBC Online*, August 3, 1999.) In April 2000, the head of the Pakistani military regime, General Pervez Musharraf, pledged that his government would take strong measures to curb “honour” killings. “Such acts do not find a place in our religion or law,” Musharraf stated. “Killing in the name of honour is murder, and it will be treated as such.” Most observers were skeptical, however, that Musharraf’s words would be followed up by committed actions. (See “Honour Killings Now Seen As Murder”, *The Sydney Morning Herald* (from *The Telegraph* (UK)), April 24, 2000.)

While the victims of Pakistani “honour” killings are overwhelmingly female, tradition dictates that males involved in the “crimes” should face death as well. But the accused women are standardly killed first, giving men a chance to flee retribution. Moreover, targeted men can escape death by paying compensation to the family of the female victim, leading to an “honour killing industry” involving

tribes people, police and tribal mediators,” which “provides many opportunities to make money, [or] obtain a woman in compensation,” according to Amnesty International. The organization also states: “Reports abound about men who have killed other men in murders not connected with honour issues who then kill a woman of their own family ... to camouflage the initial murder as an honour killing.” (Amnesty International, “Pakistan: Honour Killings of Girls and Women”, September 1999.)

[**Note:** For more information on “honour” killings in Pakistan, contact the International Network for the Rights of Female Victims in Pakistan, P.O. Box 17202, Louisville, KY 40217, USA; e-mail: inrfvvp@inrfvvp.org.]



A poster condemning “honour” killings, produced by Kurdish Women Action Against Honour Killing

Focus (2): Jordan

In Jordan, “honour” killings are sanctioned by law. According to Article 340 of the criminal code, “A husband or a close blood relative who kills a woman caught in a situation highly suspicious of adultery will be totally exempt from sentence.” Article 98, meanwhile, guarantees a lighter sentence for male killers of female relatives who have committed an “act which is illicit in the eyes of the perpetrator.” Julian Borger notes that “in practice, once a murder has been judged an ‘honour killing,’ the usual sentence is from three months to one year.” (Julian Borger, “In Cold Blood,” *Manchester Guardian Weekly*,

Jordan Honour Killings,” Agence France-Presse dispatch, July 31, 1999; the perpetrators included a 19-year-old man, Hussein Suleiman, who ‘was accused of driving three times over his six-month-pregnant unmarried sister in a pick-up truck, despite her denials of immoral behaviour and pleas for help.’) Ironically, as Borger notes, this legislation is “the result of Western influence in the Middle East,” having arisen “out of a fusion between Egyptian tribal custom and the Napoleonic Code in 1810, after the French legions took Cairo.” (Borger, “In Cold Blood.”)

In a particularly tragic case in 1994, a handicapped 18-year-old girl, who had already served six months in jail (!) for becoming pregnant out of wedlock, was killed by her 17-year-old brother. A neighbour was quoted as saying the family seemed relaxed, happy and satisfied after announcing the news that she was killed ...“ (Rana Hussein, “18-year-old killed for ‘family honor,’” *The Jordan Times*, September 19, 1994.) *Manchester Guardian Weekly* reporter Julian Borger described another typical case in 1997:

One morning this summer, Rania Arafat’s two aunts came to take her for a walk. They told their 21-year-old niece they had arranged a secret meeting with her boyfriend. She strolled with them through Gwiesmeh, a poor suburb where Amman’s concrete sprawl peters out into desert. When the three women reached a patch of open land, the aunts suddenly stepped aside, leaving Arafat standing alone. She was shot four times in the back of the head at close range and once in the forehead. The gunman was her 17-year-old brother, Rami. ... Arafat’s crime was to refuse an arranged marriage and elope with her Iraqi boyfriend. Rami is in jail, but is unlikely to be sentenced to more than a few months, especially as he is a minor, which is almost certainly why he was given the role of executioner. (Borger, “In Cold Blood.”)



The *Jordan Times* estimated in 1994 that between 28 and 60 Jordanian women — the difference between official police figures and commonly-cited estimates of the actual number — die in “honour” killings every year. (Rana Hussein, “Murder in the Name of Honour,” October 6-7, 1994.) The death-toll may even run into the hundreds, more women in perpetual hiding, tearful for their lives.

One positive sign is the staunch opposition to the practice displayed by the regime of King Abdullah II, who took power after the death of his father King Hussein in 1999. “The king has backed legislation to put honor killings on a par with other murders and has encouraged public support to change the law.

The fact that the royal palace has taken such a stance has translated into tougher sentencing and investigations of honor killings by the courts and police. The king’s support has also encouraged activist groups to speak out more strongly against honor killings.” (Stephen Franklin, “Jordan Begins to Punish Practice of ‘Honor Killings’”, *The Chicago Tribune*, September 1, 2000.)

Such efforts continue to encounter staunch resistance from conservative elements, however. In early February 2000, the Jordanian parliament “took only three minutes to reject a draft law calling for the cancellation of Article 340.” The country’s leading political party, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), denounced the draft law as an effort to “destroy our Islamic, social and family values, by stripping the man from his humanity, [and] not allowing him to get angry when he is surprised by [i.e., surprises] his wife committing adultery.” Ten days later, in an unprecedented action, some 5,000 protesters flooded the streets of Amman demanding the repeal of the penal code provision allowing “honour” killings. The protesters included “Prince Ali, who is King Abdullah’s brother and his personal guard, as well as Prince Gazi, the king’s advisor for tribal affairs.”



Focus (3): Palestine/Israel

“Honour” killings are also regularly reported in the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In the Canadian women’s magazine *Chatelaine*, Sally Armstrong described the fate of one victim:

Flirting was a costly mistake for Samera. She was only 15 years old when her neighbours in Salfet, a small Palestinian town on the West Bank, saw her chatting with a young man without a male chaperone. Her family’s honour was at stake; a marriage was quickly arranged. By 16, she had a child. Five years later, when she could stand the bogus marriage no longer, she bolted. In a place where gossip is traded like hard currency, and a girl’s chastity is as public as her name, Samera’s actions were considered akin to making a date with the devil. According to the gossips, she went from man to man as she moved from place to place. Finally, last July [1999], her family caught up with her. A few days later she was found stuffed down a well. Her neck had been broken. Her father told the coroner she’d committed suicide. But everyone on the grapevine knew that Samera was a victim of honour killing, murdered by her own family because her actions brought dishonour to their name. Here in the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority law allows honour killing. Samera’s parents are walking the streets of their neighbourhood with their heads held high, relieved that the family honour has been restored. (Armstrong, “Honour’s Victims”, *Chatelaine*, March 2000.)

Twenty-two other women died in the Palestinian territories in the same year as Samera. The killings often spill over into neighbouring Israel, as with the killing of “40-year-old Ittihaj Hassoon” near Haifa in 1995:

On Oct. 16, 1995, ... Hassoon got out of a car with her younger brother on a main street of Daliat al Carmel, a small Israeli Druze village ... Over 10 years before, Ittihaj had committed the unpardonable sin of marrying a non-Druze man. Now, after luring her back to her home village with promises that all was forgiven and her safety assured, her brother finally had the chance to publicly cleanse the blot on the family name with the spilling of her blood. In broad daylight in front of witnesses, he pulled out a knife and began to stab her. The witnesses quickly swelled to a crowd of more than 100 villagers who—approving, urging him on—chanted, ululated, danced in the street. Within minutes, Hassoon lay dead on the ground while the crowd cheered her killer, “Hero, hero! You are a real man!” (Suzanne Zima, “When Brothers Kill Sisters,” *The Gazette* [Montreal], April 17, 1999. See also Walter Rodgers, “Honor Killings A Brutal Tribal Custom”, *CNN World News*, December 7, 1995)

According to Zima, “Ibrahim had agonized over his decision: ‘She is my sister - my flesh and blood — I am a human being. I didn’t want to kill her. I didn’t want to be in this situation. They [community members] push[ed] me to make this decision. I know what they expect from me. If I do this, they look at me like a hero, a clean guy, a real man. If I don’t kill my sister, the people would look at me like I am a small person.’”

Who is responsible?

“Honour” killings of women (and occasionally their male “partners in crime”) reflect longstanding patriarchal-tribal traditions. In a “bizarre duality,” women are viewed “on the one hand as fragile creatures who need protection and on the other as evil Jezebels from whom society needs protection.” Patriarchal tradition “casts the male as the sole protector of the female so he must have total control of her. If his protection is violated, he loses honour because either he failed to protect her or he failed to bring her up correctly.” (Armstrong, “Honour’s Victims.”) Clearly, the vulnerability of women around the world to this type of violence will only be reduced when these patriarchal mindsets are challenged and effectively confronted.

As many of the examples cited in this case study indicate, state authorities frequently ignore their obligation to prosecute “honour” killings. They should be viewed as “co-conspirators” in such crimes, and held accountable by organizations such as the United Nations.

The typical “honour” killer is a man, usually the father, husband, or brother of the victim. Frequently teenage brothers are selected by their family or community to be the executioners, because their sentences will generally be lighter than those handed down to adults (as was the case with the killing of Rania Arafat in Jordan, cited above). “Talking and writing about this atrocity is a good start,” wrote Marina Sanchez-Rashid in a letter to *The Jordan Times*, “but I believe that action to start treating and judging the men who commit these crimes as the first degree murderers that they are, as well as to protect the victims as they deserve to be protected, is needed as soon as possible.” (Quoted in Patrick Goodenough, “Middle East Women Campaign Against ‘Family Honor’ Killings,” *Conservative News Service*, March 8, 1999.)

As with witch-hunts, however, “honour” killings also need to be viewed from a broader societal perspective; they derive from expectations of female behaviour that are held and perpetuated by men and women alike. Women’s role has often been underappreciated. Occasionally, they participate directly in the killings. More frequently, they play a leading role in preparing the ground. In Palestine, for example, the anthropologist Ilsa Glaser has noted that women acted as instigators and collaborators in these murders, unleashing a torrent of gossip that spurred the accusations.” (Quoted in *The Calgary Herald*, April 20, 2000.) Jordanian women running for parliament have also been “reluctant to break the taboo” on condemning and prosecuting “honour” killings; one told the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* that “This is our tradition. We do not want to encourage women who break up the family.” (Borger, “In Cold Blood.”) In the Ramle district of Israel, police commander Yifrach Duchovey lamented his inability to secure the cooperation of community members in investigating “honour” killings: “Even other women — the mothers — won’t cooperate with us. Sometimes the women cooperate with the men who commit the murders. ... A woman may think it is OK — maybe she thinks the victim deserves it” (Quoted in Zima, “When Brothers Kill Sisters.”)

BLOOD FEUDS

Summary

The institution of the “blood feud is the little-known but highly-destructive male counterpart to honour killings of women. Every year, at least a thousand men and boys die in blood-feud killings in Albania alone; the lives of tens of thousands more are spent in isolation and perpetual fear. Women and girls are virtually never targeted.

Focus (4): The Balkans

The Balkans, along with the Caucasus region, Sicily, and Corsica, are the areas where the “blood feud” still holds greatest sway’ today. (In the past, the institution was also prominent in Scotland -- and in the U.S. region of Appalachia, as with the famous feud between the Hatfields and McCoys.)

The institution of the blood feud is most virulent in the *malësi* (mountain regions) of northern Albania, spilling over into the territory that is today the Yugoslav province of **Kosovo**. The institution has its roots in the *Kanun* (canon) of Lek Dukagjin, a legal code compiled in the fifteenth century that enshrined “many customary practices which went back much further into the past,” according to Noel Malcolm. Malcolm writes that:

The importance of the *Kanun* to the ordinary life of the Albanians of Kosovo and the Mëlesi can hardly be exaggerated. One leading scholar has summed up the basic principles of the *Kanun* as follows. *The foundation of it all is the principle of personal honour. Next comes the equality of persons. From these flows a third principle, the freedom of each to act in accordance with his own honour, within the limits of the law, without being subject to another’s command. And the fourth principle is the word of honour, the besë ... which creates a situation of inviolable trust. Gjeçov’s version of the Kanun [“the fullest and most authoritative text”] decrees: “An offence to honour is not paid for with property, but by spilling of blood or a magnanimous pardon.” And it specifies the ways of dishonouring a man, of which the most important are calling him a liar in front of other men; insulting his wife; taking his weapons; or violating his hospitality. ... This was very much a man’s world. ... Women had their honour, but it existed through, and was defended by, men. (Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* [London: Papermac, 1998], pp. 18-19.)*

The blood feud was the result of perceived violation of this code of “honour.” It is one of the most archaic features of northern Albanian society, notes Malcolm. “...What lies at the heart of the blood-feud is a concept alien to the modern mind, and more easily learned about from the plays of Aeschylus than from the works of modern sociologists: the aim is not punishment of a murderer, but satisfaction of the blood of the person murdered — or, initially, satisfaction of one’s own honour when it has been polluted. If retribution were the real aim, then only those personally responsible for the original crime or insult would be potential targets; but instead, honour is cleansed by killing any male member of the family of the original offender, and the spilt blood of that victim then cries out to its own family for purification.” The blood feud granted blanket exemption to females, the killing of whom was seen as a profound violation of a *man’s* personal honour. “The strongest taboo of all concerned the murder of women, and any woman could walk through raging gunfire in the knowledge that she would never be shot at.” (Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, pp. 19-20.)

In his study of the blood-feud in the Yugoslav province of Montenegro, Christopher Boehm gives a vivid picture of the surreal lengths to which this gender-selectivity is carried:

In the old days, women were free to come and go as they chose under feuding conditions, since taking their blood did nothing to help the blood score and also counted as a dishonor, morally speaking. Thus, their normal daily activities could continue. But men were sorely pressed when it came to doing any work other than herding, which allowed them to stay under cover with a rifle ready at all times. In 1965 [at the time of field research] it was for this reason that women still did so much of the heavier work in the fields, so I was told by the slightly apologetic Montenegrin “male chauvinists,” who viewed this as a once-necessary custom formed in an earlier era.... Whatever might happen to the men during a feud, the women were always free to keep the household economy going because the rules of feuding were taken so seriously by the opposing party.

With respect to the sanctity of women, it was even possible for them to enter directly into combat during the first stage of a feud, when the killer’s clan shut itself in and the victim’s clan attacked the fortified stone farmhouse, which had loopholes [for firing rifles everywhere]. With no fear of being harmed, women could carry straw and firebrands up to the house to try to burn it. Also, women of a

besieged house could go outside at night carrying torches, to light up the enemy so that their own men could shoot at them. This exemplifies the strength of these particular rules: to shoot a woman was a source of shame (*sramota*) for the entire clan. (Boehm, *Blood Revenge: The Anthropology of Feuding in Montenegro and Other Tribal Societies* [Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1984], pp. 111-12.)

The death-toll exacted by the blood feud has historically been heavy for Balkans men. "At the end of the Ottoman period it was estimated that 19 percent of all adult male deaths in the Malësi were blood-feud murders, and that in an area of Western Kosovo with 50,000 inhabitants, 600 died in these feuds every year." (Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, p. 20.) In Albania, the feuds gave rise to another enduring institution: the "sworn virgin," women who "cut their hair short, wear trousers and drink fiery local brandy with the men." According to Julius Strauss, "The tradition of the sworn virgins was born of necessity in this barren land racked by war, blood feuds and intense poverty. In times past when the male line of a family was wiped out, such a virgin was entitled to take over as the head of the family." (Strauss, "The Virgins Who Blood feuds generally declined in the Balkans after the Second World War, as the authoritarian rulers of Albania (Enver Hoxha) and Yugoslavia (Josip Broz Tito) clamped down on practices that were seen as a legacy of the feudal past. In Albania, however, the blood feud has returned with — one might say — a vengeance. It has also spread from the traditional heartland of the Malësi to Tirana, the capital, and to the south of the country.

The origins of the current blood-feud crisis in Albania date to the collapse of the communist regime in 1991, and the weakness of the quasi-democratic government that replaced it. From 1992 to 1996, "press reports in Tirana" spoke of "more than 5,000 murders linked to vendettas in the past four years." (Branko Jolis, "Honour Killing Makes a Comeback," *The Guardian* [UK], August 14, 1996.) It is worth noting that this rate of approximately 1,250 men killed in blood feuds annually is slightly greater than the number of known "honour" killings of women in Pakistan — in a country with about 1/35th of the population. Estimates of fatalities are made difficult by the fact that many blood-feud murders go unreported. As one Albanian clan leader told *The New York Times*, "People don't want to report killings to the police because then the accused would be protected by the state in prison instead of being available to kill." (Jane Perlez, "Blood Feuds Draining a Fierce Corner of Albania," *The New York Times*, April 15, 1998.)

