

Female genital mutilation persuasive essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Is Female Genital Mutilation A Moral Practice Female genital mutilation (FGM) is not a morally justified practice. It is an unnecessary procedure that has no medical health benefits to the girls and women it is being performed on. According to Utilitarianism, we should produce the greatest amount of pleasure for the greatest number affected. Utilitarian's also believe that we should alleviate the greatest amount of pain and suffering for the greatest number affected. Based on Utilitarian grounds, FGM has no medical health benefits and it is a completely unnecessary act on females in this culture.

It is also an extremely painful procedure that has very serious short term and long term side effects, including death. Jeremy Bentham, an Act Utilitarian, developed the hedonic calculus, which is a "scientific" methodology for determining which pleasures ought to be pursued and which pains ought to be avoided. FGM is an example of the pains that "ought" to be avoided. This principle enables individuals to provide good reasons for their course of action. When we are deliberating about the right thing to do, Bentham maintains that we must always account for the pleasures and pains.

Examples of this are the intensity, duration, certainty or uncertainty, remoteness, fecundity, purity and extent of the pleasure or pain. In order to understand why FGM is not a morally justified practice and why it goes against the principles of Utilitarianism, you have to know what FGM is. You need to learn who it is being performed on and what age, why it is being done, where it is happening, how it is performed, and what short term and long term side effects occur, after this procedure has been done.

The pain and suffering that is resulting from this procedure is going against the greatest happiness principle of Utilitarianism. There is a reason why it is

no longer called female circumcision and is now being referred to as female genital mutilation. FGM is an un-safe, un-sterile procedure that is taking place in many foreign countries around the world including Egypt, the Sudan, the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and Malaysia (Winter, Par. 6). FGM harms girls and women in these cultures by causing them severe pain and multiple serious side effects.

According to the hedonic calculus, and the principle of intensity, it states that some pleasures and pains are more intense than others. The girls or women in this culture are being put through an extreme amount of intense pain for no beneficial reason. The procedure is being done by midwives or older "experienced" women in the villages that do not have any medical training and are not educated in the field of medicine. Not only is FGM a dangerous procedure, but it also has physical, sexual and mental consequences (Amnesty International USA, Par. 3).

According to the World Health Organization, this practice has many serious side effects including shock, hemorrhage (bleeding), tetanus or sepsis (bacterial infection), urine retention, open sores in the genital region and injury to nearby genital tissue (Par. 13). Other side effects can include death, serious infections, HIV, abscesses, small benign tumors, and clitoral cysts (wolvesdream, Par. 5). The World Health Organization has also reported many long term consequences which include; recurrent bladder and urinary tract infections, cysts, infertility, an increased risk of childbirth complications and newborn deaths (Par. 4). It can also lead to a need for later surgeries in life (Par. 14). For example, the FGM procedure that seals or narrows a vaginal opening needs to be cut open later in life to allow for sexual

intercourse and childbirth (Par. 14). In this same procedure, women could be cut and stitched repeatedly, leading to further complications and more long term risks. Along with the high risk of short term and long term side effects, the biggest issue resulting from this procedure is death. FGM is the removal of all or part of the external parts of the female genitalia.

It is a cultural practice that started in some African countries over 2000 years ago (wolvesdream, Par. 1). According to this same source, FGM is primarily a cultural practice, not a religious practice (Par. 1). However, in some cultures they do include it as part of their religion (Par. 1). In these foreign countries, FGM has become something that is just expected and defines them to their culture (Par. 1). According to the people in this culture, girls will not become women, or adults for that matter, if this procedure is not performed.

Most will be considered un-clean and will not be able to marry without the procedure (Par. 9). In some cultures, the reasoning for this procedure, is that it will reduce the woman's desire for sex, therefore reducing the chance of sex outside the marriage (Amnesty International USA, Par. 7). We can refer this to the purity aspect of the hedonic calculus, which states that some pleasures or pains are purer than others. Why is it fair to take away the pleasure of sexual intercourse from women, but not from men in this culture?

What prevents the men from going outside the vows of a marriage? What is reducing their desire for sex and why are they considered "clean" without performing some kind of horrendous procedure? In this culture, since marriage is often the only role available for women, it is impossible for them

to marry if they have not undergone this procedure (Par. 7). Is this procedure only being done to women in this culture because they do not value women? Is their only role in the community reproduction in order to maintain the culture and its practices?

