

**ATTITUDES OF EGYPTIAN WOMEN TOWARD FEMALE
CIRCUMCISION**

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Abstract:

Female circumcision is one of the reproductive health issues. It is practiced in few countries including Egypt. This paper investigates attitudes of Egyptian women toward female circumcision using data from the 1991 Egyptian Maternal and Child Health Survey. The results show that 90.8 percent of women approve female circumcision in Egypt. The percent approving female circumcision in urban areas is 80.5 versus 98.1 in rural areas. Women's education decreases the approval of female circumcision. About three-quarters of the Egyptian women approve female circumcision as a normal practice. Only 17.6 percent approve female circumcision due to religious belief.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Female circumcision is one of female genital mutilation (FGM). It is a procedure where the foreskin of the clitoris is removed, simulating male circumcision. When female circumcision is practiced, there are immediate and long-term complications which can result in both physical and psychological damage. Immediate risks include bleeding, tetanus, infection or septicemia. The long-term side effects of circumcision pose problems for reproductive and

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general health: Severe scarring and chronic infections of the kidneys and urinary tracts are frequently found in circumcised women in adulthood (IPPF, 1993).

Female circumcision is only found in a few Arab countries - Egypt, Somalia, and Sudan. Reasons for the continuation of the practice include male fear of female sexuality, symbolized by the clitoris, which is a powerful factor in male-dominated societies; the belief that circumcision is a hygienic practice; male domination and the fear of an uncircumcised woman not finding a husband; and the fact that 'Circumcision' often derive an important part of their income from performing circumcision.

In Egypt in 1959 a law passes against all forms of circumcision. This made very little impact as it was not given high priority by the government, and no popular support was rallied behind it.

In 1985 an international conference on the status of women, held by Arab and African lawyers, also clearly called for the abolition of female circumcision. The United Nations Nairobi Conference on the Women's Decade passed unequivocal resolutions against female circumcision and suggested plans for action.

In this study an attempt is made to analyze women attitudes toward female circumcision in Egypt by socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, namely, place and region of residence, women and husband's educational status, work experience, age, ever use of family planning methods, and living daughters.

The data used in the study come from the 1991 Egyptian Maternal and Child Health Survey, which was carried out by the League of Arab States and the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics of Egypt (CAPMAS). In this survey all women aged 15 to 54 years old were asked about their attitudes toward female circumcision, whether they approve or not. Further question was asked about the reason of approval or disapproval. The responses on these questions are used in this paper.

II. RESULTS:

2.1. Approval and Disapproval of Female Circumcision:

As shown in Table 1, 90.8 percent of women approve female circumcision, while only 8.6 percent disapprove it. The percent approving female circumcision decreases in urban to 80.9 percent, while it is 98.1 percent in rural areas. With respect to regional variations, except Urban Governorates, the percent of women approving female circumcision are very high. It is about 100 percent in rural Lower and rural Upper Egypt, while it is higher in urban Lower than urban Upper Egypt (89.0 vs. 82.5 respectively).

The unexpected pattern of approval is found with respect to age. Young women are more likely to approve female circumcision than older women.

The higher the number of surviving daughters the higher the percent approving female circumcision. Women who ever used family planning method are less likely to approve female circumcision than women who never used, but the difference is somewhat small (88.0 vs. 94.7 respectively).

Women's education decrease their approval of female circumcision than husband's education. However the percent approving female circumcision still high for highly educated women (63.6 percent).

2.2. Reasons of Approving Female Circumcision:

The data presented in Table 2 show that about three-quarters of the Egyptian female approve female circumcision as a normal practice and not due to religious belief as it is expected. Religious belief ranked second. Only 17.6 percent approve female circumcision due to religious belief.

About 9 percent of women approve female circumcision because it is good for girl. Female circumcision is a woman's desire, not a husband's desire. Husband's desire comprise only 0.2 percent.

The percent approving female circumcision due to religious belief in urban is higher than rural areas, while the percent approving it as a normal practice is higher in rural than urban. With respect to region of residence, those who live in urban governorates and urban and rural Lower Egypt approve female circumcision due to religious belief more than those who live in urban and rural Upper Egypt, where the approval is due to considering female circumcision as a normal practice.

The percent of young women approving female circumcision as a normal practice is higher than older women, while the percent of older women who approve female circumcision due to religious belief is higher than young women.

