The Practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Pakistan

Submission to the Women Human Rights and Gender Section

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

By the Institute for Social Justice (ISJ) Pakistan[[1]](#footnote-1)

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*Introduction*

This brief paper offers information about the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) in Pakistan which includes legislative and administrative measures, role of different stakeholders and recommendations for government and civil society organizations.

*Scale of FGM*

The practice of FGM is rarely reported in Pakistan because it is not concern of any NGO, INGO, UN agency, and the Government of Pakistan.

In Pakistan, mainly in Karachi, Bohra[[2]](#footnote-2) community has the practice of FGM[[3]](#footnote-3) but this practice takes place secretly with Bohri girls when they are just seven years old, when they are not in any position to protest or resist against this act of brutality.[[4]](#footnote-4)

It is reported that these are not only Pakistani Bohri girls that suffers through this agony but young British girls of Pakistani origin are brought by their Bohri parents to Pakistan four a couple of weeks for carrying out the FGM procedure.[[5]](#footnote-5) The practice is also found in Muslim communities near Iran-Pakistan border.[[6]](#footnote-6)

It is claimed that nearly “90 % of Bohra girls are forced to undergo female genital mutilation”.[[7]](#footnote-7) If 90 percent of girls in the community go through this, the ISJ believes that (as given the size of the community in Karachi) every year about 1000 girls undergo the practice of FGM. Even if there are only 100 girls per year, these are more than enough to open eyes of NGOs and INGOs in Pakistan claiming to be champions of human rights.

*Reasons of FGM*

It is claimed that it is religious, cultural and social practice of Dawoodi Bohra community but majority of the other majority religious groups do not adhere and practice FGM. The Holy Quran is completely silent about female circumcision and references associated with Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him) are weak and unauthentic.[[8]](#footnote-8)

*Human rights by practicing FGM*

As in other harmful traditional practices, such child marriages, honor killings, *vani[[9]](#footnote-9)*, and *sawara[[10]](#footnote-10)*, rights of women/girls are violated, similarly in the practice of FGM. “FGM is, hence, a crime, sitting at the top rung of immorality.”[[11]](#footnote-11) But women of the Bohra community do not consider it a harmful practice or human rights violations that is why many women of the community still would like their daughters to go through this practice and they have also gone through this. [[12]](#footnote-12)

*Legal, administrative measures and policy measures*

In Pakistan, there are no legal and administrative measures to stop practices of FGM. There is no law that mentions about FGM, it is mainly because its occurrence is not recognized and reported; perhaps, it is because the issue is sensitive and silently practiced by a small religious community.

In 2006, the federal government of Pakistan had introduced the National Plan of Action for Children; the goal number nine of the Plan was to end harmful traditions or customary practices, such as early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, by 2010. Under the goal, strategies/actions included: Increasing education facilities especially for girls; effective implementation of existing laws; awareness raising specially educating the mass of harmful effect of early marriages and capacity building measures. For the implementation of the goal, responsible institutions/bodies were: the Ministry of Social Welfare & Special Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Interior, and Provincial Social Welfare, Health, Home and Education Departments.

After the Plan 2006-2010, no other plan was introduced by the government; it is claimed that with the devolution of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Special Education, Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, implementation of the Plan became greatly a responsibility of provincial government; the provincial governments should have their own Plan of Action for children; but no provincial governments have introduced any Plan of Action for Children; whereas, as far as, progress against the Plan 2006-2010 is considered, there is no record and report of it; therefore, there is no details of implementation of the goal nine mainly the issue of female genital mutilation.

The Plan 2006-2010, is the only government document which recognizes the issue of FGM. There is no law or policy mentions about this practice in Pakistan.

*Health practitioners*

It has been claimed that methods applied in the practice of FGM have improved, and trained doctors are doing this practice, whereas in old days untrained women used to perform this. Now, as claimed, procedures are applied to ensure no pain and no permanent harm.[[13]](#footnote-13) However, there are reported cases in which unqualified persons’ services are used for this purpose.[[14]](#footnote-14)

*The UNCRC and the CEDAW*

Pakistan since does not recognize this issue, therefore, Pakistan has not reported practice of FGM in any of its periodic reports submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In 2014, Pakistan has submitted fifth periodic report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and in May 2011, fourth periodic report to CEDAW.