In March 1997, the post-communist regime was rocked by "the collapse of enormous, government-endorsed pyramid investment schemes. The public looted army weapons depots as furious investors clashed with security forces. Roughly 1 million firearms are said to be in circulation in a Balkan nation of only 3.2 million." (Michael J. Jordan, "In Albania, A Return to 'Eye for Eye'", *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 7, 1997.) Between 1,600 and 5,000 Albanians died in the ensuing six months, and "revenge killings skyrocketed." (Perlez, "Blood Feuds.") In 1998, Gjin Mekshi, a leader of the Committee of Blood Reconciliation in the town of Shkoder, stated that "In some families there are no men left," although "So far no women have been killed." (Owen Bowcott, "Thousands of Albanian Children in Hiding to Escape Blood Feuds," *The Guardian* [UK], September 30, 1998)

In addition to the thousands killed, tens of thousands of men live in fear and seclusion as a result of the blood feuds. Mihaela Rodina cites estimates by Albanian non-governmental organizations that "the men of some 25,000 families in northern Albania live thus, never going out of the house for fear of being victims of ... feuding. The women, who are unaffected by the kanun, are left alone to provide for the family's needs." (Rodina, "Blood Code Rules in Northern Albania," Agence France-Presse dispatch, June 30, 1999.) In 1997, *The Christian Science Monitor* interviewed one man in Shkoder who "ha[d] been homebound for six years ... The man says he dreams of escaping with a visa to America. 'This is actually worse than prison,' he says, standing in his fenced-in garden. 'At least in prison I'd know that one day I could get out.'" Even school-age boys must remain cloistered: "up to 6,000 children [were] said to be hiding" in 1998. (Bowcott, "Thousands of Albanian Children.")

The resurgence of the blood feud has led Gjin Mekshi and others to join forces in an attempt to reconcile feuding families. "The Committee of Blood Reconciliation has 3,000 members in Albania and is pressing the government to accept its arbitrations as part of the legal process. 'I have a good reputation and my

father was a man of good reputation, too,' says Mr. Mekshi. 'I am approached to arrange truces by those who are in hiding and dare not go out during the day. When we agree a deal, we sanctify the arrangement with a procession led by the local priest.' (Bowcott, "Thousands of Albanian Children.") Albanian Radio reported in August 2000 that "Seven hundred and fifty-six blood feuds have been reconciled, allowing the people involved to put an end to self-confinement at home. (BBC Worldwide Monitoring August 10 2000.) In neighbouring Kosovo, a similar campaign was mounted in the 1990s by Anton Çetta. (Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, p. 20.) Nonetheless, according to Deutsche Presse-Agentur, the success of such campaigns has been "only limited." ("Albanian Blood Feuds Affect 210,000," Deutsche Presse-Agentur, March 11, 2000.) "The feuds have very deep roots," said Perlat Ramgaj, mayor of the town of Koplik. "They're ingrained on our souls, and in this period of transition people feel free to do just about anything." (Quoted in Helena Smith, "Lost Land Where Vengeance is Written in Blood," *The Guardian* [UK], February 12, 1995.)

WOMAN SLAIN TO “CLEANSE FAMILY

AMMAN, Tuesday

Police have arrested a 25-year-old man who allegedly killed his married sister “to cleanse his family’s honour” because she had had sexual relations with a man before she married him, the Jordan Times reported today.

Ms Sharifeh Yusef was stabbed repeatedly by her brother on Saturday, after which the man turned himself over to police, the newspaper said, quoting official sources.

According to the sources, the victim had developed a relationship with a man and become pregnant, after which the two married and had a baby girl.

The victim’s brother, who had been in jail at the time, serving a two-year sentence for theft, told the authorities shortly after his arrest that he had planned to kill the woman as soon as he was released.

He was released 10 days ago and eventually found her in the town of Gor al-Safi, where she had moved.

Her death brings to two the number of Jordanian women killed in Jordan each year in such incidents, which are the target of a national campaign against judicial leniency against those charged with such crimes.

In 1999, the Jordanian parliament voted down a bill that would have nullified a statute exempting such murderers from the heaviest penalties of the law, including death. (AFP)

For the facilitator

The Facilitator should put up this definition of stereotypes as a guide for the participants.

Stereotypes are unfounded beliefs that often are related to the abilities, personalities, and behavioural practices of one group of people by the other. The belief says something about the personality as well as the capabilities of the people in question.

To assist this process, the facilitator can take participants through an exercise whereby they (the participants) identify common stereotypes from their own countries/regions etc. This can assist them in identifying the stereotypes in the clippings.

EXERCISE 18

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

MATERIALS: Newspaper clippings

TIME: 20 MINUTES

AIM: To interrogate media coverage of female genital mutilation and come up with strategies for new coverage ideas that can bring about change.
To come to an understanding of the term 'female genital mutilation'.

STEP 1: In small buzz pairs

Read the articles on FGM and then answer the following questions:

1. What do you understand by female genital mutilation and how prevalent is it?
2. Why is it almost impossible to eradicate female genital mutilation?
3. What is your assessment of the 'Alternative rite to female circumcision' that is said to be spreading in Kenya? Does this resolve the problem and can it be considered elsewhere as an option?
4. What issue does this alternative not address that is fundamental to the rights of women?
5. Why is female circumcision considered to be a problem while male circumcision is not?
6. What role can the media play in cases where legislation makes it illegal to carry out FGM but the practice is still being conducted?

STEP 2: Focusing on the media coverage

Millions of women and girls continue to live in fear and ignorance of their own bodies and life-giving functions.

The above is one of the stereotypes created and perpetuated by the media on women. In the same buzz pairs, the participants should:

1. Identify and list other stereotypes in the articles.
2. What do these stereotypes say about women?
3. List down the people/groups responsible for perpetuating these stereotypes.
4. What has been the effect of these stereotypes on
 - a) the perception of women
 - b) the role of women in the decision-making process
 - c) development

Discuss the reasons why the media has been responsible for creating its own set of stereotypes about women. These stereotypes have become clichés that the media use over and over. The participants should report back in plenary.

RAISING DAUGHTERS AWARE

WHAT IS FGM/FC/FGC?

The World Health Organization (WHO, 1997) defined FGM as all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs whether for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons.

The World Health Organization also classified FGM into four types:

- Type I. Excision of the prepuce (Note: less common), with or without excision of part or all of the clitoris (Note: More common).
- Type II. Excision of the clitoris with partial or total excision of the labia minora.
- Type III. Excision of part or all of the external genitalia and stitching/narrowing of the vaginal opening (infibulation).
- Type IV. Unclassified: this includes pricking, piercing or incising of the clitoris and/or labia; stretching of the clitoris and/or labia cauterization by burning of the clitoris and surrounding tissue.

General, basic introduction for those completely unfamiliar with Female Genital Mutilation

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), also known as female circumcision, or female genital cutting, has been practiced for several thousand years in almost 30 African and Middle Eastern nations. It is also practiced, to a lesser extent, in parts of Asia. It varies in degree, ranging from cuts around the clitoris (rare), to (more commonly) the entire removal of the clitoris, the removal of the clitoris and labia minora, or the removal of the clitoris and entire labias, with the resulting wound stitched shut. In this last form, infibulation, the opening left is generally no larger than a match head, leaving an insufficient opening for the passage of urine and menses. Severe physical and psychological health consequences can result from both the initial ordeal, and its aftermath. In many instances, FGM is performed in unsterile surroundings with the girl forcibly restrained and cut with rudimentary instruments (razor blade, knife, glass, etc), although it is sometimes performed in a medicalized setting, particularly in large cities. The age at which a girl is subjected to this ranges from seven days old to young adulthood. Most commonly, it is performed between 2 and 15 years of age.

The resulting scarring and damage caused by this practice creates difficulty in both the woman's daily life, as well as during childbirth, as scar tissue is not as flexible as normal tissue and often creates prolonged childbirth, causing potential harm to both mother and child. Other side effects include painful menses, blocked urination, chronic and/or acute infections, painful or impossible intercourse, infertility, fibroids, fistula, and ruptures into the urethra or rectum during sexual intercourse. It also often results in added challenges for health providers performing routine pelvic examinations, due to discomfort for the patient. In some cases, a normal examination may be very difficult due to acute sensitivity or too restricted a vaginal opening. Women being strong, many adapt and live basically happy and healthy lives, in spite of the assault to the body. This is, however, not a reason to condone the practice, which is performed on young girls, prior to the age of consent, and most often by force.

The male equivalent, of even the least severe form of FGM, would be the complete cutting off of the entire head of the penis. In addition, sexual mores for males are comparatively lax, their social freedoms and opportunities more vast.

While evidence of FGM can be found on Egyptian mummies dating back several thousand years, the specific origin of FGM is obscured by time, but, most often the historic reasons cited are marital fidelity, controlling the woman's sex drive, preventing lesbianism, ensuring paternity, "calming" her personality, and hygiene. It is commonly considered an important rite of passage. In some regions, a celebration is associated with the event, but in many areas, there is no particular ceremony, gifts or ritual. FGM is practiced by Muslims, Christians, Jews and animists alike. In many cultures, sexual pleasure is considered to be "for men," and the reward for women is babies. Overall attitudes can vary greatly between the various FGM practicing ethnic groups and cultures. Within some ethnic groups, adolescent sex is permitted, even encouraged, until circumcision is performed and "adult" responsibilities commence. (For more discussion on Muslim's women's perspective on FGM, please visit: <http://www.mwllusa.org>)

For parents, reasons for adhering to the practice range from fear for the daughter's marriageability and honor, to conformity and insistence by older relatives and the community. It must be understood that most parents feel strongly that having their daughter circumcised was healthy and in her best interests. It must be further understood that, for many women who have undergone FGM, it was an important rite of passage in their lives, and one which – endured with dignity, as their mothers and great-grandmothers before them—conferred enhanced social, adult status. In cultures where the opportunities for women to be so honored, celebrated and recognized are few, "circumcision" (an inaccurate term) becomes disproportionately significant, in spite of the pain it brings.

Western culture certainly has its own historic practices, incongruous to the social and medical standards we purport to uphold today: bleeding patients, burning women at the stake after (often) sexual tortures used to extract "confessions," committing outspoken women to mental asylums, chastity devices and performing routine hysterectomies and clitoridectomies to "calm" women. "Traditional" practices that are dangerous or burdensome to women are present in nearly every culture on every continent.

FGM is illegal in most Western, and, now, in many African nations, although laws often go unenforced and FGM is still practiced, either "underground" in private homes or clinics, or by sending unsuspecting girls back to the parent's home country, often under the auspices of a family vacation, to be "circumcised." FGM is being practiced in the U.S. At this time, physicians, other health care providers, social workers, teachers and counselors, police and prosecutors, are largely unprepared to assist effectively women and girls affected by FGM or seeking to avoid FGM. Many young women are experiencing serious health problems due to their infibulation or excisions. Often their parents are reluctant (or totally refuse) to seek medical care for them. Health providers must be prepared to help these young women, while protecting their anonymity and being aware of the strict family dynamics still important to them. Many have few resources of their own.

Other young women or girls experience symptoms which may potentially be misdiagnosed as learning problems, cognitive disorders, chemical imbalance, mental illnesses, or behavior disorders, while their FGM is left unknown or unaddressed.

Health providers who interview patients with FGM often do not ask the correct questions. Often a woman is asked, "Are you having any problems?" The answer is frequently, 'no', as many women have little to compare with, having undergone FGM at a young age. Direct, specific questions in the manner of "how long," "how much," etc, are advisable. The health provider should also not assume that the patient knows everything about her body, how it functions, and what may have been removed. Many women were very young when the procedure was performed, and again, have little to compare themselves with. (For specific protocols on taking such a patient's medical history, please see marked articles in the Medicine section.)

In cases where a translator is required, it is advisable to select one not directly related to the patient. Some women are not able to, or not comfortable, describing their wishes and health complaints in the presence of other family members, and may, in fact, depend on the health provider to advocate for them to a husband, parent, or other family decision maker, as to any medical necessities (e.g. deinfibulation, other surgeries). Translation services, however, must be introduced as a 'matter of policy,' and in a way which does not offend the woman or her family.

Another ironic problem for FGM affected women and girls is the new awareness of FGM. This "awareness" can put them under embarrassing scrutiny and cause difficulties with their classmates, who often harass, rather than support. This is also a very private and personal issue, and one few affected women wish to discuss, a fact often obscured in much of western thinking.

Others have forgotten that this is an African women's issue and have cut the women themselves out of the decision making and advocacy process. The fact that affected women may also be refugees who have suffered war, civil unrest, deprivation, loss and displacement, is also too often forgotten. Often immigrants are appalled at what they witness of western culture, both in the media and in their daily lives. Often it makes them more determined than ever to keep their old traditions and insure the chastity of their daughters.

The preceding paragraphs are a very, very general overview for health providers of what FGM is; for more detailed and complete information, one must visit the various sections (Medicine, Law, Cultural Links, Economics, etc.) linked on our main index page: <http://www.fgm.org>. RDA was founded to provide a basic medical, legal and advocacy service,

as well as to provide a friendly, accessible network among health and education professionals, organizations and affected women. This is not an issue which can be easily encapsulated or explained. Many other issues are interwoven with it (lack of political, economic, social, educational opportunities and representation, regional conflicts, (etc), and any serious inquiry into FGM and women and girl's right to refuse FGM, must take all those interwoven issues into consideration).

Below are some links to various source articles discussing in more detail the technical definitions of FGM. Again, treatment, advocacy and protocol issues are discussed in detail on the remainder of the Rising Daughters Aware web site see: index page or go directly to: Medicine or Law. All of the articles are available free of charge, for immediate print out or download.

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TWO MILLION FEMALES AT RISK OF BEING MUTILATED

By Florence Bamanyaki

Nairobi

The biological facts of reproduction are as intriguing as ever. Millions of women and girls continue to live in fear and ignorance of their own bodies and life giving functions. Every year about two million females are at risk of being mutilated, says a recent World Health Organisation report. Globally, between 85 and 115 million women and girls have undergone Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

The pain is simply excruciating! There is the risk of death from excessive bleeding or from tetanus or from other infections. There are even risks in child-birth on account of the scar from operation.

Many people from societies in which the practice does not exist can only express horror at the details of the operation. Those who have been through the operation speak of the trauma of the whole experience and how they would not want to inflict such misery on their own daughters.

This operation otherwise seen as sheer misery is none other but female circumcision (excision, clitoridectomy, infibulation) - give it any name, but the fact remains, according to women's rights activists and medical personnel, it is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

They argue that when external genitals are normal, there can be no reasons, medical, moral or aesthetic for removing all or any of them.

John Kanga, a history teacher in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, says it is wrong to fully discredit the cultural reasons for female circumcision because "these women, though uneducated, are highly intelligent, creative individuals who are just as aware of the inevitability of social change".

There are men who favour female circumcision, saying it ensures the elimination of the sexual urge and preservation of chastity in women. But then, one wonders why there is never any need to curb the sexual urge in men!

Finda Mbriwa (not her real name), a Kenyan Somali, who has undergone circumcision and says she can perform the operation by the virtue of her age and experience as an elder, defends the practice, saying it is a rite of passage from childhood to womanhood and that it is directly linked to fertility.

But one interesting argument Mbriwa puts across is that if a baby's head touched the clitoris during childbirth, it would die. The question is, says who?

The biological facts of reproduction continue to be the best kept secrets in many parts of Africa, often distorted by damaging myths, taboos and fears that threaten and debase the lives and dignity of women. The failure to learn about the natural biological process of giving life or how a baby is made, are still the cause of great suffering, pain and tragedy - quite needlessly.

One, Christine, from Kenya's Maasai community where female circumcision is practiced widely, says she feels "more of a woman" and that she is respected in her society as a full-grown woman.

Well, it is often difficult, even impossible for those who do not belong to a given culture, to fully appreciate the implications as well as the significance of aspects of that culture, and understand why even enlightened members of that society choose to conform against the judgement that female circumcision is obviously a painful and dangerous experience.

Jane Auko, a sales girl in Nairobi is disturbed by the argument that female circumcision is meant to preserve chastity in women. Obviously irritated, she asks why women should on the overall continue to succumb to the whims of men who are naturally the decision-makers in matters pertaining to culture and traditional practices under which female circumcision falls.

One would imagine the pangs of childbirth alone would suffice the ability to endure pain and the qualification of "being a woman".