The percent of educated women approving female circumcision due to religious belief is higher than less educated women who approve female circumcision as a normal practice is higher than more educated women. Husband's education follow the same pattern.

2.3. Reasons of Disapproving Female Circumcision:

Recalling that the percent of women disapproving female circumcision is only 8.6 percent. As shown in Table 3, the percent of women disapproving female circumcision because they believe that it is not good for girl is 87.8, while 4.3 percent disapprove female circumcision due to husband's desire. About 8 percent disapprove it due to other reasons.

Husband's desire is higher in rural areas than urban areas in both Lower and Upper Egypt. Less educated husbands are less likely to approve female circumcision than more educated husbands.

III. CONCLUSIONS:

An attempt is made in this study to analyze women attitudes toward female circumcision in Egypt using data come from the Egyptian Maternal and Child Health Survey, which was carried out in 1991. The conclusions of the study can be summarized in the following points:

First, 90.8 percent of women in Egypt approve female circumcision, while only 8.6 percent disapprove it. The percent disapproving female circumcision

decreases in urban areas to 80.9 percent, while it is about 100 percent in rural areas.

Second, Young women are more likely to approve female circumcision than older women.

Third, about three-quarters of the Egyptian female approve female circumcision as a normal practice and not due to religious belief as it is expected. Religious belief ranked second. Only 17.6 percent approve female circumcision due to religious belief.

Fourth, the percent of women disapproving female circumcision because they believe that it is not good for girl is 87.8, while 4.3 percent disapprove female circumcision due to husband's desire.

**Table (1)
Women Attitudes Toward Female Circumcision, Egypt 1991**

Background Characteristics	Attitudes Toward Circumcision			Number of Women
	Approves	Disapproves	Undecided	
<u>Place of Residence:</u>				
Urban	80.5	18.1	1.4	4094
Rural	98.1	1.8	0.1	5765
<u>Region of Residence:</u>				
Urban Governorates	74.4	23.6	2.0	1922
Urban Lower Egypt	89.0	10.2	0.8	1161
Rural Lower Egypt	98.2	1.7	0.1	3266
Urban Upper Egypt	82.5	16.8	0.7	1011
Rural Upper Egypt	97.9	2.0	0.1	2499
<u>Age of Woman:</u>				
15-19	97.7	1.8	0.5	385
20-24	96.0	3.3	0.7	1278
25-29	94.2	5.5	0.3	1801
30-34	89.9	9.2	0.9	1569
35-39	89.8	9.5	0.7	1648
40-44	86.9	12.2	0.9	1279
45-49	86.9	12.8	0.3	1111
50-54	86.8	12.3	0.9	788
<u>Surviving Daughters:</u>				
0-2	89.3	9.9	0.8	7515
3-5	95.2	4.5	0.3	2216
6+	97.7	2.3	0.0	128
<u>Ever Use FP Method:</u>				
Ever Used	88.0	11.3	0.7	6162
Never Used	95.5	4.0	0.5	3697
<u>Education of woman:</u>				
Never Went to School	98.7	1.2	0.1	5623
Went & No Certificate	94.7	4.4	0.9	1466
Primary/Preparatory	86.7	12.3	1.0	1034
Secondary/University	63.6	34.3	2.1	1715
<u>Work Status:</u>				
Ever Worked for Cash	77.4	21.5	1.1	2242
Never Worked for Cash	94.7	4.8	0.5	7578
<u>Education of Husband:</u>				
Never Went to School	98.7	1.2	0.1	3880
Went & No Certificate	97.4	2.2	0.4	1792
Primary/Preparatory	93.9	5.5	0.6	1536
Secondary/University	72.3	26.1	1.6	2550
Total Egypt	90.8	8.6	0.6	9859

Source: Calculated From the 1991 EMCHS.

