

BACKGROUND

Circumcision of Muslim males and females is done in many parts of the Arab world. Boys are typically circumcised between the ages of three and nine. Girls undergo circumcision (also called excision in females) around age seven or eight. The practice, particularly female circumcision, is being openly questioned by many Muslims.

CIRCUMCISION AND THE KORAN

The traditional justification for circumcision is found in some of the sayings of Mohammed. There is no mention of circumcision in the Koran, and in fact some verses seem to oppose it because it conflicts with the Islamic belief that God's creations are perfect. According to the Koran, God "perfected everything He created" (32:7), and alterations of nature are defacements inspired by the devil (4:119). Imam Mahmud Shaltut has stated that he does not see any reason for male or female circumcision, either in the Koran or in the Sunnah of Mohammed.

WHAT ARE MUSLIM SCHOLARS SAYING ABOUT CIRCUMCISION?

According to **Sami A. Aldeeb Abu-Sahueh**, a lawyer of Palestinian origin who has written extensively about circumcision and Islamic law, "religion has been a means of justifying both male and female circumcision. It is time to expose the irrationality behind this thinking and reveal the harmful influence of some religious circles which are in favour of it or refuse to denounce it."

He notes that "both [male and female circumcisions] are mutilations of healthy sexual organs of non-consenting children. There is no alternative but to condemn the attitude of international and non-governmental organizations which dissociate one type of circumcision from the other, giving legitimacy to male circumcision in the process."

Dr. Aldeeb's article, "To Mutilate in the Name of Jehovah or Allah", is an in-depth discussion of the Islamic religious and legal arguments surrounding circumcision.

Both **Dr. Nawal El-Saadawi**, an Egyptian woman and medical doctor who was circumcised as a child, and **Aziza Kamel**, a Muslim feminist, have spoken out against circumcision. Dr. El-Saadawi has written numerous articles for the Egyptian press describing the beneficial function of the prepuce and the disadvantages of circumcision for both males and females. In an article published in Rosal Youssef in 1999, she stated that circumcision may be one cause of male sexual frustration and violence.

In a post-Master's fellowship research thesis, "Male Genital Mutilation (Circumcision): A Feminist Study of a Muted Gender Issue", **Dr. Seham Abdel Salam Mohammed**, an Egyptian medical doctor, conducted interviews with Egyptians about their experiences with circumcision. Some Muslim parents may feel strong negative emotions about circumcision. One mother who was surveyed described her son's circumcision: "It was a tragedy. No matter what I say, I cannot describe it. The screaming!!! Oh my God!!!! I will never hear [anything] like it again! With

his eyes [my son] was asking me, 'What have you done to me? Didn't you have mercy on me?' I hated myself."

Dr. Mohammed writes, "Because circumcision results into useless unnecessary pain and harm for the individual, it is not a health procedure. It is a practice with symbolic and political nature. Its hygienic justifications are nothing but a tool to put such social body politics into action." She also writes that women may be more ready than men to speak out against circumcision and should "take the initiative to encourage men to break the barrier of silence about MGM [male genital mutilation, or circumcision]."

WHAT DO MEDICAL DOCTORS SAY ABOUT CIRCUMCISION?

Routine circumcision is not considered to be medically necessary. No major medical organization in the world recommends routine circumcision.

For more information on Islam and circumcision:

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Quran.org - This site expresses a progressive view of circumcision in an Islamic context.
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www.norm-uk.org/circumcision_islam.html

For more information on circumcision, visit:
www.cirp.org
www.circumcision.org

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