A mid-wife at one of Kenya's leading hospitals says that the female external reproductive organs are "normal, healthy organs" and each has its own function to perform either during sexual relations, labour, child-birth and post partum, therefore none of them is a mistake.

Talk about reproduction, millions of women and girls continue to live in fear and ignorance of their own bodies and life giving functions. A recent World Health

Organization (WHO) report indicates that every year about 2 million females are at risk of being mutilated.

Globally, between 85 and 115 million women and girls have undergone FGM. The report says that Sierra Leone and Liberia still widely incorporate female circumcision in their secret societies.

A research carried out in Kenya by the Programme for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) revealed that the practice is still emphasized among the Kisii, Maasai, Samburu and Meru communities. Up to nearly 50 percent of the women in this East African state are circumcised.

A programme officer for PATH, Samson Radeny, says that even the educated, including medical personnel are involved in the practice.

Radeny says that parents send their daughters to the village at the age of seven for circumcision whether they are in school or not. He notes that some tribes like the Kikuyu had abandoned the practice.

This is because the Church stepped in with threats to excommunicate those Christians involved in the practice. PATH is a non-governmental organisation dedicated to offering technical assistance in improving the reproductive health of women. The programme has been very active in anti-female circumcision campaigns.

Explaining the medical dangers of female circumcision, Gerald Aine, a private practicing gynecologist, says after

the operation, the external reproductive organs heal with a scar which consists of fibrous, non-elastic tissues which do not yield during childbirth, thus making labour prolonged and sometimes obstructed.

According to Aine, during this period, referred to as the second stage of labour, the head of the baby is already in the vagina, but the opening of the birth canal is closed by the unyielding scar tissue of circumcision.

Aine says the constant prolonged grinding of the baby's head on the mother's urinary bladder on top and the rectum behind causes fistula (uncontrollable passing out of urine and faeces). This is not bed wetting which occurs in boys and girls up to the age of nine to ten years.

Aine adds that fistula is common in adolescent girls and it is extremely difficult for some of these women to give birth to a normal child if the fistula is not repaired. If by chance they become pregnant, urine poisons the foetus causing frequent miscarriages.

"But not all circumcised women end up with fistula," stresses Aine. But many still wonder why womanhood training including family education, sex education and child rearing should not be continued and made the most valuable aspects of female initiation.

One would imagine the pangs of childbirth alone would suffice the ability to endure pain and the qualification of "being a woman".

FGM: A WOMAN'S AGONY, CIRCUMCISER'S DELIGHT

By **Daniel Benno Msangya**

Nairobi, Kenya

Female genital mutilation is a deeply rooted harmful traditional rite practised in many parts of Africa where it is commonly referred to as female circumcision. In Tanzania, for example, it is commonly practised in ten regions while in such countries as Eritrea, the practice is even more widespread. But what are its social justifications?

According to the Gogo ethnic group in Central Tanzania, the largest and most populous East African country, female circumcision is considered to enhance the cultural values of the communities practising it.

“(The practice) is highly regarded as a rite of passage for girls into womanhood, grooming and training of cultural values that maintain domestic stability within the community,” explains Nyangadule Kodi, a 78-year-old woman circumciser and resident of Mundemu Village in Dodoma Rural District.

The traditional circumciser further explains that a girl who is not circumcised has no right to associate with her age mates and has diminished prospects for getting a husband, a traumatising situation indeed.

The circumciser or *muhunga* (in Gogo language) uses a knife they call *icheto* to operate a group of girls ranging between five to twenty years in age depending on the situation.

The operation takes about 15 to 20 minutes depending on the sharpness of the *muhunga*, says Nyangadule, adding that female circumcision among the Gogo is conducted by praise songs eulogising the parts removed, “and for the recognition of the bravery of the girls submitting themselves to the ritual.”

The songs are expected to serve as an encouragement for the young girls waiting for their turn to be circumcised to remain courageous and get ready for the act, says Nyangadule.

The utmost evidence of beauty in a woman is the fact that she is circumcised. Some men fear social sanctions that could be imposed on them by their respective communities should they marry uncircumcised women. “They had to

keep that a secret and find out immediately how they can get their spouses to be circumcised,” emphasises Nyangadule.

The Gogo believe that female circumcision promotes social and political cohesion. This can be examined through the circumcision ceremonies - the participation of different people from various clans, the way they socialise and familiarise, “this brings about social solidarity among themselves and it integrates the circumcised girl to her relatives and society at large,” said a Councillor of Mnadani Ward in Dodoma Town, Sara Mwenge, in an exclusive interview with AANA.

The Gogo community maintain that if female circumcision is eradicated, part of their culture would likewise be eradicated leaving their society bereft of purpose and with nothing to look forward to.

The Gogo demand that the eradication of female circumcision may lead to disharmony and constant conflict within the community, “this is expected to result from absence of specific norms and values they have to bear in mind,” explains Sara Mwenge.

Many old women such as Nyangadule still maintain that they would not allow their male relatives to marry uncircumcised women because such women are “not polite and are over-sexed”.

The Gogo people perform clitoridectomy, a type of genital mutilation which is practised by various ethnic groups in Africa. According to medical experts it involves the removal of the whole clitoris.

In Gogo rituals, the young girls are operated on outside their homes especially under the mountain or near bushes and rivers.

The Gogo have their perception on the clitoris. “They consider this part as dirty and it is therefore to be removed from the women’s genital areas,” says Nyangadule. The Gogo believe that due to its dirtiness, it causes a disease known as *lawa lawa* or *peremende* (others call it *tamtam*), an irritation within a woman’s genital organs.

continued next page...

But according to professional explanations by gynaecologists, the disease is due to the fact that the female genital organ is so folded that it requires a continuous washing. "Failure to maintain cleanliness causes irritation in the inner parts of female organs," says Dr Zainabu Chaula, a senior medical expert in Dodoma Regional Government Hospital.

According to Chaula, about 600,000 women and girls in Dodoma Region are affected by FGM. Worse still they undergo this compulsive traditional ritual without anaesthetic application to diminish the pain.

The doctor says the girls are usually subjected to torture as they experience severe bleeding, shock, infection, painful intercourse, blockage of menstruation and tearing of tissues and haemorrhaging during childbirth. Others die due to FGM, notes Chaula.

Over 20 countries in Africa perform FGM. But outside the continent, FGM and other forms of female circumcision are performed in mainly the Arab and Middle East countries.

Among those who practise FGM in Tanzania are the Masaai, Iraqw (Mbulu) and Barbaig of Arusha region, the Gogo, Rangi and Sandawi of Dodoma region, the Chaga and Pare of Kilimanjaro region, the Mwera Yao and Makua of Lindi and Mtwara regions.

The others include the Kurya, Ikizu, Simbiti, Rieny, Ugu, Bakabwa, Kine, Natta, Zanaki, Kiroba and Tatiro of Mara region and Nyaturu of Singida region. Other regions include Dar es Salaam, Morogoro, Tanga and Iringa.

In countries like Eritrea FGM is a ritual which confers social acceptability and integration upon the female. The practice is performed on about 99 percent of the eligible females.

"Without it people become estranged from their own kith and kin and they may lose their right to contribute to or participate in the community life of their homeland, to own property, to vote or to be voted for," explains Azenagosh Ghebreselasie, medical expert in the Ministry of Health from Eritrea who visited Dodoma recently on a study tour.

The culture causes many significant effects to the majority of populations in Africa and it affects the physical, mental and social life of the women and girls as well as the socio-economic development of the country.

According to Ghebreselasie, Eritrea has one of the highest levels of maternal mortality which is 999 per 100,000 live births. FGM causes 90 percent of the problem because it may lead to trauma to surrounding tissues.

Experts say the vulva of a young girl is very small and there is a tendency for someone who is unskilled in the anatomy and physiology of the area, to cut too much, thereby injuring other nearby tissues such as muscles, the urethra and the rectum. These would have their own attendant complications particularly during delivering of a baby.

However, the effort made by Tanzania government to eradicate FGM has, in effect, intensified the risks. Parents fear the government. They instead authorise secret rituals that cause serious health problems as most of them are now circumcised in their early ages or in infancy.

WORLD AGAINST FGM

By Favour Okereke

Lagos, Nigeria

Female circumcision is alive and well but a global effort to eradicate this traditional practice is gathering momentum.

Annetee Onabanjo, 45, a banker married at 20, was divorced three years later. Her first two children were stillborn.

The root of Onabanjo's problems dated back to when she was circumcised at the age of 13 by a traditional birth attendant who injured her. This resulted in an infection and "growth" in her body. She underwent surgery to remove the growth but it hardly helped.

Her real problem started when she married and found she had severe pains during intercourse. After six months of marriage, the husband started to lose interest in her.

"But I don't blame him. I never enjoyed sex because it was always very painful. Tell me who will not, after a non stop difficulty in penetrating the wife?" She asked rhetorically.

Onabanjo had difficulties during labour. It was prolonged. Her first and second sons were stillborn.

"The doctor explained to my husband that the skin of vulva and vaginal canal is normally soft and elastic to enable it expand easily during child birth to allow the baby come out without difficulty. And that the removal of these from my body has made the area dense and hard because of scarring, hence the predicament I found myself," she said. The marriage ended.

Onabanjo is a victim of female circumcision, now called female genital mutilation, FGM. She is one among thousands of women in a similar situation. Zarah Mohammed, 26, a civil servant, is another victim. Mohammed was circumcised at nine. She too had problems of sexual intercourse with her husband.

"That has been the bane of my marriage and motherhood. I never enjoyed any sexual relationship with my husband due to pains and at times bleeding during intercourse. Of course, this has forced me to stop child bearing even though I have only two daughters. All this because of the traditional nonsense," she said.

She has promised to protect her daughters from female genital mutilation.

Grace Osarewan, 50, business woman and mother of three girls, was circumcised at 16. But she supports female circumcision. "Circumcision is absolutely necessary. You know the clitoris which is the object of circumcision grows bigger the older the girl gets. And being the erectile part of her body, it makes her promiscuous. Actually, this is what our forefathers wanted to avoid by practising female circumcision. Our grandfathers handed down this tradition to us. I have already circumcised my three daughters and I will make sure my grand children are circumcised. I won't mind those who join the whiteman to destroy our culture," she said.

Yomi Oguntunga, a consultant and family physician, Holy Trinity Hospital, Ikeja told Newswatch:

"Some women have gynaecological problems because of circumcision. It can also cause acute and chronic pelvic inflammation emanating from infection at the time of circumcision. Also, when the fallopian tubes are blocked due to infections and inflammation, the woman automatically becomes infertile."

FGM is practised in many states of Nigeria. Girls from south-west and south-south are not eligible to marry until they are circumcised. But the majority of the Igbo communities of the south-east circumcise their daughters within seven days after birth.

Linda Osarenren, information officer, Inter-African Committee, IAC, sees the practice as unjust to women. She argues: "The main reason why they do it is that they don't want a woman to enjoy sexual relation because they feel if she enjoys it, they cannot guarantee she would be faithful to her husband. Again, it is not true. So, why should they deny a woman a fundamental right. Not just a reproductive health (right) but sexual health?"

Funke Bogunjoko, a doctor and primary healthcare adviser to World Health Organisation, WHO, in Lagos is working towards the eradication of the practice. She told Newswatch that it was based on the global concern for the practice that WHO regional committee for Africa adopted resolution

AFRIRC 43/R6 which ordered the regional officers to accelerate routine collection of data on female genital mutilation, September 1993. She said that this was further reinforced during the 47th World Health Assembly of May 1994. Bogunjoko said that the assembly adopted resolution WHA 47.10 which urged member states to establish national policies towards abolishing FGM and other harmful practices.

A national baseline survey conducted in Nigeria two years ago to ascertain the extent of FGM in the country showed that one in every four Nigerian women between 15-49 years old were circumcised.

The survey revealed that FGM was most prevalent among the Yoruba people of the south-west with Osun State recording 98.7 percent; Oyo State followed with 96.8 percent. Other states were Cross River, 95.4; Delta 93.1; Ondo 91.4; and Imo, 82.4 percent. The practice was generally low in the North.

FGM is not peculiar to Nigeria alone. The practice is universal. A WHO report says that "most of the girls and women who have undergone genital mutilation live in 26 African countries, although some live in Asia. They are also increasingly found in Europe, Australia, Canada and USA, primarily among immigrants from Africa and South-Western Asia."

The report reveals that more than 130 million girls and women in Africa have undergone some kind of female genital mutilation. According to the reports of Efua Dorkenoo in the book *Female Genital Mutilation, the Practice and its Prevention*, 1994, the percentage of FGM practice in Africa is highest in Djibouti, Egypt, Somalia, Mali, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone and the Gambia. And the lowest are Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda.

FGM is practised in more than 20 sub-Saharan countries, and among some religious sects in Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Oman, South Yemen and the United Arab Emirate.

The United States Centre for Disease Control estimated that more than 150,000 women and girls of African origin living in the US have been or are at risk of being genitally mutilated.

WHO wants all this to stop. It has intensified efforts to force governments to legislate against it. Bogunjoko regrets that not much has been achieved in that respect as only five states, namely Edo, Cross River, Rivers, Bayelsa, and Ogun States have legislated against it.

Osarenren told Newswatch that IAC had done a lot to stop FGM by sensitising and creating awareness on a regular basis since 1985. "We have done a lot. We are old in the game since 1985. We started with sensitisation, creating awareness on a regular basis by talking to the policy makers and government officials at the state level, to local government chairmen to involve policy makers at the local government level, and the Christian segment of the community, traditional leaders, opinion leaders, market women at the community level."

She said that IAC has also spoken to religious bodies to educate them that God did not ordain female genital mutilation. The campaign, she said, has similarly been taken to girls in schools, grandmothers and mothers in different communities.

In addition, Osarenren said the organisation has started talking to men as well. "We find men would tell you it is women's business. But we know in this African society, Nigeria is highly patriarchal. When a man talks, the woman would listen. If a father takes his seat and tells his wife, you dare not circumcise my new born baby girl, the woman will not. So we are now doing a specialised information package for men only, organising seminars for them so that we become partners in this eradication business. All these are geared towards total elimination of FGM in Nigeria," she said.

Osarenren said that traditional birth attendants stick to FGM because it is their source of livelihood.

She said that some of their converts in Ogun State confessed that "in addition to charging as much as N800 per child to be circumcised, they keep the clitoris and sell it as love portion to some people who want charm for promotion, good luck, marriage and success."

But Osarenren is not happy that instead of getting encouragement from the victims, men and government, they have always received denial, resistance and hypocrisy. "The men condemn us and say that we have collected money from the whites to destroy their culture," Osarenren said. She is however, optimistic that if the federal government passes into law the bill outlawing female circumcision in Nigeria, IAC Nigeria and all other organisations who had joined in the fight against FGM would have succeeded.

Kola Osundairo, a lawyer told Newswatch that nobody could be prosecuted for carrying out female circumcision because there is no law in Nigeria against it.

Edo State house of assembly has passed a bill criminalising it. The bill has since been signed into law No 4, of 1999. Newswatch investigation revealed that some highly placed individuals from the

state are mounting pressure to stop the bill becoming law. A motion to repeal the law has even been sent to the house by Omoh Tsatsaku Ojior, a US-based University lecturer. Ojior wrote Edo House of Assembly for the repealing of the "Female Circumcision and Genital mutilation law," September last year arguing that such law "stands to insult and intimidate the intellect, consciousness and understanding of the meaning of marital and family of the traditionalists of Edo land and its people including the entire Nigerian traditionalists."

He accused Esohe Jacobs and Elizabeth Ighodaro, representatives of Egor local government constituency and Oredo II constituency respectively who introduced the bill to the house as "victims of unholy and offensive propaganda of foreign forces they know nothing about."

He explained that unlike in western cultures, "female circumcision is the actual rite of passage from girl-hood to becoming a married woman, among the Etsako people of Edo land." He said it is the wedding rite and even the wedding itself and not the ring invented by the European culture that modern couples wear nowadays.

Ojior insisted that the fore-bearers who invented the rite of female circumcision in Edo knew what the present generation didn't know. "The promiscuity, laxity and lack of self comportment which seem to be associated with the non-circumcised females, compared with the highly respected African women of yesterday stands to warn us, as these are a clear evidence of moral ineptitude, and indiscipline," he said.

Index on censorship, reported last year that as at June 1998, about 29 villages in Senegal had outlawed FGM.

The US campaign against the practice started in 1980, when five cases of FGM among pregnant immigrant women in San Jose, California, became public. Thus, a law against FGM was promptly passed in California to stop the abuse.

