



“A Review of Female Genital Cutting in the Dawoodi Bohra Community: Part 3—the Historical, Anthropological and Religious Underpinnings of FGC in the Dawoodi Bohras”

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Abstract

Purpose of Review The aim of this third review in a three-part series is to provide a contextual overview of the historical, anthropological, and religious underpinnings of female genital cutting (FGC) in the South Asian and diaspora Dawoodi Bohra communities, a practice referred to as khafd (pronounced khafz).

Recent Findings Amatullah Burhanuddin, the wife of Mohammed Burhanuddin, the 52nd Da'i of the Dawoodi Bohras, wrote a guidebook comprised of four volumes for orthodox Bohra religious practices based on Al'Qadi al-Nu'man's work. A June 6, 2016, press release from the Bohra's central authority begins by explicitly supporting the practice of khafd, and then continues with the religious requirement to obey the law of the land where one resides.

Summary This review looks at FGC within the context of Islamic history, cultural anthropology and geography. It also looks at FGC in the context of the subjects of Islamic jurisprudence. Then, it reviews the Bohra religious foundation for the practice of khafd in terms of the clergy, texts, hadiths, and jurisprudence. Finally, current knowledge with regard to the rationale, timing, setting, and people involved with the Bohra practice of khafd are reviewed.

Keywords Female genital cutting · Khafd · Dawoodi Bohra · Islam

This article is part of the Topical Collection on *Sociocultural Issues and Epidemiology*

Preface This review is a series of three articles. There is a significant paucity of data with regards to FGC (khafd) in the Dawoodi Bohra community. In order to contextualize khafd, Part 1 reviews language including WHO terminology, genital cutting in Western societies, male circumcision, surgery on children with ambiguous genitalia, and clitoral hood reduction, and finally FGC in Southeastern Asia. In Part 2, there is an overview of Bohra culture, marriage, and sexuality in Bohra women; review of studies and testimonies on the practice of khafd in Dawoodi Bohras; and a review of the pertinent legal cases involving FGC. In Part 3, the history, cultural anthropology, and geography of FGC in the Islamic context and the religious motivation amongst Dawoodi Bohras for practicing khafd are reviewed.

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Introduction and Background

Two hundred million women have been affected by FGC worldwide [1]. Today, FGC is practiced by some African Christians, some African tribal communities, and some Muslim communities in Africa, Georgia, Russia, Colombia, South and Southeast Asia, and the Middle East [2].

The exact origins of FGC are unknown. Historically, the practice predates Christianity and Islam and Judaism. Islam was revealed to the world by the Prophet Mohammad around 600 CE. Many Islamic practices can be found prior to 600 CE as well as in other religions, such as covering the head with a hijab, also found in Orthodox Judaism and Catholicism.

The earliest recorded examples of FGC are from Egypt. Mary Knight describes Greek hieroglyphs on a sarcophagus from around 163 BCE that show a woman getting circumcised [3]. FGC appears to have originated in ancient Egypt and then spread around the Red Sea by Arab traders, through the African slave trade [4]. FGC became a critical

socio-cultural norm for women’s marriage, inheritance of property, and social acceptance in ancient Egypt.

Methods

The Dawoodi Bohra website <https://www.thedawoodibohras.com/> was explored regarding the origins of the religion. Hadiths referencing circumcision were reviewed from the *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures* as well as online essays and blogs including WikiIslam. FGC prevalence studies (Table 1) were reviewed from *The Orchid Project*, Cappa et al. from *Global Public Health* journal, and Wikipedia. Sermons and public comment on FGC from the religious leader of the majority of Dawoodi Bohras is reviewed. The text in the Bohra religious guidebook Volume 3 referencing circumcision is reviewed.

There is very little information available other than studies prepared by advocacy organizations or individual testimonials on the practice of khafd in the Bohra community. The author conducted a small focus group discussion amongst self-identified Bohra women that allowed the women to discuss their feelings, memories, and experiences related to khafd in a safe space in March 2018. Due to the sensitive nature of this

topic, no details and no participant information can be shared, and none are included in this paper. It merely provided context from which the author further explored the topic. Published and unpublished studies and Islamic studies textbooks that were accessible to the author were reviewed for this paper. Gray literature including online forums and newspaper articles were reviewed on this topic. The author also drew upon a dialogue with many individuals including: religious scholars who are part of the mainstream following, religious scholars who have broken from mainstream following, leaders of advocacy groups including Sahiyo and DBWRF, and many Bohra women who follow with varying levels of orthodoxy.