Similarly, NGOs and INGOs did not mention the practice of FGM in their alternative reports to these two Committees whenever they submitted reports. There is also similar behavior of the relevant UN agencies on this issue, which also did not mention about the practice of FGM when submitted any report to these Committees. It is unfortunate to state that alternative report (also known shadow report) submitted to CEDAW against Pakistan’s fourth periodic report does not contain a single about the practice of FGM in Pakistan.

In 2012, UNICEF published a report on “Situation Analysis of children and women in Pakistan”; the report also did not consider mentioning the practice of FGM in Pakistan.

It is important that any of these NGOs, INGOs or UN agencies had highlighted or mentioned about this issue, then there was likely to have some debate and discussion on policy level or at least at NGOs’ forums.

In result of no recognition of this harmful practice by NGOs, INGOs, UN agencies and Pakistan, these Committees also did not mention about occurrence of FGM in Pakistan, therefore, there have been proposed any recommendation to Pakistan in this regard.

*Good practices*

There are no Pakistan specific practical (or field) campaigns but there is an online social media campaign against the practice of FGM in the world and there are some well written blogs that provide ample information on the issue from many aspects. But since there is no practical field mobilization and sensitization at community level, and there are no policy measures taken yet, therefore, yet this issue is silently practiced.

*Major challenges/problems*

The practice of FGM is little recognized as an issue or problem in Pakistan. NGOs, INGOs, UN agencies have given the same weightage to the problem as the government has.

If NGOs or INGOs have mentioned about this practice, but it is not addressed or discussed separately.

Therefore, there is no empirical and evidence based research on the problem, and there are no measures or initiatives taken by the government departments and NGOs.

The media has not given due consideration to this problem, it is hardly reported or investigated issue by the media professionals.

*Recommendations*

Since FGM is greatly practiced in Sindh, therefore, the Government of Sindh should immediately pass a law to ban on the practice of FGM, and introduced severe punishment for violators of the ban. Or in other case, the government can insert a provision of ban on the practice of FGM in the Sindh Child Protection Authority Act 2011. Besides, it should also launch a community level campaign against the practice of FGM.

Besides Government of Sindh, the federal government of Pakistan should also adopt a legislation to declare FGM as harmful practice for girls and raise public awareness about serious health complications for girls who are circumcised. The federal government may insert provision against the practice of FGM in a long pending bill, the child protection (criminal law amendment).

The Government of United Kingdom should also ensure that young British girl of Pakistani origin are not taken to Pakistan for this purpose. The government should set up legal and administrative procedures in this regard.

The End!

1. The ISJ acknowledges support of Abdullah Khoso in drafting this brief submission for the OHCHR. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. There are about 100,000 Bohras in Pakistan. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Chohan, A. (2011), *The Female Genital Mutilation in Pakistan, and beyond*; The Express Tribune Blogs, August 18, 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Pakistan Today (2011*), Low Awareness of hidden FGM/C practices*; December 28, 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Chohan, A. (2011), *The Female Genital Mutilation in Pakistan, and beyond*; The Express Tribune Blogs, August 18, 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Moazzam, F. Z. (2011), *The Dark Side of Custom*; NEWSLINE, August 30, 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Wikipedia, Dawoodi Bohra; last retrieved on 17 November 2014 at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dawoodi\_Bohra [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Jawad, H.A. (1998), *The Rights of Women in Islam: An Authentic Approach*. PALGRAVE, New York, page 58 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Vani* is a custom in which young girls are married as part of punishment for a crime committed by her male relative/s. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Swara* is a custom of child marriage, in which girls are given to resolve feuds [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Chohan, A. (2011), *The Female Genital Mutilation in Pakistan, and beyond*; The Express Tribune Blogs, August 18, 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Zahidi, F. (2013), *Female Genital Mutilation: Many Pakistani Women’s Painful Secrete;* athttp://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/15979/female-genital-mutilation-many-pakistani-womens-painful-secret/ [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Zahidi, F. (2013), *Female Genital Mutilation: Many Pakistani Women’s Painful Secrete;* athttp://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/15979/female-genital-mutilation-many-pakistani-womens-painful-secret/ [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Moazzam, F. Z. (2011), *The Dark Side of Custom*; NEWSLINE, August 30, 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)