Even in the whole of US today, FGM is an adequate ground for granting asylum. A case in point was that of one Togolese, Fauziya Kasinga, 20, who lived in Philadelphia. The US Immigration and Naturalisation Service stood by her when a Philadelphia judge told her that her story of FGM was unbelievable and insufficient for granting her political asylum. Kasinga was later granted an asylum.

US government has taken the battle against FGM beyond its borders. Its representatives on financial institutions like the World Bank are required to refuse to give loans to governments that are not carrying out programmes to eradicate FGM.

The parents of a three-month old girl who died as a result of circumcision carried out on her were charged with criminal negligence and given suspended sentences in France in 1982. Since then France has prosecuted parents of more than 30 families for genitally mutilating their daughters in the last ten to 15 years.

GENITAL MUTILATION STILL A NIGHTMARE FOR MANY AFRICAN SISTERS

Female genital mutilation is still a major health problem among the Sabinu people of eastern Uganda, in spite of concerted efforts by the Uganda government, donors and community leaders to combat the practice.

Statistics compiled by the Family Planning Association of Uganda and the Reproductive, Educative and Community Health Programme (Reach) show the trend is far from declining.

The findings have been described by government officials as surprising.

The statistics were compiled by surveying women between 14 and 30 years old in the district of Kapchorwa, 480km east of the capital Kampala.

They were circumcised between December 1998 and January 1999.

This district is populated by the Sabinu – the only ethnic group in Uganda that practices female genital mutilation, in the belief that it reduces promiscuity among married women.

The practice involves cutting off the clitoris of the woman, as well as parts of the lips of the vagina.

The whole area is then stitched up to narrow the passage.

The rituals, which are carried out once every two years, were last carried out in December 1998 and will again be done in December 2000.

In Tingey County, Kapchorwa district, it was found that 193 out of a total of 5 762 girls (3,3 percent) had been circumcised, while in Kween country the study found that 473 girls had been circumcised out of 3, 027 (13,5 percent).

“The findings are surprising and indicate the problem is far from over.

“It could even be getting worse so we must redouble efforts to fight it,” says Charles Opio, the government resident district commissioner.

The government, through a local group called the Sebei Elders’ Association has in

Despite the efforts of anti-female circumcision groups and government officials, traditionalists in eastern Uganda continue to subject young women to the painful and unhygienic ‘operation’

the last two years intensified a campaign to end the practice. Cases are believed to have dropped by about 40 percent since 1996.

Female genital mutilation is practiced in 27 of the 53 member states of Africa. In some countries more than 90 percent of females have undergone genital mutilation.

The World Health Organisation estimates that about 100 million women in Africa today have gone through some type of genital mutilation.

In Uganda it is done using crude implements such as sharpened pieces of metal or knives.

The circumcisers are mainly old women who have been locally trained to cut the girls.

“They are very experienced in the job and have done it for many years,” says Joseph Chepsikor, a community leader in the district.

Before the girls are circumcised they go through several rituals and receive gifts.

They are taught to believe that no man can marry them unless they are “initiated through circumcision”.

For days before the ceremony, the young girls roam the villages visiting relatives, who console them and offer them gifts. The ritual itself is carried out early in the morning.

The girl is made to lie on her back on a mat in the compound of the home and told to open her legs wide. The “surgeon” approaches and kneels between her legs. She pulls the clitoris until it is elongated before cutting it.

After cutting it, the “surgeon” rubs some locally concocted herbal medicine into the wound.

The girl, who is expected not to cry, gets

up and walks to a nearby shelter, where she will stay for months while the wound heals.

Crying during circumcision is a sign of cowardice and is believed to bring bad luck to the family.

“I was circumcised when I was about 13. I thought if I did not do it, nobody would marry me. They used one knife for several girls. Today I cannot allow my daughters to do it because, among other problems, it exposes one to the risk of HIV/AIDS,” says Jane Chelimo, a nurse involved in the Reach programme.

The mother of four says she has had difficult childbirths because of damage done to her reproductive system.

The crusade against the practice gained momentum in 1996, when Jane Francis Kuka was appointed Minister of State for Gender and Community Development. Since her appointment, she has been outspoken against the practice and mobilized local women in Kapchorwa to speak out against what was regarded as a cultural practice.

“I refused to be circumcised and everybody thought I would never be married. But I am happily married with children,” says the minister, who was recognized by the United Nations in 1997 for her efforts in combating female genital mutilation.

She has also been at the forefront of mobilizing girls in schools to reject the practice. As a result of her efforts, as well as those of the Reach programme, the Family Planning Association, the Elders’ Association and government, 150 schoolgirls wrote to the United Nations secretary-general in 1997, requesting help to save them from the practice.

In response, UN Population Fund (UNFPA) chief, Nafis Sadik promised help to strengthen the fight against the practice.

Despite the gains, strong opposition still exists among the traditionalists in the district.

Opio says extra effort is being made to convince the traditionalists that female genital mutilation is a harmful practice – Sapa-IPS.

RIGHTS-LIBERIA/ UN: FIGHTING HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

By Attes Johnson

MONROVIA, Apr 20 (IPS) - UN agencies in Liberia have begun to tackle the growing cases of the abduction and forceful initiation of persons into traditional societies through harmful practices like the female genital mutilation (fgm).

Over the past few months, over a dozen cases of forced initiation involving more than 50 children and adults have been reported in various parts of Liberia including the capital, Monrovia.

In one instance in February, two teenage boys from Monrovia's Save Our Souls (SOS) Children's Village, who had gone to visit relatives in the central Liberian town of Kakata were seized by the traditional "Devil", as the practitioners are known in Liberia, and forcefully initiated into the "poro" society.

Efforts by the SOS Children's Village to secure their release, failed, as the children were reported to have been "eaten by the Devil".

In another instance in early March, the Criminal Court in Monrovia ordered the immediate release of 10 persons, who had been seized by the "Devil".

It all started when three Mandingo girls — whose ethnic group does not subscribe to the harmful traditional practices — were abducted by the rival Femal ethnic group.

Seven elderly Mandingo women sent to negotiate their release were also chained and threatened with forced initiation, prompting their relatives to institute legal proceedings to secure their release.

The various ethnic groups in Lofa County, bordering Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone, who indulge in the harmful traditional practices, have often clashed with the Mandingos.

In one such incident, two persons were killed and several others injured during a clash between Mandingos and members of the Lorma ethnic group.

"Besides posing a threat to individuals, the activities of the traditional 'Devil' have also often disrupted traffic and commercial activities in towns and major highways across the country," says a member of the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFLL).

A case in point was an incident that occurred in November last year when the traditional "Devil" ambushed and abducted four trucks transporting passengers and unprocessed rubber.

Both the goods and passengers were seized during the raid along the Monrovia/Kakata highway at evening, according to a police officer in Kakata, about 32 kilometres west of Monrovia.

Elizabert Moyounor, an AFLL official urged “the government to pass a legislation to halt the growing cases of harmful traditional practices in Liberia.”

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Children’s Fund (Unicef) and the World Health Organization (WHO), in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Social welfare, have begun consultations to end the practice.

“The effort is bound to prove an uphill task, considering the extent to which these traditional practices have become entrenched in Liberia,” says Philip N. Wesseh, Managing Editor of the ‘Independent Inquirer’ newspaper.

Not only are top government officials, like legislators, ministers and judges, members of the tradition societies, but also President Charles Taylor, has been made chief of the “zoes” (head of the traditional societies).

The U.S. State Department Human Rights report on Liberia, released on Feb 26, shows that prior to the civil war (1989-1997), 50 percent of women in rural Liberia between the ages of eight and 18 had been subjected to FGM.

But social workers in Liberia estimate that more than 90 percent of rural women in that age group have undergone the practice.

The UN agencies, in collaboration with the AFLL, say they will lobby influential female legislators and judges to fight the scourge.

Liberia’s five human rights organisations have assured AFLL that they will lobby parliament to pass a legislation against the practice.

Of late, much attention has been drawn to harmful traditional practices, which violate the human rights of women and girls, putting them at risk of irreversible hazards to their health and well-being and perpetuates violence against them.

The UN says up to 130 million girls and women worldwide, especially in Africa, have undergone some form of FGM, in which the female clitoris is removed.

ZAMBIAN WOMEN SUCCUMB TO GENITAL MUTILATION

By Juliet Chibuta
and Kezia Mumba

CASES of genital mutilation, once considered rare among Zambian women, are now surfacing at an alarming rate at various hospitals.

Some gynaecologists and obstetricians at the University Teaching Hospital (UTH) say though genital mutilation is considered illegal, the number of circumcised women appearing at labour wards in the country's health institutions is increasing.

The gynaecologists and obstetricians said they are witnessing almost all levels of circumcision. Level one is where the clitoris has been removed, level two where the clitoris and the labia have been sliced and level three where every thing is cut off except for a small hole left for menstrual purposes.

The doctors said history records of the majority of these circumcised women appearing at hospitals, indicate that most of them are Zambians married to foreigners who come from countries where women are subjected to genital mutilation.

"Some women happen to be children born to these foreigners," the doctors said.

The doctors said they were concerned about the emergence of genital mutilation in Zambia, which posed a risk to the health of women.

"Most of these women have very serious complications when giving

birth and many end up dying," the doctors said.

The doctors said there is nothing they can do because their duty ends at helping the women deliver safely, a case they say is rare among circumcised women.

"Authorities should do something about this cruel practice. The sad thing about it is that women opt to be circumcised voluntarily because they do not want to lose their marriages or 'friendships' to these foreigners who give them a lot of money," they said.

Meanwhile, a Somali supermodel, Waris Dirie, has been appointed United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) special ambassador for the elimination of female genital mutilation (FGM) because of her personal experience of the ordeal.

Ms. Dirie, who was born into a nomadic family, survived the practice, which kills hundreds of women every year. She felt the pain of losing a younger sister and two cousins who died in the process. And just before she could be married off at a tender age of 13 to an elderly man, she ran away from home and eventually found her way to London.

According to a UNFPA report, *Populi*, it was while in London after some success as a fashion model that she gained courage to share her ordeal with the public and thereafter decided to dedicate her energies to ending FGM

and improving the status of women.

Dirie was appointed special ambassador in 1997 to support UNFPA and national programmes to eradicate FGM. She has also written a book entitled *Desert Flower, The Extraordinary Journey of a Desert Nomad* in which she narrates her experience. "When I imagine more little girls going through what I went through, it breaks my heart and makes me angry" she says, adding: "With great pride, I accepted UNFPA's offer to become a special ambassador and to join it's fight. I will return to Africa to tell my story and speak out against this crime".

In her campaign, she talked to United States senators and representatives and told them of her encounter with FGM as a Somali child, who was cut in a practice that has claimed many lives.

During her long visit to the United States, she met Representative John Cooksey of Louisiana, a doctor who has worked in Africa and supports efforts of eradicating the practice. She addressed press conferences in which she called the attention of UNFPA's cooperation with NGOs to eradicate the practice.

Populi further says that as of press time, there were bills in Congress to give UNFPA \$25 million and \$35 million for fiscal years 2000 and 2001, respectively.

FMG KILLS MANY CHILDREN IN TANZANIA

By **PUDENCIANA TEMBA**

Peter Mlundi (51), a resident of Majengo Street in Singida town, is in deep agony. He has been living in this sorrowful state for the past two years, and is not sure as to when he will recover from it.

Mlundi, a mason, found himself in this stress after the death of his six and a half years old daughter, Bertha. She died of complications resulting from a circumcision operation conducted on her.

"What makes me so sad is not the death of my daughter, but the cause of her death and more, the suffering she was subjected to, which were all imposed on her without her consent," said the weeping father.

Narrating the ordeal to a team of journalists from the local media sent by TAMWA to Singida region to write on development issues and traditional practices and beliefs harmful to the health of women and children. Mr Mlundi said the operation was conducted on the girl while she was two years old.

He said, "his wife colluded with her relatives and a traditional practitioner to carry out the operation on the child, while she was on leave. They did not seek permission or inform him of the act.

"I came to learn of the problem at a very late stage when my daughter was about to die. The doctor at the hospital told me of the causing factor of my daughter's suffering," he said and added:

"I almost fainted when the doctor said my daughter would not recover

because the operation was so severe and irreparable," he said wiping out tears.

The Singida regional hospital doctor, Aubrey Mushi, confirmed the incident saying the girl was taken to the hospital by her father and police while in a critical condition.

He said after a thorough examination, it was established that it was the excision kind of circumcision that was conducted on her.

Dr Mushi who is in charge of the gynaecology department at the hospital said the circumcision involved the removal of prepuce with all labia minora.

He said that since the operation was carried out while the girl was so young, some veins were cut in the process, causing paralysis and brain damage.

"By the time she died, the girl could not talk or walk. Before the operation she was a bright and lovely girl," lamented the father.

Following the incident, the mother of the late Bertha, Lucia Augustino, who is alleged to have facilitated the circumcision, is in custody awaiting charges related to the death.

Bertha's case is just a tip of the iceberg, as there are several incidents of FGM among children and babies which have been reported in Arusha, Dodoma and Singida regions.

FGM reports amongst toddlers and babies have been in the media of late especially after the enactment of the Sexual Offences Act, 1998 which among others bars circumcision of children and women.

The Singida regional social welfare officer, Ms Zuhura Karya, told journalists recently in the region that FGM was carried out on babies to conceal the crime.

"People are fearing to be sent to court over FGM hence they have decided to operate on the girls just after birth or within two months after birth," she said.

She said the practice was common among Wagogo, Wanyaturu and Taturu tribes in Singida rural areas on belief that uncircumcised women were incomplete and do not deserve a marriage.

Since the law has made it difficult to fulfil their deep rooted traditional norm, she said, the parents, particularly mothers and grandmothers, were performing the ritual on innocent babies. This serves the purpose of escaping the long arm of law, as well as avoiding possible resistance from the girls when they are grown ups.

Ms Karya said some enlightened girls and mothers were sometimes opposed to the practice but tricks of different sorts were used particularly by the grandparents to ensure that the ritual was performed.

She cited a case of a woman from Msimihi village, Llongero division, Singida Rural District who left her six months baby girl with her grandmother to go to fetch water from a well. When she returned home she found her daughter crying while bleeding profusely. She was circumcised by her grandmother.

CULTURAL VALUES CONTRIBUTE TO FEMALE CIRCUMCISION IN SINGIDA

The circumcision of females in Tanzania is still a problem despite concerted efforts to eradicate it. Business Times Reporter ROIDA ANDUSAMILE, who recently visited Singida Region, gives the details.

"I am proud of being a circumcised woman; a 'clean' woman with dignity," said 27 year old Anna Lameck.

Anna is among many women interviewed in Singida region who seemed to see no harm in what is referred to as female genital mutilations (FGM) in enlightened circles. Ostensibly, this attitude is born of the fact that the practice is part of a culture inherited from their ancestors.

The Wa-Nyaturu, wa-Mmburu, Barbaig, wa-Gogo and wa-Taturu are among the tribes in central Tanzania that are still involved in such 'cultural' practices.

Zuhura Karya, a senior social welfare officer in the regional administration, told Business Times that statistics for the period 1997 to June 1999, some 16,966 out of 42,627 women who attended clinic in the region were circumcised.

She believes that the number must be higher, as not all the women in the rural areas give birth in hospitals and health centres - thereby escaping the statistics net.

According to Karya, the trend

shows that, surprisingly, it is the women in the region who insist on undergoing circumcision; the menfolk are indifferent to it, and seem not to bother - or be bothered - by the practical.

She says that since the Sexual Offences Act started to operate in 1998, women in Singida region are now undergoing circumcision in utter secrecy. The practice is a punishable offence under the new law.

One recent development is that the perpetrators have resorted to a new modus operandus, a method of operation, whereby baby girls aged between one day and 6 months are being circumcised as a way of concealing the practice: they are too young to know or complain about what is going on - or report/testify on the perpetration!

Swahiba Kilingo, the Manyoni community development officer, told Business Times that the authorities in the district have a big role to play in ensuring that female genital mutilation is eradicated.

Kilingo says women in the district tend to take other women

who remain uncircumcised as being the source of various diseases which attack their children, or even attack the uncircumcised women themselves.

When girl-children develop rashes in their genital parts (locally known as Lawalawa), or babies are attacked by diarrhoea, the tradition-minded women take this to be the result of their not having been circumcised.

However, Doctor Herbert Bhwana, the regional medical officer, said that rashes and diarrhoea have nothing to do with circumcision. The two diseases are caused by other factors: rashes are normally caused by improperly washed genital parts, and putting on dirty clothes. Diarrhoea is caused by ingesting dirty foods.