Results

FGC in Islamic Jurisprudence

When looking at FGC in Islam, it is important to look at all schools of Islam. Within the Sunni subsets of Hanafi and Maliki, FGC is obligatory for men and recommended for women. Within the Sunni Shafi’i school, it is obligatory for both men and women. Within the Sunni Hanbali sect, some consider it obligatory for both men and women; others

Table 1 Historical vs. current prevalence of FGC by country and jurisprudence [1, 6•, 18, 19, 20]

Islamic jurisprudence (subjects arose 750 CE)	Countries	Historically FGC commonly practiced after 800 CE	Current prevalence of FGC in women age 15 to 49*
Sunni Maliki (FGC permissible)	Tunisia	No	None reported
	Morocco	No	None reported
	Algeria	No	None reported
Sunni Hanabali (FGC recommended)	Syria	No	Anecdotal reports
Sunni Hanabali (Wahabi) (FGC recommended)	Saudi Arabia—predominantly Hanabali but mixed	No	Reports amongst migrants and along southern border shared with Yemen **
Sunni Shafi’i (FGC obligatory)	Sudan	Yes	86%
Sunni Shafi’i (FGC obligatory)	Indonesia	No***	49%****
	Malaysia	No***	Unknown—small scale studies suggest > 50%
Mixed sects	Egypt	Yes	87%
	Yemen	Yes	18.5%
Shia (FGC recommended)	Iraq	No	8%
	Iran	No	Unknown—small scale studies suggest > 50% amongst minority Sunni Shafi’i populations

*Where statistical data available it is utilized, otherwise estimates used based on the Orchid Project [1, 2]

**According to the Orchid Project, there could be a possible rise in practice as increasingly some Sheikhs are supporting the practice in Saudi Arabia [14]

***Shafi’i missionaries to Southeast Asia came from India, Persia, and Southern Arabia. The timing of their arrival is debated but peaked around the fifteenth century. FGC was not endemic in Indonesia and Malaysia prior to the arrival of Islamic missionaries [19]. The practice of FGC was endemic in Southern Arabia from where some of the missionaries came

****Data only available from ages 0–14 [1]

consider it mandatory for men, and honorable for women [5]. Within Shi'a Ja'afari school of Islam, it is honorable for women, but not required, in contrast to Ismaili and Bohra subjects where it is required for women [6••, 7]. The hadiths that each subject ascribe to are different. There are major differences between Sunnis and Shi'as; each subject generates their jurisprudence and shariat practices from selection and interpretation of the hadiths.

FGC cannot be easily linked to just one school of Islamic jurisprudence. There are diverse attitudes within and between schools of jurisprudence. Some version of FGC is endorsed, either recommended or obligatory, by most Muslim jurists. It is not rejected outright in any of the hadiths. Islamic law, fiqh, cannot be translated into one standardized practice amongst all Muslims. Some Islamic scholars argue FGC is forbidden based on the Qu'ran's teachings of prohibiting harm to your family.

History and Cultural Anthropology of FGC in the Context of Islam

Though FGC is not unique to Islam, this paper is concerned with the social and cultural anthropology and religious principles pertinent to the practice of FGC within the Islamic Dawoodi Bohra community. The Fatimid Dynasty spanned across much of North Africa to the eastern side of the Red Sea, encompassing Mecca and Medina. This dynasty is of Arab origin and made Egypt its political, cultural, and religious center during its height in the tenth century. It is notable that FGC was endemic in this region [1]. Eleventh century Ismaili (Fatimid) missionaries from Egypt and Yemen came to India at the port of Khambat and sought converts to the Ismaili Fatimid faith [8]. From the eleventh to the sixteenth century, the Bohra Da'i al-Mutlaq was in Yemen. FGC is a culturally entrenched practice in Yemen [1]. In the 1500s, the Bohra headquarters moved from Yemen to Gujarat, India. Currently, about 80% of the community lives in India and Pakistan, but a Bohra diaspora reside in the Middle East, East Africa, Europe, North America, Australia, and other parts of Asia [9]. Dawoodi, Suleimani, and Alawi Bohras trace their religious heritage to Egypt and Yemen, where FGC was indigenous to the culture and all perform FGC.

In contrast, the Aga Khani Ismailis follow the same jurisprudence as Dawoodi Bohras, specifically the same book *Da'a'im al-Islam*, and also trace their religious heritage to the Fatimid caliphate where FGC was prevalent from the tenth to the twelfth century. However, the Aga Khani Muslims are of the Nizari Ismaili branch, and from the twelfth to the eighteenth century they were in Syria and Persia [8, 10••]. In the sixteenth century, Persia underwent a forced conversion from Sunni to Shia [11]. Aga Khani Ismailis did not arrive to India until the nineteenth century, so their missionaries to India came from Persia, which is predominantly Shia and did not historically practice FGC. Despite jurisprudence that parallels

the Ismaili Bohra Muslims very closely and shared religious heritage to the Fatimid dynasty, Aga Khani Ismaili Muslims spent about 600 years in Persia, prior to their arrival to India. The Aga Khani Ismaili Muslims, based on current knowledge, have abandoned the practice of FGC [8, 10••]. Their supreme leader also defines and dictates how the religion is practiced by the community, similar to the Da'i al-Mutlaq amongst the Dawoodi Bohras. The shared Islamic law, fiqh, between the two groups, with markedly different practices illustrate that Islamic law does not translate into definitive practice. It is subject to interpretation and selection by the religious authorities.