FGM is carried out at various ages in a girl's life but it is most frequently around the ages of four to eight years of age (wolvesdream, Par. 3). Referring back to Bentham's hedonic calculus and the principle of remoteness, it states that some pleasures and pains may come sooner than others. The girls that are enduring this procedure are at a very young, immature and undeveloped age. However, the pain inflicted in the procedure doesn't end here. It can be a lifetime of pain and suffering with every sexual encounter or birth.

Looking further at the hedonic calculus and the principle of certainty or uncertainty, it states that there is either pleasure or pain in an act. The girls in this culture are forced into this procedure knowing that they will have to endure an extreme amount of pain that could last a lifetime, depending on the circumstances. According to an article written on FGM, there are three different types of FGM that take place in different cultures (Par. 3). The first one is called Sunna Circumcision which is the removal of the prepuce (retractable fold of skin, or hood) or the tip of the clitoris (Par.). In this culture Sunna is Arabic for " tradition" (Par. 3). The second type is Clitoridectomy which is the removal of the entire clitoris (prepuce and glands) and the removal of the adjacent labia (Par. 3). The third type is called infibulation (pharonic circumcision) which consists of performing a clitoridectomy (removal of all or part of the labia minora, the labia majora)

(Par. 3). This is then stitched up allowing only a small hole to remain open to allow for urine and menstrual blood to flow through (Par. 3).

To conduct this procedure the midwives or village women use various un-sanitized instruments including; broken glass, tin can lids, blunt knives, scissors, and razor blades (Amnesty International USA, Par. 3). In most cases, these items are used repeatedly, without any type of sterilization or disinfecting. This practice has led to the rapid spread of many diseases, high infection rates and HIV. Typically, this procedure is performed without any anesthesia and there are no antibiotics given to prevent infection. The only medical treatment they receive is being stitched up using anything from cat or lamb intestine, to the use of thorns (Par.). If infibulation or a clitoridectomy is performed, their legs are bound for up to two months while their wounds heal, leaving them immobilized (Par. 3). We can refer this back to the hedonic calculus and the principle of duration, which states that some pleasures or pains will last longer than others.

Depending on the type of procedure done and how it is done, these girls could endure a lifetime of pain and suffering resulting from this practice. According to research, an estimated 135 million girls and women have undergone FGM and 2 million girls a year are at risk for having this procedure done (Amnesty International USA, Par.). This accounts for approximately 6, 000 girls per day (Amnesty International USA, Par. 5). Referring back to the hedonic calculus, the extent of pain and suffering that is being inflicted on the girls and women of this culture is astounding and the numbers are staggering. After reading about FGM and the culture it is being performed in, some cultural relativists may argue that the ethical

understandings vary between cultures and what may be considered morally wrong in one culture may be perfectly acceptable in another.

However, considering the fact that FGM involves the deliberate infliction of severe pain and suffering and that its effects can be life threatening, it does not follow the greatest happiness principle in Utilitarianism. Not only is it a violation of the rights of females but because it is most commonly performed on girls ranging in age from birth to adolescence, it is a grave violation of Children's Human Rights (Amnesty International USA, Par. 10).

In conclusion, female genital mutilation is not a morally justified practice because it goes against the greatest happiness principle of Utilitarianism. It violates the rights of females and female children. It causes serious pain and suffering that can last a lifetime. The amount and seriousness of the side effects outnumber any traditional or religious values that some cultures believe in. Therefore, according to Utilitarian grounds, we should produce the greatest amount of pleasure for the greatest number affected by eliminating this cultural practice all together.

In doing this we would be alleviating the greatest amount of pain and suffering for the greatest number affected.

Works Cited Amnesty International USA. Action for Human Rights. Hope for Humanity. n. d. Female Genital Mutilation: A Fact Sheet. Web. 27 Sept. 2010. "Female Genital Mutilation." n. p. wolvesdreams. tripod. com. n. d. Web. 25 Sept. 2010. Winter, Mary. "Female Genital Mutilation." The Rocky Mountain News, 31 Jan. 1996. Print. World Health Organization. Female Genital Mutilation, 2010. Web. 25 Sept. 2010.