To make matters worse, Kilingo said, the people who carry out the operation of circumcision are not willing to stop their activities, on account of the fact that they earn a lot of money for their job.

The district authorities are doing their best to educate the 'circumcisers' on the adverse nature of their work, and discourage them from such activity. One way of doing this is to virtually 'read them the Riot Act', enlightening them on the Sexual Offences Act, and the penalties provided there under.

FEMALE RITE PERFORMED 'IN SECRET'

By SILAS NTHIGA

Female genital mutilation is being carried out secretly in government health institutions and private clinics in Embu District, a seminar was told yesterday.

Participants at the AIDS seminar complained that some health personnel were carrying out the rite with impunity, frustrating campaigns to eradicate it.

A public health officer, Mrs Peris Nyaga, said female circumcision was rampant in mushrooming illegal clinics in the district and asked the concerned authorities to act against those promoting it.

The practice is particularly rampant in Manyatta, Runyenjes and Nembure divisions.

The seminar at Karingari market is aimed at updating health personnel on latest developments on the AIDS pandemic and equipping them with skills to deal with those suffering from the disease.

Embu medical officer of health, Dr Nicholas Muraguri, said any government health personnel promoting the practice would be sacked.

He said investigations would be carried out to establish the personnel carrying out the practice.

Nurses and clinical officers are said to be the culprits.

Dr Muraguri asked parliament to enact laws criminalising female circumcision.

He said the rite was partly to blame for the spread of AIDS.

The medic accused religious organisations of stigmatising AIDS sufferers.

He said this had frustrated government's efforts to intensify home based care for the sufferers.

CHANGED OUTLOOK ON CIRCUMCISION OF WOMEN IN SUDAN

Khartoum, Nov 11 (IPS): A few years ago, it would have been unthinkable for an uncircumcised Muslim girl to find a husband in Sudan.

All that is changing now. Last week Samia Hassan and Ahbal Omer al Hussien became the first Muslim women in Sudan to publicly get married without having to undergo circumcision.

"I'm impressed that two young university graduates have accepted to marry uncircumcised girls," says 18-year-old Mona who attended the ceremony.

"We consider this marriage a miracle because in the past no man would have accepted an uncircumcised girl as a wife," says Mona who has been circumcised.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a common practice in Sudan. UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that 82 per cent of Sudanese women have been circumcised.

"FGM is performed on girls between five and eight years of age. A highly institutionalised custom, FGM is considered not only essential by the majority of those who practise it but also a real part of women's status, similar to the status acquired when one is married," says Amna S Badri of the Babiker Badri Scientific Association, a non-government organisation (NGO) which campaigns against the practice.

In a recent paper published by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), Badri says, "FGM is viewed as a natural part of a woman's life cycle which cannot be eliminated."

In Sudan, the most common form of female genital mutilation is Sunna, a practice which ranges from the removal of the foreskin of the clitoris to its complete excision.

As a result of these campaigns, UNICEF's analysis shows a decrease of 10 per cent in the prevalence of FGM in Sudan.

ALTERNATIVE RITE TO FEMALE CIRCUMCISION SPREADING IN KENYA

By Malik Stan Reaves

A growing number of rural Kenyan families are turning to an alternative to the rite of female circumcision for their daughters.

The new rite is known as 'Ntanira na Mugambo' or 'Circumcision Through Words'. It uses a week-long program of counseling, capped by community celebration and affirmation, in place of the widely criticized practice also known as female genital mutilation (FGM). Next month, residents of some 13 villages in central Kenya will celebrate the fourth installment of this increasingly popular alternative rite of passage for young females.

The first Circumcision Through Words occurred in August 1996, when 30 families in the tiny village of Gatunga, not far from Mount Kenya, ushered their daughters through the new program. Some 50 families participated in the program in December followed by 70 families this past August.

Circumcision Through Words grows out of collaborations between rural families and the Kenyan national women's group, Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO), which is committed to ending FGM in Kenya.

It follows years of research and discussion with villagers by MYWO field workers with the close cooperation of the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH), a nonprofit, nongovernmental, international organization which seeks to improve the health of women and children. Headquartered in Seattle, PATH has served as technical facilitator for MYWO's FGM program, providing the methodologies and other inputs to help carry it forward.

FGM is practiced in about half of the rural districts of Kenya, part of a larger international population of more than 100 million women who are believed to be subject to varying forms of FGM across Africa and parts of western and southern Asia.

FGM is generally grouped into three categories: incision, the cutting of the hood of the clitoris; excision, the cutting of the clitoris and all or part of the labia minora; and infibulation, the removal of the clitoris, the adjacent labia (majora and minora), and the sewing of the scraped sides of the vulva across the vagina, except for a small opening.

In rural areas, circumcision rites are usually carried out by traditional practitioners using crude instruments and little or no anesthetics. Urban dwellers and the more affluent are more likely to seek out professional health care providers.

While in some cultures the circumcised include infants a few days old, most of the affected girls are between the ages of 4 and 12, according to a statement announcing a UN joint plan of action against FGM.

The health consequences of FGM can range from serious to deadly. "Short-term complications include severe pain, shock, hemorrhage, urine retention, ulceration of the genital region and injury to adjacent tissue," according to the UN release. "Hemorrhage and infection can cause death. Long-term complications include cysts and abscesses, keloid scar formation, damage to the urethra resulting in urinary incontinence, dyspareunia (painful sexual intercourse), sexual dysfunction, urinary tract infection, infertility and childbirth complications."

Yet female circumcision encompasses more than the practice itself. It is often deeply entrenched in the culture, wrapped in a complex shroud of assumptions, taboos, and beliefs that impact or a woman's social status and personal identity.

Indeed, it seems the central defining achievement of Circumcision Through Words is not that it saves young women from the dangers of FGM, but that it captures the cultural significance of female circumcision while doing away with the dangerous practice itself.

“People think of the traditions as themselves,” said Leah Muuya of MYWO. “They see themselves in their traditions. They see they are being themselves because they have been able to fulfill some of the initiations,” said Muuya in “Secret and Sacred,” a MYWO-produced videotape, distributed by PATH, which explores the personal dangers and harmful social results of FGM. The tape explains that female circumcision has traditionally signaled when a young woman is ready for the responsibilities of adulthood.

In answer to that, Circumcision Through Words brings the young candidates together for a week of seclusion during which they learn traditional teachings about their coming roles as women, parents, and adults in the community, as well as more modern messages about personal health, reproductive issues, hygiene, communications skills, self-esteem, and dealing with peer pressure.

The week is capped by a community celebration of song, dancing, and feasting which affirms the girls and their new place in the community. Indeed, after witnessing the community’s response to the first celebration, MYWO Chair Zipporah Kittony said she was “overjoyed” and believed it was a critical achievement in their efforts to eradicate FGM.

The original proponents of the new rite have since incorporated and are seeking support from international donors in order to continue and expand their efforts. Indeed, it was such broad-based cooperation that led to the effort’s creation in the first place.

In addition to the initiative of the local population, the development of Circumcision Through Words is rooted in cooperation between the national women’s group and PATH. Under MYWO’s direction, the groups conducted surveys in 1990 and 1991 that examined the dimensions of FGM in four districts of central Kenya. Funding came from several international donors including the Ford Foundation, the Moriah Fund, Population Action International (PAI)/Wallace Global Fund, Public Welfare Foundation, and Save the Children - Canada.

MYWO and PATH have also developed public awareness campaigns that spread information on the harmful effects of female genital mutilation. According to Dr. Asha Mohamud, a PATH Senior Program Officer focusing on FGM, the two organizations agree that information, education, and public discussion are more effective tools against FGM than direct, prohibitive action.

That became clear recently after Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi declared his intent to abolish the practice. “It led to a terrific backlash,” she said, including circumcisions in the middle of the night and a rush to circumcise girls at a younger-than-usual age, in an effort to beat the ban.

Accompanying this Kenyan initiative is an international effort to increase global pressure on the issue. In April of this year, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and the UN Population Fund announced a joint plan to significantly curb female genital mutilation over the next decade and completely eliminate the practice within three generations.

Many governments have outlawed the practice in their own territories, including the United States in September of last year, while they seek strategies to manage the problem. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is working through the Centers for Disease Control and the Immigration and Naturalization Service with a host of non-governmental organizations to develop the means to help thousands of African females at risk within its borders. However, such efforts are complicated by criticism from some within the African community who see such actions as racist and intrusions upon African cultural practices.

Efforts like Circumcision Through Words offer a promising approach to resolving this controversial issue, at least within practicing communities, said Dr. Mohamud, since there are many people who would like to end the practice yet are not able to face the social ostracism that would entail. Yet, despite the continuing successes of Circumcision Through Words, proponents of traditional circumcision are still numerous in these communities.

“You cannot change culture overnight,” said Peter Kali, District Officer in the Gatunga area of Kenya, during the recent celebration.

WITCHCRAFT

DEFINITION

Witchcraft is defined as the power to exert supernatural harm upon another person or his possessions, that power depending upon inherent evil qualities in the evil person (witch) himself/herself. (Witchcraft and Development J.L.Brain:)

Brain argues that witches are believed to be naturally evil and anti-social as part of their genetic makeup. They differ from sorcerers in that they have achieved their evil powers by study. Most witches are believed to be women.

Sorcery refers to the use of physical objects and substances to do harm to others. It is a very potent form of witchcraft and its practitioners are mostly men. Men become sorcerers by training (i.e. by choice and achievement). Witchcraft, on the other hand is the use of supernatural powers and invisible forces to do harm to others. It is practiced mostly by women. In many societies this is said to be an innate force. In Zimbabwe there is the belief that many women inherit this from their matriarchal or other female forebears. Somehow it is said that women cannot refuse to inherit this force because if they do, then the forebearers get angry and reign terror on the intended 'heiress'.

These definitions denote power differences between men and women, which are congruent with gender differences. Men are the most visible human beings in our society and hence they use a visible and tangible form of witchcraft. Women on the other hand, are invisible, second class citizens who have no public voice and hence they use an invisible form of witchcraft. Likewise, to say that women's type of witchcraft is ascribed, is to say that women cannot escape being witches as long as there is witchcraft in their families. This also goes hand in hand with the notion that women's feminine traits are 'inborn' denying the role of socialization. These definitions emphasize women as linked to symbols like 'nature' and men to 'nurture'. This emphasizes that women cannot be trusted because nature is wild, untamed and unpredictable. Nurture, on the other hand, is a human creation and is within human control. (Mate, R., Women and Witchcraft, a paper, June 1996)

EXERCISE 19**WITCHCRAFT**

MATERIALS: Paper and pen; newspaper articles

TIME: 20 minutes

AIM: To create discussion on witchcraft and thereby raise understanding on the practice.

Read the attached articles. In small groups of about 5 people, the participants should answer these questions:

1. Does witchcraft really exist?
2. What are some of the reasons that cause women to be branded witches?
3. What is it that people believe about witches?
4. What are the differences in connotation across cultures between witches and wizards?
5. How does this affect women and men differently?
6. How does the justice system collaborate in witchcraft violence?
7. In what ways are women's rights violated in the newspaper articles?
8. How does reporting on witchcraft by the media impact on society's understanding of witchcraft?

NEEDED: PUBLIC EDUCATION TO END SLAUGHTER OF THE ELDERLY

By Joyce Mkinga
recently in Shinyanga

Sixty-eight-year-old Rehema Maganga of Shinyanga has narrowly escaped death at the hands of her own children. They suspected her to be a witch.

"It was midnight when my two children Wandu and Maduhu chased me away from my home on allegations that I was bewitching my grand daughters and sons. They bundled me into the wheel-barrow and dumped me in Shinyanga town," she narrates.

"I'll never go back to my home village because I know they will kill me," she explains, adding: "I thank good Samaritans for bringing me to Shinyanga Regional Hospital."

Rehema is not the only elderly woman in Shinyanga who has abandoned her own home for fear of being killed by the unknown night murderers on allegations of practicing sorcery.

Elderly women in the region are on the run, not as criminals escaping arrest, but as innocent people who want to save their lives. Most of them wander daily in the dry, dusty regional capital where nobody cares about their welfare.

According to research done by the Tanzania Media Women Association (TAMWA), more than 100 elderly women in Shinyanga town are leading miserable lives after fleeing from their rural homes escaping deaths at the hands of hired murderers.

The poor elderly women are running away from a hostile environment to seek refuge and security in urban centres.

However, in Shinyanga town, the aged live in the open or in train wagons.

Fear of crime limits their mobility and criminal elements target them for sexual abuse.

Shinyanga Regional Commissioner, Lt Gen. Tumainieli Kiwelu, says a misconception that elderly women cause misfortunes and even deaths still holds sway among rural communities though the government and non-governmental organizations have tried their best to change people's beliefs.

Elderly people have been rejected by their own families on allegations that they are witches.

"I think more education and sensitization is badly needed so that people know that what they are doing was a violation of human rights," Kiwelu says.

A number of elderly women have fled their homes after seeing their peers being murdered by thugs at the behest of their own relatives.

TAMWA Director Leila Sheikh says helpless elderly women need immediate help from the government and the general public. Most of the victims suffer from alienation from their families and communities. They have no option for survival except turning into beggars in the town where nobody cares about their welfare.

"It is absurd that the elderly who should be respected, loved and taken care of by the society are being rejected by everybody including their own relatives," says Leila.

Surprisingly, Shinyanga town residents are not saddened by the steady flow of destitute women from the villages. They are aware of the situation, but instead of responding to the needs of these women, they

probably think the trend would reverse itself.

"These people are like that and the situation changes during rainy seasons when the number of elderly women increases," says James Peter, a student at Shycom Secondary School.

"The elderly move to Shinyanga during the rainy season when there is an outbreak of diseases such as cholera caused by dirty water. During that time of the year many children die. All the deaths are associated with witchcraft."

He says nobody would even dare to assist the wandering elderly women because witchcraft beliefs are also rampant in Shinyanga town as well.

A suspected witch in Shinyanga automatically becomes an enemy of everyone in the society and hence doesn't deserve any help, says Peter.

"Nobody is confident over these women because much as there are some who are being wrongly suspected, there are those who are real witches," he says.

Currently TAMWA has embarked on a human rights public sensitization programme to make Shinyanga residents aware of the consequences of slaughtering elderly women.

"Shinyanga people need to be educated through both modern and traditional media so that they understand that elderly people are human beings who have the right to live," says Leila.

Because of the aged women from rural areas, it has been reported that agricultural production has declined in several villages for lack of farmers.

RIGHTS-INDIA: WOMEN BRANDED AS WITCHES TO SETTLE PERSONAL SCORES

By Sweta Kushry

PATNA, India, Feb 22 (IPS) - Neepudi and her three daughters Agaramanao Devi (10), Malati (8) and Lalita (6) and two sons Kuldip (4) and Dilip (2) were axed to death in Mandwa village of Palamau district, in eastern India's Bihar state.

They were killed by Mohar Shah who accused Neepudi of being a witch and responsible for the death of his daughter-in-law. The incident took place in September 1997.

Later it transpired that Shah had his eye on the land she owned and succeeded in his plan to wipe out the entire family because she was a woman.

The then Deputy Commissioner of West Singhbhum, Amit Khare, submitted a special report in which he mentions the cold-blooded killing of the family. He cites another instance of a family that was similarly killed for property.

The victims were Sohraj Munda (60), his wife Jaitadi (55) and four sons and two daughters. Enquiries revealed that Sohrai Munda wanted to own the family's 16 kusum trees, valuable for its sap, 'lac', and had quite deliberately spread a rumour that Jaitadi was a witch.

These are not the isolated cases. Violence against women is a part of rural life in the state, resorted to by upper castes to keep the socially disadvantaged under economic and social subjugation and to inflict political "lessons".

In some areas of rural Bihar, while rape is resorted to by owners and the police to crush dissent within the community, in the tribal areas of south Bihar, women are labelled witches as a cover for exploitative social arrangements.

The state government in Bihar outlawed the practice of labelling women as witches last July. The new law, Dayn Pratha Patishedh Vidheyak, 1999, also takes a very serious view of anyone assisting in trying to identify or instigate others to identify a woman as a witch.

Since large parts of the tribal districts are inaccessible by road, the district administration, and sometimes even non-governmental organisations, have not reached the interior villages.

In the absence of modern health care, people depend on the 'ojhas' for remedies for minor and serious ailments. In exchange the 'ojhas' take locally-brewed liquor, goats or hens.