FGC is not explicitly stated in the Qu'ran. Within all four Islamic Sunni sects and Shia sects, hadiths mention and sanction FGC, Type Ia or Type IV, although FGC is not always described as obligatory [12]. The perpetuation of the practice has been identified in the Sunni Shafi'i sect, some of the Sunni Hanbali sect, and the Shi'a Ismaili Bohra sects [6••]. The Sunni Shafi'i school of Islam represents about 30% of the world's Muslims, residing in the eastern horn of Africa, Egypt, Yemen, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The Sunni Hanbali sect represents about 15% of the world's Muslims, residing in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and United Arab Emirates. The Shi'a Ismaili sect represents about 2% of the world's Muslims, residing in India, Pakistan, Iran, and Lebanon [13].

FGC was highly prevalent in ancient Egypt and the Nile Basin dating back to 160 BCE, and there is a high continuance of the practice in these areas such as Egypt, Yemen, and Sudan. Additionally, the Shafi'i subject's jurisprudence is followed in these areas and the Shafi'i school renders FGC obligatory as described by the thirteenth century jurist Al-Nawawi [6••]. As of 2016, more than 80% of Egyptian women and girls, sparing the northwest corner of the country, between ages 15 to 49, have had FGC [14]. Egypt is predominantly a Sunni Muslim nation and FGC was endemic before Islam and is still highly prevalent [2].

FGC does not appear to be indigenous to the Southeast Asian culture in Indonesia and Malaysia. From the eighth to the fifteenth century, Indian, Persian, and Arab merchants and traders propagated the Sunni Shafi'i Islamic subject in Southeast Asia. With the introduction of Islam, FGC also came to Southeast Asia in the thirteenth century. The Sunni Shafi'i school of Islam in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Malaysia endorse FGC as an Islamic practice so with the advent of Islam to this area, they also brought FGC [15, 16]. The Arab traders who came to Southeast Asia, came from the eastern and southern region of the peninsula, the Hadramaut region, current Yemen and Oman [17]. FGC is culturally entrenched in Yemen and Oman and continues to be practiced today and likely has had a strong historical influence on current FGC practice in Southeast Asia.

Islamic jurisprudence, fiqh, is normative and prescriptive texts, not descriptive, documentary style, nor historical

sources. Although it is possible with primary research, it is difficult to know how the different fiqh were practiced historically, prior to the rise of Islamic modernism and modern-day communications. The different jurisprudences found within Islamic subjects corresponds to practice patterns but does not translate into all Muslims in the region adhering to all of the practices outlined in their respective fiqh [6••]. The litterateur, Al-jahiz (d. 868 CE) notes in the *Kitab-al-Hayawan* “circumcision has been practiced among the Arabs on both men and women since the time of Abraham and Hagar up to our own day.” Male circumcision is attributed to Abraham and his covenant with god [6••]. Male circumcision is widely accepted by Islamic scholars as an Abrahamic tradition.

Hadiths and FGC

Hadiths are specific reports of the Prophet’s words and deeds that were witnessed and narrated a few hundred years later and then passed down orally. Religious scholars extensively study hadiths. The actual narration of the text is called *matn*. The *isnad* is the trail of narrators to support the authentic transmission of Prophet’s instructions over centuries. The authenticity of the *isnad* is classified as *mutawatir* or *ahad*. *Mutawatir* hadiths are considered fully authentic with multiple reporters from each generation whereas *ahad* hadiths, which are further subdivided, do not have this strong trail of narrators [21]. The pillars of Islam are based on *mutawatir* hadiths. Those who oppose FGC often point out that hadiths referencing female circumcision are considered weak or not fully authentic, but this is controversial [21]. For example, in the *Sahih-al-Bukhari*, which is considered highly authentic by Sunni Muslims, the human acts inspired by God are outlined such as removal of pubic hair and trimming mustache hair. Male and female circumcision falls under this category according to some, although not explicitly outlined [18]. Shia Muslims do not ascribe to this hadith as they followed the hadiths approved by leaders (Imams) from the direct bloodline from Prophet Muhammad. Another hadith from the *Sunan of Abu Dawud* references Prophet Muhammad telling a circumciser not to cut too deeply as this is more preferable to the woman and more pleasing to the man, but this hadith has a weak chain of transmission, therefore questioning its authenticity [6••]. Each school of jurisprudence will place differing weight upon various hadiths based on their belief system in scholarship and leadership beyond Prophet Muhammad.