Table (2)
Reasons of Approving Female Circumcision, Egypt 1991

Background Characteristics	Reason of Approving Circumcision					Number of Women
	Religious Belief	Normal Practice	Good for Girls	Husband's Desire	Other Reasons	
<u>Place of Residence:</u>						
Urban	20.7	66.0	12.8	0.2	0.3	3295
Rural	15.8	77.8	6.2	0.2	0.0	5653
<u>Region of Residence:</u>						
Urban Governorates	23.0	58.3	18.2	0.1	0.4	1428
Urban Lower Egypt	25.9	66.6	6.9	0.3	0.3	1033
Rural Lower Egypt	24.5	70.0	5.4	0.1	0.0	3206
Urban Upper Egypt	10.4	78.3	10.9	0.2	0.2	834
Rural Upper Egypt	4.4	88.0	7.2	0.3	0.1	2447
<u>Age of Woman:</u>						
15-19	13.0	80.3	5.6	0.8	0.3	376
20-24	16.1	77.3	6.4	0.1	0.1	1227
25-29	17.3	75.2	7.1	0.2	0.2	1696
30-34	18.2	72.7	8.9	0.1	0.1	1410
35-39	17.0	72.2	10.7	0.1	0.0	1480
40-44	19.1	70.5	10.2	0.1	0.1	1109
45-49	18.9	71.1	9.8	0.2	0.1	966
50-54	19.3	70.8	8.9	0.3	0.7	684
<u>Surviving Daughters:</u>						
0-2	17.9	73.0	8.8	0.2	0.1	6712
3-5	17.0	74.4	8.4	0.1	0.1	2111
6+	13.6	80.8	5.6	0.0	0.0	125
<u>Ever Use FP Method:</u>						
Ever Used	19.4	70.6	9.7	0.1	0.2	5420
Never Used	14.7	77.9	7.0	0.3	0.1	3528
<u>Education of woman:</u>						
Never Went to School	14.9	78.8	6.1	0.2	0.0	5553
Went & No Certificate	19.0	70.0	10.5	0.1	0.4	1389
Primary/Preparatory	23.2	65.5	11.3	0.0	0.0	896
Secondary/University	24.5	57.8	17.0	0.2	0.5	1091
<u>Work Status:</u>						
Ever Worked for Cash	19.9	66.1	13.6	0.2	0.2	1736
Never Worked for Cash	17.0	75.2	7.5	0.2	0.1	7173
<u>Education of Husband:</u>						
Never Went to School	15.4	78.0	6.2	0.3	0.1	3831
Went & No Certificate	15.4	76.0	8.3	0.1	0.2	1744
Primary/Preparatory	21.5	69.7	8.8	0.0	0.0	1442
Secondary/University	21.3	64.3	13.8	0.2	0.4	1840
Total Egypt	17.6	73.5	8.6	0.2	0.1	8948

Source: Calculated From the 1991 EMCHS.

Table (3)
Reasons of Disapproving Female Circumcision, Egypt 1991

Background Characteristics	Reason of Disapproving Circumcision			Number of Women
	Not Good for Girl	Husband's Desire	Other	
<u>Place of Residence:</u>				
Urban	89.3	2.6	8.1	741
Rural	76.7	16.5	6.8	103
<u>Region of Residence:</u>				
Urban Governorates	87.7	2.6	9.7	453
Urban Lower Egypt	95.0	4.2	0.8	119
Rural Lower Egypt	74.1	16.6	9.3	54
Urban Upper Egypt	89.9	1.2	8.9	169
Rural Upper Egypt	79.6	16.3	4.1	49
<u>Age of Woman:</u>				
15-19	100.0	0.0	0.0	7
20-24	82.9	7.3	9.8	41
25-29	84.9	3.0	12.1	99
30-34	91.0	4.2	4.8	144
35-39	89.8	3.8	6.4	157
40-44	85.4	5.7	8.9	157
45-49	88.6	3.5	7.7	142
50-54	86.6	4.1	9.3	97
<u>Surviving Daughters:</u>				
0-2	88.2	3.8	8.0	742
3-5	86.8	7.1	6.1	99
6+	0.0	33.3	66.7	3
<u>Ever Use FP Method:</u>				
Ever Used	90.1	2.4	7.5	696
Never Used	77.1	12.8	10.1	148
<u>Education of woman:</u>				
Never Went to School	58.5	32.3	9.2	65
Went & No Certificate	85.9	4.7	9.4	64
Primary/Preparatory	88.2	1.6	10.2	127
Secondary/University	91.1	1.7	7.2	586
<u>Work Status:</u>				
Ever Worked for Cash	88.8	3.1	8.1	482
Never Worked for Cash	86.5	5.8	7.7	362
<u>Education of Husband:</u>				
Never Went to School	58.7	34.8	6.5	46
Went & No Certificate	87.5	5.0	7.5	40
Primary/Preparatory	81.2	5.9	12.9	85
Secondary/University	90.8	1.7	7.5	664
Total Egypt	87.8	4.3	7.9	844

Source: Calculated From the 1991 EMCHS.

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