High incidence of witchcraft related atrocities are reported from the inaccessible areas where literacy rates and health care facilities are poor.

Lack of awareness, superstition about health and diseases further complicate the problems for the poor tribals, who are left completely at the mercy of their village headmen.

The victims are exploited and tortured by the village headman and the 'ojhas' or spirit diviners with extraordinary powers, who investigations show work hand-in-hand to teach victims a lesson or usurp their property.

Women have been stripped and beaten up in public by the 'ojhas' to force them to submit to the will of men they have dared to oppose. They are "tortured" in many different ways.

The forms of violence perpetrated include having to eat their own excreta in some cases. Recently the Free Legal Aid Committee which has been fighting against this evil in south Bihar brought some of the victims to a seminar in the state capital, Patna.

Kunti narrated how she was made to eat her faeces by the 'ojhas'. She was charged with killing the son of another tribal, while Parul, 20, was raped by three people in her house in 1995 following a land dispute between her father and their neighbour.

When two of the neighbour's children died from an illness, the villagers accused Parul of being a witch. Police officer Khare reveals in his report that there was no truth to the claim, and the motive behind Parul's rape was only to grab the family's property or settle personal scores.

Among illiterate villagers their blind faith in 'ojhas' and unscrupulous village practitioners has defied attempts to reform.

Time and again the gullible villagers have joined in the crime. The Legal Aid Committee confirms at least 8 women were killed in Singhbhum in 1998. Police reports corroborate the death of 357 so-called witches in the four tribal districts of Singhbhum, Palamau, Ranchi and Lohardaga between 1990 and 1996.

Calcutta-based sociologist Dr Pashupati Halder, an authority on tribal practices, says 'ojhas' who people believe are possessed with divine power or 'Jan guru' are common in the tribal belts of eastern India.

'Ojhas' brand women as witches in exchange for money or other gifts from the powerful and vested interests in the village. Their claim is never challenged. Often the village headman is also part of the conspiracy, and puts his stamp of approval.

Village 'ojhas' live luxurious lives, and they have confessed that their primary interest is to earn money for which they use their power to exorcise evil spirits. There are also occasions when their own interests comes first.

In one such incident, Malati had to face the wrath of an 'ojha' simply because she refused to have sex with him. She was set upon by the 'ojha' and his henchmen who raped and then killed her in a village in Lohardaga.

THREE SO-CALLED WITCHES SPEAK OF THEIR ORDEALS

By LUCAS LUKUMBO

A warm reception is accorded by the residents to a new comer in Shinyanga, where their old women are experiencing a terrible life.

Just make a short walk in one of the streets in the township. You will surely be amazed to witness old women prowling the streets in search of food.

These are not the beggars we use to brush shoulders with in Dar es Salaam. They are old women who have taken refuge to the streets from their families for fear of being hacked to death after being mistaken for witches.

Regional statistics reveal that about 300 elderly women are being lynched year in year out in the region.

I had a chance of interviewing three of the many alleged witches who had come to a three-day seminar organized by the Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA) to narrate their bitter experiences.

One of them, Anna Zengo, who estimated her age to be 60, said she formerly lived in Mshikamano village in Shinyanga District.

Her troubled life started when she separated with her husband in Isaka village in Kahama District.

Her woes are traced to the suspicions her own children harboured about her, believing that she was practicing witchcraft. They were living harmoniously with their father instead. In that way she was left without proper support and later shifted to Mshikamano area to lead the miserable life for fear that her children might hire bandits to kill her as is normally the case in the region.

"I have lost contact with all my children," she lamented. She said such a miserable life made people in Mshikamano believe that she was a witch.

She said traditional security guards known in Shinyanga Region as *Sungusungu*, ordered her to leave the village, believing also that she was a witch. She took refuge in Shinyanga township where she is still leading a deplorable life.

Another so-called witch, Rebeka Luhanwa (78), is currently staying at Mshikamano village in Shinyanga District

after being forced to leave Busendo village after her sister-in-law committed suicide when members of her family suspected her of being a witch.

She said other sisters-in-law accused her of being responsible for the incident.

She had to leave the village for fear of being lynched by family members. Now she is living a pauper's life in the streets of Shinyanga.

The third alleged witch was Minja Sayi (70). She resides at Mshikamano village in the region.

She makes ends meet by sifting rice pulp thrown by owners of milling machines and selling it to get money for food.

She was picked by *Sungusungu* and branded the leader of all the witches in her area in Kitangili village where she once lived.

She said one day a group of *Sungusungu* guards went to her and delivered to her a message to the effect that a previous day's meeting of the traditional army had found out that she was the ring leader of the witches in the area, and ruled that she must be taken to task.

She said the *Sungusungu* emissary told her to give him a 1,800 shillings-bribe so that she could "be allowed to continue living" as she might be lynched by killers.

She said she reported the threats to the police who searched for the "emissary" but he has never been found ever since.

What amazed me even more is why should victims of witchcraft death threats only be women? What does history say about witchcraft and women? I kept asking myself.

The answers to those questions were given to me by a Shinyanga-based sociologist. Mr Joseph Mihangwa, who has conducted research on the phenomenon.

He says more often elderly women are suspected of practicing witchcraft than men, saying that such women's age range is about 50 years.

He says it is true that women have more knowledge of traditional medicine than men from early age. During old age, he says, women's ability to know the traditional medicine was derived from the

fact that at times, they feared that they might be killed by their male counterparts. They ran to the nearby forests to hide.

"In the forest she fed on roots. She treated herself with herbs. This is how women became masters of traditional medicine more than their aggressors – the men," Mr Mihangwa said, but quickly added that a traditional healer should not be mistaken for a witch.

"Discrimination on women continues to date. While a male using herbs to treat people is called a traditional healer, a female counterpart is normally called a witch," he says.

The community also thinks that old women's mastery of traditional medicine cannot be used for peaceful purposes but only for destroying others.

"The negative attitude is maintained so that women could be seen as destructive human beings and in no way could help others," he says.

He says, for example, that one of the conditionalities for being a witch, people in Shinyanga think, is for one to possess blood-shot eyes.

"This is nonsense because the red eyes are a result of the old women's use of fuel wood for their cooking," he says, adding "some women, for lack of firewood, even use cow dung as their source of energy. What do you expect?"

He says lack of an alternative belief system for the Shinyanga residents is another reason for perpetuation of the killings of older women.

Lack of spiritual nourishment to many people who do not belong to any religion is a contributing factor to the spate of killings, the sociologist says adding that nearly 49.5 per cent of the Shinyanga residents are not affiliated to any religion. Most of them, he says, consult the soothsayers for their treatment.

He also revealed that out of 50.5 per cent of the Shinyanga residents who belong to either Christianity or Islam, 3.5 per cent consult traditional healers for solving their health problems.

"These include graduates who are supposed to be agents of change in their communities. This shows how difficult it will be to stop the killings in Shinyanga," he notes.

WITCHCRAFT KILLINGS: GOVERNMENT HAS NOT BEEN DOING ENOUGH

By Joyce Mkinga,
Shinyanga

Witchcraft killings have continued unabated over the years in the Lake Zone regions ostensibly because the Government has not been doing enough to fight the vice, a senior administrative official has stated.

Speaking to journalist who are in a tour of the region yesterday the Shinyanga Regional Cooperative Union (SHIRECU) Administrative Manager, Mr Joseph Mihengwa, said this was the feeling of the *wananchi* in the affected areas and beyond.

He noted that there has been very little follow-up by the state organs with regard to efforts to end the primitive culture that has seen many innocent old women killed on suspicion that they were bewitching other people.

The SHIRECU official was presenting a paper on *Problems of Killings of Old Women in Shinyanga Region*, on the second day of the three-day seminar being organized by the Tanzania Media Women Association (TAMWA), being held at the SHIRECU conference hall.

"It is widely viewed that the

Government is giving up in this war, while old women continue to be murdered with each passing day due to witchcraft and superstitious beliefs," he noted with concern.

Over the past 25 years, he said, killings of presumed witches have been allowed to continue and now the practice is taken as a normal way of life in Shinyanga villages, said the co-operative union chief.

"Who is more powerful than the Government in this country? If the State was doing anything, how come the people in the region keep on swearing with impunity that witches will never be allowed to live amongst good people?" he queried.

He revealed to the astonished seminar participants that the motto in rural areas was: "A witch must be killed." Ironically, he noted, those who support the perpetuation of the primitive practice argue that they are on the right as per the Bible which, they purport, spells out that witches must die.

Mihengwa pointed out the police and courts of law which would have been front-line fighters against the vice

are totally absent in the villages where these killings take place openly. The killers often go scot free.

He said that experience has shown that before the TAMWA's on-going campaigns, the government in the region was shying away and never ready to speak about the problem. "The Government's silence was part of the problem," he noted.

Mr Mihengwa pointed out that even the figures being released by authorities differ from one source to another, which shows that nobody was "making a close follow up of what is going on."

Mr Mihengwa observed that annual figures of killings of old women on witchcraft beliefs in the region were not less than 300, but many of the incidents are not reported anywhere.

The Unionist called in the Government to improve social services especially water and primary health care for women and children who are mostly affected with diseases leading to their deaths.

"When one dies, that's the time people start to associate death to witchcraft beliefs."

OVER 180 SUSPECTED WITCHES KILLED IN SHINYANGA REGION

OVER 180 old persons in Shinyanga region were murdered on suspicion of witchcraft between 1997 and August this year, the Shinyanga Regional Police Commander (RPC), Wolfgang Gumbu, said yesterday.

Gumbu said 187 people were victimized, 168 of whom were old women and 19 old men, adding that the killings were on the increase, mostly targeting old women.

The RPC was leading a discussion on age violence at a seminar organized by the Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA) in Shinyanga town.

According to statistics issued by the RPC, 80 old people were killed in 1997, whereby 76 of them were women; in 1998 and 1999, the number of murdered women was 43 and 49. The statistics also showed that Shinyanga district was leading in the number of cases.

In 1997, for instance, Shinyanga had 31 cases, Bariadi 29 and Kahama 6. In 1998 Shinyanga district also led with 19 cases, followed by Bariadi (14), Bukombe (6), Maswa (5), Meatu (4) and Kahama (3).

Up to August this year, Shinyanga had 19 cases, Bariadi 18, Kahama 6, Bukombe 6, Meatu 5 and Maswa 2.

However, the RPC said there was need for the relevant authorities and the

society at large to arrest the alarmingly increasing killings.

Giving reasons for the increase, Gumbu said recently a good number of murder suspects were released for lack of enough evidence to prosecute them.

He said most of the people were not disposed to giving supporting testimony for convicting the suspected murders for fear of revenge from culprits or their relatives

GOVT URGED TO SCREEN TRADITIONAL HEALERS

The government should identify fake traditional healers in society in order to avoid issuing licences to those who instigate superstitious beliefs, which lead to killings of innocent old persons suspected of witchcraft, a Dar es Salaam-based traditional healer has said.

Nuru Nhangachalloh, who attended the just ended seminar on age violence organised by the Tanzania Media Women's Association ((TAMWA) in Shinyanga, told participants that the society was full of fake traditional doctors.

She said the government was to blame for issuing licences without prior scrutiny to establish bona fide healers.

Nhangachalloh was responding to a call by some participants that the government should ban traditional healers who, through soothsaying, instigated the murders of innocent old women in society.

She said relevant authorities had been blamed for haphazardly issuing licences to people who were not qualified traditional healers, most of whom

ended up taking patients and the public for a ride through soothsaying.

Nhangachalloh, who is the Dar es Salaam Association of Traditional Healers chairperson, proposed that the government should consult the association in order to identify fake healers before issuing licences.

She argued that banning them was not easy as they were yet to be identified, and that it was possible for the authorities to mistakenly ban legitimate ones.

She said true healers never deceived or indulged themselves in evil practices

that degenerated into public fear, as they abide by their ethical standards.

Meanwhile, journalists said on Thursday in Dar es Salaam that the government should commit itself to wiping out the atrocious killings by constructing enough police posts in most affected areas while working out long-term measures to curb the crime.

The suggestion was made at a meeting convened by TAMWA to share experiences of the just ended seminar and to find out ways of helping to solve the problem.

WITCHCRAFT KILLINGS: GOVERNMENT SLAPS BAN ON SOOTHSAYERS

By Joyce Mkinga in Shinyanga

Soothsayers have been banned from practicing their craft in Shinyanga by regional authorities in a move aimed at bringing to an end the primitive culture that has seen many innocent old women being killed on suspicion of being witches.

The Shinyanga Regional Commissioner, General Tumainiel Kiwelu said here yesterday that already the Government in the region has started instituting several measures geared to curb witch killings. These, he said, included banning from practice a number of false diviners whose major occupation has been to name the alleged elderly witches who would be ruthlessly killed.

Gen. Kiwelu said the Government has vowed to bring to an end the activities of fake soothsayers who are the main cause behind the killings of innocent senior aged female citizens in this part of the country.

Opening a three-day seminar being organized and sponsored by TAMWA the Regional Commissioner told over 30 participants that the Government in collaboration with registered traditional healers has prepared a list of the bogus diviners who have been prohibited from operating in the region.

The Tanzania Media Women Association (TAMWA) is on the forefront of fighting the vice against old women in the Lake Zone regions of Mwanza and Shinyanga which have been orchestrated by the dubious witchhunters for over 25 years.

The seminar being held at Shinyanga Regional Cooperative Union (SHIRECU) hall has brought together Members of Parliament, government leaders in the region, traditional healers and journalists from electronic and print media.

Kiwelu further called for more cooperation between registered traditional healers and Government leaders to combat the problem which

has been on the increase in the region despite the education campaigns being waged by different NGO's on the problem.

He revealed to reporters, "What happens is that a diviner picks on some hapless old woman he claims to be a witch. The person or people who believe it is the alleged witch who had been the cause of their problems of one nature or another hire a killer to finish her off, on that basis."

"We know for sure that, traditional leaders still wield a lot of power in villages and therefore can play a great role in the effort to bring to an end this abhorable practice," he stated.

He said the Central Government alone cannot eradicate the problem which is well rooted in most of the villages in the lake zone.

Gen Kiwelu further called for cooperation between police officers in the Lake Zone because some of the killer bands operate across district borders.

Witchcraft killings in the Lake Zone came to the fore from as far back as 1975 when some people were killed during police interrogation at Kigoto in Mwanza, leading to the resignation of Ministers who headed Home Affairs and Security portfolios.

According to the available statistics more than 180 old women were killed in Shinyanga Region between June 1997 and August 1999.

The RC sadly noted the problem has been further muddled by the fact that most of the accused taken to court are being released because of lack of evidence on grounds that most of the killings take place at night when everybody else in the village except the killers is fast asleep.

The regional boss commended the efforts being taken by TAMWA to sensitise people on the problem with the aim of eradicating the inhuman practice in the region.

SOCIAL SCIENTISTS CHALLENGED TO STUDY WITCHCRAFT KILLINGS

SOCIAL scientists have been challenged to investigate into real problems leading to age violence in society and come out with long-term solutions for curbing the atrocious killings of elderly men and women currently rampant in various regions in the country.

The challenge was given by the Regional Police Commander for Shinyanga region, Wolfgang Gumbu, when leading a discussion at the just-ended seminar organised by the Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA) on age violence in Shinyanga town.

Gumbu said there was need for the society to address the issues from a scientific point of view instead of relying on traditional approaches mainly attributing the killings to superstition and illiteracy.

The RPC was reacting to a contention by some participants that the main causes of the killings were illiteracy and paganism among the majority of the population.

Earlier, a researcher with TAMWA, Joseph Mihangwa, told the participants that about 50 per cent of the population in Shinyanga were illiterate, in which case they were also superstitious.

He said many elderly people were murdered by the young generation that suspected them of bewitching them even in cases that required only a basic

education to identify the problem

Those supporting Mihangwa included a councillor with the Shinyanga town council, Andrew Minzi, a legislator for Bariadi East, Danhi Makanga and the District Commissioner for Bariadi, Cleoplace Lugaimukamu.

Coincidentally, they said that it was necessary for the government and religious institutions to commit themselves in creating a literate and God-fearing population that would not indulge in brutal killings.

Though conceding to the fact that illiteracy and superstition were main causes of the killings in the region, Gumbu argued that records showed that even some regions renowned for better backgrounds in education and religion were not exempted in cases of murdering elderly people.

He cited Kagera, Mbeya and Iringa as regions with a literate and religious population, but which also had alarming cases of murdering elderly people for various reasons. According to the RPC, regions with such cases of murder were Shinyanga (50), Mbeya (32), Iringa (32), Kageri (24) and Tabora (20).

"It is surprising that some of these regions are better placed in terms of education and religion than many other regions particularly those along the Coast", said Gumbu.

WITCH—HUNTING ON THE INCREASE IN RURAL VILLAGES

By Gumisai Mutume

Mdabazi Phakula (58) is lucky to be alive having escaped a burning hut which was set alight by the smoldering emotions of her neighbours.

Phakula recalls the events of one morning in January 1997 with an intensity that belies the anger and deep loss she feels at having been labelled a witch and seeing the hut she slept in with three children burn to the ground.

She is a survivor of the wrath of the witch-cleansers in her little village called Gavaza, on the outskirts of Tzaneen in South Africa's largely rural Northern Province. The reality of existence in these areas is that if the community suspects you are a witch, if you are disliked, or if you appear to be richer than those around you, chances are you can be labelled a witch, and burnt or stoned to death or evicted.

Before Phakula's huts were burnt, the village had earlier concluded a witch hunt to establish the killers of two local boys who died mysteriously. Although no conclusive evidence pointed in her direction, she became the target and Phakula says she does not know why.

"The witchcraft they are talking about I do not know," she says. "I am a traditional healer, I heal people."

"I feel my life is still in danger," she says. "The two huts burned down with all my belongings and all my muti (medicine)... as a traditional healer I was making a living supporting four children."

In a written affidavit to the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE), she says she has been to court seven times to try and get a conviction of the three youths accused, but since 1997, the case has continuously been remanded. "I was told by the lawyer that they (the suspects) were writing their examinations and had no time for court."

The CGE is a statutory body created to monitor forms of gender discrimination in South Africa. It has investigated witchcraft violence.

What happened to Phakula is not confined to the marginalised rural backwaters of the Northern Province. It is part of a larger national phenomenon so wide spread it is baffling lawmakers and human rights activists.

In South Africa's remote rural areas, there is a strong belief that witchcraft exists. Government and police reports on the phenomenon attribute it largely to poverty lack of education, political and economic power.

Stories of people who are able to command

lightning bolts to strike an enemy or of jealous neighbours who put spells on people abound.

While the existence of witchcraft remains an issue for debate, what has raised concern and growing disapproval in South Africa is witch-hunting. The dimension to this, according to CGE, is that it is women who are mainly targeted and they are subjected to horrendous methods of torture and death, such as being burnt, using a tyre around their neck, known as 'necklacing'.

Between 1994 and 1995, police say 97 women and 46 men were killed in the Northern Province as a result of witchcraft accusations. Over the same period, witchcraft violence saw more than 164 recorded cases of people being uprooted from their villages and forced to settle in areas of safety away from persecution. However, many cases go unrecorded.

"In general the community is responsible for the killings of witches, but the youth who are called comrades are in the fore-front," says a report on Ritual Murders in the Northern Province.

"One of the reasons why the youth are easily used by adults and political organisations is that they know that such juvenile offenders would be treated lightly by the courts..."

The CGE has recommended the adoption of a national plan of action for eradicating the scourge, which is often poorly investigated by the police.

On the South African law books is the Witchcraft Suppression Act, passed in 1957. This Act has largely fallen short of effectively dealing with accusations of witchcraft, because it basically denies the existence of witchcraft.

"Because there is no effective law which deals with witchcraft, there is no legal recourse for those who sincerely believe they have been bewitched," says Raxon Ndlovhu, president of the Northern Transvaal Traditional Healers Association. "The police cannot do much and this does not satisfy the complainant and he takes further action."

"Witchcraft does exist, but one cannot prove it," says Ndlovhu. "Magic is very difficult to explain. In the past, there were traditional healers who could protect people from witchcraft. Now, the western system, the church, has destroyed our culture saying it is the devil's thing."

The conflict between the modern and traditional systems clash not only in the day to day lives of the rural people, but also in the legal system - traditional courts agree

witchcraft exists, but formal courts do not.

In the past, when a witch was tried and convicted by traditional courts, ostracism was the mildest form of punishment. In some instances, witches were ordered to leave and their houses were destroyed, others were beaten up and in some cases, others were "cured". Only rarely were they killed.

Traditional courts in South Africa still try witches, although they are not legally permitted to do so.

"Witch hunts have been happening since before we were born," says Somi Maluleke, chairperson of the Northern Province Network on Violence Against Women. "Now the trend has changed. It is the youth who are playing an active part and sometimes, it is politically motivated. This started when political calls were made that 'we will use a match and a tyre to get rid of the enemy'."

Apartheid politics played itself out well in the rural areas of South Africa pitting supporters and beneficiaries of the system against those opposed to it. In order to politicise the people, some of the liberation movements chose to use witchcraft.

One of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into Witchcraft Violence in the Northern Province is that since traditional healers (mongomas) play an active part in pointing out witches for elimination, prosecution of those who do will reduce the rate of witchcraft violence.

But it is the youth who perpetrate the violence, and some of them now realise that this has been the wrong path. "The youth must be well informed that through this witch hunt and witchcraft accusations, many families, including children who are the country's future leaders are left in poverty," says a statement by the Zanhoma Youth Development Project - a grouping of former perpetrators of witchcraft violence that have converted and now seek to spread the gospel against it.

"We want to educate our people that in most cases, deaths and illnesses which people are accused of causing through witchcraft are not witchcraft related, but they are natural deaths and illnesses, e.g. AIDS, TB, cancer, etc."

The Northern Province is home to more than five million people and is one of the poorest of South Africa's nine provinces. "There is a lot of damage that has been done. Some have lost a lot of property and it has left serious psychological damage even on the perpetrators," says Maluleke. "How do we repair the damage?"

'WITCHES' DO NOT WANT FREEDOM

By Edward Ameyibor

GAMBAGA, Ghana - More than 100 women branded as "witches" by their communities, recently were set free from a camp where many have lived for most of their adult lives.

However, instead of stepping out and enjoying their new freedom, the women, ranging in age between 30 and 75, have refused to go home.

"We will not go anywhere. We are safe here," says Assana, who is more than 70 and is the leader of the women. She has been at the witches' village in Gambaga for more than 30 years after being chased out of her some home village "for being responsible for the death of a child."

Assana came to Gambaga, because the Rana (chief) is reported to have powers to cleanse anybody with "such evil powers."

"You can see I am not preventing any of them from leaving. I did not go for them. They came to seek refuge under my power and I welcomed them," says Chief Gombagarana Wuni.

Gambaga has for over 100 years been the refuge for women declared witches by their communities in the northern regions of Ghana and parts of neighbouring Burkina Faso.

These women are accused of causing death, the impotence of their husbands, and some have even been blamed for outbreaks of diseases such as cholera, meningitis, measles, and tuberculosis.

To escape being beaten to death by their communities - a

traditional form of punishment often meted out to women who are declared witches - the 'women come to Gambaga on their own or they are brought by relatives.'

During the Cerebral Spinal Meningitis (CSM) outbreak two years ago, for example, five elderly women were beaten to death by youth who accused them of using witchcraft to cause the disease.

This incident prompted President Jerry Rawlings to warn of dire consequences for perpetrators of such barbaric acts."

Ghana's Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Welfare, Ama Benyiwa-Doe, has said that although the government can stop the practice of women being labelled as witches by law, "we want: to use education and persuasion to end the practice".

Such traditional practices as only accusing women of witchcraft, she added, are an abuse of women's human rights.

Rights groups, like the International Federation of Women Lawyers also have called for an end to the practice.

While the Ghanaian media has portrayed Gombagarana as a "super witch catcher who has the women under his spell and working in his fields", he has denied the accusations and claims that he only "bewitches" the women. "I inherited this power from my father, who got it from his own father, who were all chiefs," Gombagarana Wuni says.

Chief Von Salifu, regional head of the Commission on Arts and Culture says there are many "witches" homes in northern Ghana.

Gambaga and Bimbilla, near the eastern border with Togo, are the two largest ones.

He adds that the women in Gambaga are not held against their will. "They sought refuge with him (the Chief) from all over the north, including Burkina Faso. That has been the tradition before Chief Wuni was born"

But he also says that "Ghanaians must guard against maltreating the weakest in society by declaring them witches or wizards."

Ghana Presbyterian Church has worked for years with the women in the "witches" communes teaching them income-generating activities like ton spinning, soap and bead making. Many of them also sell firewood. Other churches, Anglican and Apostolic, among others, also provide clothing and food for the women.

According to members of the Presbyterian Church who work in the area, the women are free to move in Gambaga town and some of the younger women have even married men from the area. A church official, who, declined to be named, says that the women are afraid to return to their communities, because people still hold grudges against them.

One woman, Aiyeshetu who returned home from Gambaga, came back with one of her ears

cut off. "She was told it was a warning. Next time she returns, the other ear will go off," says a church official.

"Because of this, the women are afraid... We have to educate the people, increase the number of people in school, evangelise among them, so that they will know that diseases are not caused by witchcraft."

"The situation seeds some kind of shuttle diplomacy. The people in the villages where the women came from must be convinced they are harmless and the women must feel safe to return," says the church official. "We cannot use force or legislation and with God on our side, we shall get many of the women home safely."

Ghana's northern region has a literacy rate of only 10 percent and officials admit publicly that the majority of the people still follow traditional practices and have little awareness of health and other issues.

Some of the women say they miss their families and would like to go back home, but the church official says, for now, this "is a delicate matter. You need a lot of patience and education on both sides. But the example of Aiyeshetu, is a big setback".

Emmanuel Arongo, the Anglican Bishop of Tamale (in the North), says the whole practice is "wrong, unjust and unfair" to women and must be stopped. But the Gombagarana says, "when they stop coming I will stop giving them refuge."

WITCHES EMERGE FROM THE BROOM CLOSET

Wiccans launch own church in bid to gain recognition

BY ZANELE MNGADI

The recent inauguration of the South African chapter of the Aquarian Tabernacle Church — which services a branch of paganism known as Wicca — has heralded the emergence from the broom cupboard of a religion many stereotype as evil.

Many unenlightened people associate paganism and Wicca with the dark, the perversion of Christianity and the occult.

But Wiccans, some of whom network within the Pagan Federation of SA, are now comfortable in a society which guarantees freedom of religion. They believe now is the time to break down the stereotypes and worship in public.

Although not recognised officially as a religion, Wiccans argue that their beliefs are about enhancing the power of positive thinking.

“We believe by focusing our will and intent, we will be able to bring about small changes in our immediate environment,” said the Reverend Norman “Stormdancer” Geldenhuys.

While only about 50 people attended the recent inauguration of the church at a private home in Johannesburg, the Wiccans, who have been practising for about two decades in South Africa, claim that 50, 000 people follow the religion in South Africa.

“Our places of worship are found

in nature, not in artificial structures wrought by man. We worship in the solitude of gardens, the spires and cathedrals of mountains, the beauty of our shade-dappled glades. Any part of the great Mother becomes our temple, or shrine, as we see it. No clarion calls our faithful to worship. “The warmth of the sun, the whisper of the breeze on our bodies and the impelling glow of the majestic full moon are reminders enough,” is how they describe their religious beliefs. Are the stereotypes valid? Perhaps, the Wiccans concede. They do practise witchcraft and they use herbs and magic. But, they say, they use these to enhance themselves and ensure that opportunities open up for them.

“Over the years we have been persecuted because Christians believe that other religions are of the devil’s nature. But now that the new constitution acknowledges the freedom of religion, we are encouraged to come out,” Geldenhuys said.

Reverend Donna “Darkwolf” Vos, the first South African to go public about being a Wiccan in 1996, has been a witch for 10 years.

Vos said she practises witchcraft by attuning herself with the seasons. “When the season changes there is a celebration during which I use magic rituals to align myself to the coming season.”

Asked if they practise witchcraft on other people, Vos said:

“Wicca has one ‘rede’ which states ‘an it harm none, do as ye will’. This means that as long as you harm nothing, not even yourself, you can do anything.”

Geldenhuys said not all Wiccans practise witchcraft. When it is used, witchcraft is targeted at enhancing individuals and it is not used for evil.

“If a person is looking for a job, for instance, we would use herbs to enhance his or her confidence. We do not do magic which will give an unfair advantage.”

Although the religion has been criticised widely, Geldenhuys said it has been largely ignored by other religions in South Africa something that suits him.

“Personally, I am not keen to get into ugly debates with other religious leaders. I just want people to accept Wicca as a religion that adds value to the people who follow it.”

Geldenhuys said it was decided to formally launch the church because followers wish to be considered a formal organization.

“We want to be given credibility. We want marriages and other activities that we do, like passing over (when somebody dies), to be recognized.”



SECTION THREE

RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

4

RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

DEFINITION

Religious fundamentalism is defined as a religious movement with the militant desire to protect itself against the perceived onslaught of modern culture. While ‘fundamentalism’ has been primarily associated with Islam, it is not exclusive to one religion. For the media, a more useful definition of fundamentalism is: A “fundamentalist” is anyone who imposes a way of thought, expression, action or behaviour using coercive methods.¹⁴

GENDER ISSUES

Fundamentalist movements are largely concerned with control of women’s behaviour and sexuality. This control of women is used as a means of ensuring social cohesion. Rigid gender roles are enforced, and community solidarity is reinforced by calling on men to defend the honour of “their” women from outsiders.

Fundamentalist movements seek to protect patriarchal systems of power. Men within these movements often prevent women from accessing religious knowledge, and suppress religious texts and interpretations that deal with women’s rights, such as the right to education.

In fact, rather than being concerned with the fundamentals of religion, fundamentalism tends to concentrate on particular interpretations of religious texts, rather than the texts themselves. For example, Islamic fundamentalists often condone “honour” killings, although there is in fact no sanction for such killings in Muslim religious law (refer to earlier exercise (17) and newspaper clippings on ‘honour killings’).

In Christianity, fundamentalism manifests in many ways.

The “fundamentalist” Christians in the United States, soon after the September 11 attacks on Washington, D.C. and New York, cited feminists as among those who were partly to blame for what had happened in America. Televangelist Jerry Falwell said: “The abortionists have got to bear some burden for this because God will not be mocked. And when we destroy 40 million little innocent babies, We make God mad. I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make an alternative lifestyle, the American Civil Liberties Union, People for the American Way – all of them who have tried to secularize America – I point the finger in their face and say, ‘you helped this happen.’”¹⁵

MEDIA ISSUES

Issues of religious fundamentalism have a tendency to bring out religious biases in media practitioners. Journalists or media organisations often portray fundamentalism in other religions as something irrational and threatening, while fundamentalism within their own religious group is condoned as a righteous force upholding cultural or family values.

¹⁴ ‘Muslim Women and the Latitudes of Freedom’, by Luisa Isabel Alvarez de Toledo, IPS Columnist Service, February 2002

¹⁵ The Datalounge, www.datalounge.com/datalounge

In the media, women are depicted as 'victims' of fundamentalism, and news coverage seldom delves into the more complex reality of women's participation in fundamentalist movements.

One of the most common images of women and religion is veiled women, presented as the passive victims, but these women's voices are never heard in the media. Their opinions are not sought, and instead we usually have a man speaking on their behalf, either telling us about the abuse they suffer, or justifying religious practices in terms of defending women's honour and dignity. While it may be difficult to interview women in these societies, there are ways of bringing women's voices to the fore.

EXERCISE 20

RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

MATERIALS: Articles on religious fundamentalism

TIME: 45 minutes

AIM: To examine the impact of religious fundamentalism on the rights of women

STEP 1: Breaking down terms

Each participant is to define/explain the following terms:

- Religious fundamentalism
- Sharia law

The facilitator can then draw out the meaning from the group using the definitions supplied by the group.

STEP 2: Read through the two articles and answer the following questions.

1. What do religious fundamentalists have in common?
2. What are the gender issues within religious fundamentalism?
3. Can religious fundamentalism and gender equality be reconciled? If 'yes' how? If 'no' why not?
4. Does media reporting on the issue reflect an understanding of gender issues within this context?
5. In what way does Alice Lakwena (article A) break with or reinforce gender stereotypes?

Note to the facilitator

It is imperative for the participants to have a common understanding of the terms Religious fundamentalism and Sharia law as this will allow proper discussions to take place. Examples could be drawn of religious fundamentalism in other religions, for example Christianity. The facilitator could use a participatory method of drawing out the definition whereby the participants are asked to write their own meanings on cards. These cards are posted on a wall. The facilitator uses these cards to draw out the meaning.

These examples could come from the group.

Furthermore, there is need to discuss in detail the impact of religious fundamentalism on gender rights and gender equality.

VISIT TO ALICE LAKWENA'S HUMBLE ABODE

Twenty years after her rag-tag movement put the fear of God in Museveni's formidable army, the fiery sect leader is a spent force — holed up in Kenya's Dadaab refugee camp

By KEN OPALA

Alice Lakwena strides her homestead like a colossus. Her lieutenants — some of them with a string of university degrees to their names — religiously trail the footsteps of this class two drop-out, awed at every step she takes, every word she utters.

Her expressions are well-thought out and her English is near perfect, save for the unmistakable Acholi accent.

She cringes at the sight of notebooks and news cameras, but quickly regains her composure to vigorously proclaim:

"I can bomb Uganda now if I want to, from where I am. Now. Just like this!" She stamps her feet on the ground then stabs at the air as if possessed.

'Prophetess' Alice Abwong' at Lakwena shot to international prominence in the late 1980s when her forces of the Holy Spirit Movement tormented President Yoweri Museveni's formidable military machine.

She now lives a forlorn life amongst 130,000 other refugees from Uganda, Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan in the bleak and desolate refugee camps of northern Kenya. The Dadaab complex 300km north of Nairobi is actually a conglomeration of three refugee camps — Ifo, Hagadera and Dagahaley.

Lakwena is accommodated at Ifo, a 28sq km camp with a population of 47,700.

The life of this 41-year old, who now survives on handouts, reads like Hollywood material. If born in the west, Lakwena would probably have made a fortune on the movie rights to her story. A modern day Joan of Arc in the darkest Africa!

A barefoot, barely literate girl, she convinced grown men to follow her into battle on the promise that a concoction of oil and flour smeared on their bodies would turn enemy bullets into water. The 20,000-plus strong army fought Museveni's vaunted National Resistance Army to a near standstill, starting off in Lakwena's Kitgum home area in eastern Uganda on a 800km blitzkrieg that threatened to take the important town of Jinja on Lake Victoria.

Even now, a decade after her insurgency finally petered out, few can fathom what drove Lakwena in her war against Museveni's "evil regime" as she calls it.

Perhaps a little history could be an eye-opener. Uganda seems to have room for all



sorts of mystics who attract fanatical followers ready to lay down their lives. Even after Lawkena, Uganda is still plagued by a similar insurgency of Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army, which ravages the north.

And only last year, the country attracted international attention when a self-proclaimed Prophetess, Credonia Mwerinda, co-authored the mass slaughter of more than 1,000 adherents of her Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God cult.

It might, therefore, not be difficult to understand what makes the Lakwenas of this world tick. "I am not a politician; I am a prophet who is inspired to bring good to the world by alleviating the suffering of my people," she told the *Nation* a fortnight ago.

She scorns at cynics who link her to voodoo and accuse her of leading her followers, many of them Acholi tribespeople, into the slaughter house.

"Alice is my name, Lakwena is the spirit. In fact, Lakwena is a man. It is a 'he'. I did not practice witchcraft but I was following his orders — to fulfil the words of God," she says without batting an eyelid.

But why were you defeated? "The boys became indiscipline."

Were they revolting against you? "No, they were disobeying the spirit. They were looting and indulging in sex." Her ragtag movement forbade sex and demanded blind loyalty to her. Faithful disciples included Prof Isaac Ojok, a former Education Minister in ousted President Milton Obote's government, and Col Kenneth Kilama, a commander in the army of Gen Tito Okello, Obote's short-lived successor.

Museveni's NRA rode triumphantly into the capital Kampala as Okello's forces fled in disarray in 1986. They quickly pacified most of the country, only to encounter shortly afterwards the most unlikely rebellion — a ragtag army with no discernable aim going into battle with bare hands under the command of some previously unheard-off prophetess.

The frustration was telling. In November 1987, Museveni was promising to either kill or capture Lakwena "in the next few weeks".

He dismissed her as a mere "nuisance with a psychiatric problem" who had polarised the nation. "You cannot chase her and capture her like a chicken. We must crush them and that is our line."

Even more graphic was the NRA's Commander Kajabago Karushoke. He described Lakwena not as a human being but as a "biological substance" which had to be obliterated.

When the NRA finally overran her base two years later, Lakwena had already fled. At the refugee camp, she remains unrepentant, and still spouts a religious credo that leaves non-believers mystified. She says she is Christian, but also claims to possess an "Islam spirit".

She claims her Bible was handed to her at age 26 when "I ascended to heaven and was given the powers to heal before I was returned to earth in the company of three angels". Now Kenyan authorities have confiscated the "Bible", she says. Perhaps her only consolation is that she has erected an altar in her house where she prays and "summons" Lakwena, the holy spirit.

Though still combative, she is in a Catch 22 situation: While her government is not in a hurry to welcome her, she fears she could be tried for crimes if she returned.

"My hands are clean, I have never killed anybody." But Ugandan authorities are hardly convinced.

She continues: "Once I get back home, I will use water from Murchison Falls to cure diseases such as AIDS. "The blind will see, the deaf will hear and the lame will walk." Whatever she believes, however, she is a spent force and her movement is in tatters.

Perhaps what remains is her philosophy. To win a cause, you have to "blend the Bible and the gun", she says confidently.

"It comes automatically if you have the will and the spirit."

BATTLE LINES DRAWN BETWEEN ACTIVISTS AND FUNDAMENTALISTS

By Colleen Lowe Morna

Women's activists are bracing for a final showdown with religious fundamentalists as the Fourth World Conference on Women gets underway here today.

As a bottom line they say the conference should not backtrack on agreements reached at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, and the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo last year (1994).

"We are going to have to fight something of a battle to hang onto the gains we made in Cairo, as the Vatican and conservative Muslim countries seek to reopen this debate," notes Gita Sen of the Development Alternatives for Women in a New Era (DAWN).

"It is a well known fact that the right watch the left organise and then organise better," says Rachel Kyte, senior policy analyst with the US based-International Women's Health Coalition.

The decision in Vienna to unequivocally regard women's rights as human rights is one that has been critical in countering negative practices against women in Moslem countries, adds Sultana Kamal, a lawyer with Ain-Q-Salist Kendra (ASK) a Bangladeshi NGO concerned with women's rights. On this issue, "there can't be any exceptions, brackets, parenthesis, anything," she says.

The NGO representatives are among the almost 30,000 who gathered here last week for the NGO Forum, and are now turning their attention to lobbying the official conference which kicks off with a colourful ceremony this morning, and official speeches this afternoon.

Some 1960 NGO representatives are accredited to the official conference. As of the weekend, 2893 delegates from 178 countries had been accredited.

Signs suggest that the Vatican and conservative countries such as Ecuador, Argentina, Guatemala,

Honduras and Malta, as well as conservative Muslim countries such as Iran and Sudan, will again seek to grab headlines at the conference, the biggest in the UN's history.

After compromises reached in Cairo, the Vatican has reopened the debate on the terms "reproductive health" and reproductive rights" in the draft Platform of Action considered at the Preparatory Conference in New York in March. The Vatican sees these terms as code words for abortion.

In references to women's rights as human rights, the Vatican has sought to insert the word "universal." This is seen by women activists as an attempt to modify rights applying to women to those that are only universally accepted.

Several Islamic governments have attempted to replace the word "equality" in the Platform for Action with "equity." The latter is far stronger in legal terms.

In an unprecedented debate at the preparatory conference, the Vatican and Muslim countries raised objections to the word "gender." They argued that the term encompassed homosexuality. A contact group established after the debate will recommend to the Beijing conference that the term, which is commonly used in international documents, be retained.

A letter of apology by the Pope for the negative role the Church may have played in subordinating women in June sparked an outcry among more radical women's groups.

It contains such lines as appreciation for "women who, with a heroic love for the child they have conceived, proceed with a pregnancy resulting from the injustice of rape."

In a move that has met with mixed response, the Vatican has appointed Harvard law professor Mary Ann Glendon as its representative at the conference. A staunch Catholic, Glendon also has a reputation for being smart, diplomatic and persuasive.

Glendon is expected to take a tough line on abortion, but may take a softer



line on some of the other issues the Vatican has been objecting to at the conference. "At least she's a woman, and at least she's not a nun," says a UN staffer.

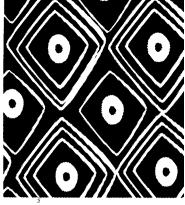
The Catholics for a Free Choice, who have been organising several workshops at the NGO Forum, have written off the choice of representative as a public relations gimmick on the part of the Pope.

Several fundamentalist Muslim groups have condemned the conference, putting pressure on the delegations of these countries as they gather here to tread a fine line between them and more liberal forces.

Jad ull-Haq Ali Jad ul-Haq of the Sharif Islamic Research Academy at the University of Cairo told a local news agency that the conference sought to "transform the human being into a monster that is neither male nor female."

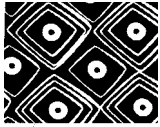
There have been several demonstrations against the conference in Pakistan. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto will be one of the key note speakers at the opening ceremony. She is likely to argue that the root of women's problems in Muslim countries is tradition, rather than anything intrinsic to Islam.

UN Secretary General for the Conference Gertrude Mongella is anxious that the conference not be sidetracked by conservative forces. She wants it to focus on the broader issues of poverty, education, health, political and economic empowerment – and the means for achieving these.



SECTION FOUR

GENERAL GUIDELINES AND IDEAS FOR COVERAGE



GUIDELINES FOR COVERAGE

SECTION FOUR

These guidelines have been adapted from the Gender Guidelines for Coverage developed by Inter Press Service (IPS).

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR REPORTING ON RELIGION AND CULTURE

INCLUDE:

- More than one perspective.
- More than just the views of men.
- More than just the views of those in powerful positions, or those considered experts.
- More than just the views of adults.
- More than just the traditional gender identities.

AVOID:

- Making generalisations such as “in terms of customary law”, which imply that there is only one customary legal system; or “according to tradition”, which implies, once again, that there is only one form of tradition, and that it is fixed and cannot be challenged.
- Concentrating on sensational issues such as female genital mutilation and “honour” killings, while ignoring the broader context of oppression of women.
- Stereotyping one particular religious group as oppressive to women – this is inaccurate, as within one religion there may be numerous different interpretations, ideas and traditions, and one religion may contain everything from fundamentalism to very progressive beliefs.

GUIDELINES FOR THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN

INCLUDE:

- Portrayals of women that challenge existing stereotypes, such as women in leadership positions.
- The voices of women who are usually “invisible” in the media, such as rural women, women with disabilities and women from marginalised ethnic and social groups.
- Descriptions of women as individuals in their own right, not as, for example, “wife of the minister” or “mother of three”.
- Stories that show men and women co-operating to build a just society, rather than constantly portraying gender relations as a conflict between men and women.
- Questions about why women are excluded from certain roles.

AVOID:

- Only portraying women in stereotyped roles such as “the good mother” and “the evil temptress”.
- Treating successful women as honorary men or astonishing exceptions.
- Concentrating on women’s physical appearance when it is not relevant to the story. If it would be inappropriate to mention a man’s hairstyle or clothing, then it is equally inappropriate for a woman.
- Sensationalised stories featuring women who have stepped outside of traditional roles and committed acts considered to be deviant.

GUIDELINES FOR SOURCING**INCLUDE:**

- Ordinary women as sources. The opinion of the “man in the street” is often used as a news source. Do not assume that the woman on the street shares the same opinion.
- Women as experts. Experts quoted in stories are usually men, but there are often many women qualified to give an expert opinion, and who may also be able to give a different perspective.
- Marginalised voices. The powerful elite are over-used as a source of information. In addition to the official version, find out how the issue affects the most marginalised members of society, such as working-class women.

AVOID:

- Tokenism – relying on one sex for the majority of views and then using a single, token quote from the other sex.
- Assuming that one woman speaks for all women. Women are a diverse group.

GUIDELINES FOR LANGUAGE**USE:**

- Inclusive language – use “humankind” instead of “mankind”.
- Empowering language – for example, speak about “survivors” of violence, rather than “victims”.
- Clear, plain language – technical jargon or euphemisms will confuse the public and further mystify issues which are in dire need of demystification.

AVOID:

- Sexist language, such as “dumb blonde” and “the weaker sex”, which is based on derogatory stereotypes.
- Judgmental language, such as “cheating wife killed”, which implies that women are to blame for violence.
- Language that stereotypes men and women according to traditional gender roles – statements such as “men are aggressive” and “women are caring”.
- Inappropriate language that trivialises serious issues. For example, in a recent newspaper article, the headline “Dirty Demon Ridder: Lusty Priest jailed for 40 Years” undermined a very serious story about a priest who abused his position of authority and raped young women in his congregation.

GUIDELINES FOR USING DATA AND STATISTICS

- Very often, official statistics are not broken down in terms of gender. This lack of gender-disaggregated data may conceal the fact that a particular issue affects men and women in different ways. For example, statistics on “honour killings” may be hidden among general statistics on murder.
- The media has a useful role to play in highlighting the lack of gender-disaggregated statistics and question why such data is not being collected.
- Governments often under-report sensitive issues, which they feel may reflect negatively on the country, or are perceived as contrary to culture and religion. For example, in many countries, statistics on abortion are inaccurate because officials believe that “abortion is against our culture, and does not happen in this country.” Governments may also under-report practices such as female genital mutilation for fear of international disapproval.
- National and international non-governmental organisations are a useful source for gender-disaggregated data, and alternative analyses of official statistics.

EXERCISE 21

STORY IDEAS

1. Based on this overview, list at least 5 story ideas on gender, culture and religion that you would like to pursue?
2. For each, list potential sources of information.
3. How will you make sure that you build a gender perspective into your stories, while including the voices of those most affected?
4. What kind of impact would you seek from your coverage?



APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1

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APPENDIX 2:

WEBSITES

Catholics for a Free Choice

<http://www.cath4choice.org>

Gendercide Watch

<http://www.gendercide.org>

Muslim Women's League

<http://www.mwlusa.org>

One World

<http://www.oneworld.org>

Religious Tolerance

<http://www.religioustolerance.org>

Rising Daughters Aware

<http://www.fgm.org>

UNIFEM Arab Women Connect Project

<http://www.arabwomenconnect.org>

Women 3rd World

<http://www.women3rdworld.about.com>

APPENDIX 3:

RECOMMENDED READING

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979)

International Conference on Population and Development, Platform for Action(1994)

Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990)

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

Video Conference: A world free of violence against women: produced by UNIFEM

Possessing the secret Joy – Alice Walker

Women and witchcraft, a paper by Rekopnatswe Mate, June 1996

Witchcraft and Development, a paper by J.L Brain, ICPD Cairo Platform for Action

FOOTNOTES

¹ Roxanne Jordaan, cited by Walker, B. 1998. "Christianity, Development, and Women's Liberation".

² Dr Robert Savio, in Inter Press Service. 1999. Globalisation, Democracy and Human Rights in Africa.

³ Dr Obododimma Oha is a lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, but currently on leave-of-absence at the Université Gaston Berger de Saint-Louis, Sénégal. He has published papers in several international journals including Mosaic, Africa, Mattoid, American Drama, African Anthropology, Journal of Communication and Language Arts, Context, African Study Monographs, and Philosophy and Social Action. He has also contributed chapters to critical anthologies. A poet and playwright, he teaches Stylistics and Discourse Analysis.

⁴ Tris Fresen, in *The Other Voices Workbook*. 2000. World Conference on Religion and Peace SA.

⁵ Adina Oskowitz, *ibid*.

⁶ Moefidah Jaffer, *ibid*.

⁷ "The Impact of Religion and Culture on Gender: Christianity, AIR and Gender", paper presented at an Inter Press Service training workshop for journalists on how to report on Culture, Religion and Gender. July 2001.

⁸ *Ibid*.

⁹ From Esack, F. 1999. *On Being a Muslim*.

¹⁰ UNICEF: The State of the World's Children, cited in Ashworth, G. 1992. Women and Human Rights.

¹¹ McFadden, P. "Reproductive rights for African women – Media perspectives", paper presented at an Inter Press Service training workshop for journalists on how to report gender, religion and culture. November 2000.

¹² International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), *Charter on Sexual and Reproductive Rights*. <http://www.ippf.org/charter/summary.htm>. 2001.

¹³ Adopted from Local Action, Global Change, published by UNIFEM and The Center for Women's Global Leadership (1999)

¹⁴ 'Muslim Women and the Latitudes of Freedom', by Luisa Isabel Alvarez de Toledo, IPS Columnist Service, February 2002

¹⁵ The Datalounge, www.datalounge.com/datalounge