Both those against the practice of FGC and those in favor of the practice of *khafd* have referenced the Qu’ran’s prohibition of harm to family members to support their viewpoint [22]. Those against FGC claim that women have experienced negative sequelae as result of the practice, whereas the activists in favor of *khafd* report it is a harmless procedure, and that it would not have been performed for centuries if it caused impairment [23].

Bohras Religious Foundation for Khafd

Sermons/Central Directive

There have been schisms within the Bohra community over the centuries. The most recent controversy is over the succession of the 52nd Da’i al-Mutlaq who passed in 2011. Most Bohras follow Mufaddal Saifuddin, the 53rd Da’i, who retains control of all community mosques and properties. But about 1,000 Bohras follow a different spiritual leader. Both of these groups consider themselves true Bohras. There is another group termed Progressive Bohras, who embrace the religious authority and status of the Da’i, but challenge the *Kothar*, or the clerical and political administration of the Dawoodi Bohras.

On April 25, 2016, Da’i Mufaddal Saifuddin commented on the practice of circumcision, saying, “In the man it is open, in the woman it is secret, but the procedure must be done” [22]. This sermon was leaked to the public, and not intended for public consumption outside the Bohra community. From a timing standpoint, it is noteworthy that in the months prior to this sermon, letters from the *dawat*, the central clerical hierarchy, were sent to all the *jamaat* communities globally, mandating that members of the community adhere to the laws of the country where they reside. This sermon and the central directives came on the heels of the conviction of three Australian Dawoodi Bohras. A parent, a nurse who cut the child, and a community member were charged with female genital mutilation (FGM) in March 2016, and incarcerated. There was increased media attention on the community. A June 6, 2016, press release from the Bohra’s central authority begins by explicitly supporting the practice of *khafd*, and then continues with the religious requirement to obey the law of the land where one resides [24]. In a press statement in May 13, 2016, the spiritual leader of a small minority of about one thousand Bohras also endorsed the practice of *khafd*. He, however, specifies the practice to be performed for women who “attain legal adulthood” at which time they can make their own decision to pursue a “medically, legally, and religiously sanctioned” procedure [25].

Texts

A Bohra text referring to FGC is the *Da’a’im al-Islam*, which was written in Arabic by Al’Qadi al-Nu’mān. He was an Ismaili jurist who died in 960 CE. He lived in Egypt and was part of the Fatimid court. Al-Nu’mān’s work is considered a central text of Fatimid jurisprudence. Amatullah Burhanuddin, the wife of Mohammed Burhanuddin, the 52nd Da’i of the Dawoodi Bohras, wrote a guidebook comprised of four volumes for orthodox Bohra religious practices [26]. In the third volume of the work, circumcision of both sexes is sanctioned.

“A child should not be kept without being circumcised,” she wrote. “[The] ceremony of circumcision of boys should be openly done....circumcision of boys should be done as soon as possible.” For girls, she wrote “[C]ircumcision should not be performed on girls before they reach 7 year...[During] khafz (reduction), the whole prepuce of the clitoris should not be cut, some should be left, by which her color remains more beautiful and she gets more [pleasure] when she is with her husband [meaning in intimate sexual act]” [27••].

Bohras and Khafd

What

Khafd is a religious act for Bohras and a social norm, and it has traditionally been performed very privately for girls around the age of seven. Given the traditionally secretive nature of the practice, it is difficult to obtain quality information regarding details. With regard to social pressure, the Bohra followers are expected to abide by rules stated by the religious clergy without exception. Followers who contest the spiritual leader or the dawat risk excommunication. Despite this, in 2015, an online petition on the website Change.org “Speak out on FGM” was started by women from the Bohra community that has pushed the topic into the larger public dialogue [28].

Why

The most common reason to practice khafd is a religious obligation based on shariat, according to both Ghadially’s informal poll of 50 Mumbai Bohra women and the “We Speak Out” study, which focused on 83 Bohra women and 11 Bohra men, predominantly from India [8, 22]. Respondents in both small surveys referred to Taharat, one of the pillars of Islam for Bohras, that refers to physical and spiritual cleanliness and purity [9]. Other reasons cited for the procedure included tradition, social pressure, and a goal of curbing a girl’s sexuality [8, 22]. The Ghadially poll reports some women believe it represents the attainment of the status of a Muslim, as circumcision does for men [8]. It is also considered a Bohra initiation ceremony and part of Bohra identity.

With regard to social pressure, there are often inquiries from the girl’s family members and community members on whether the child has had it done. Mothers are sometimes told their daughters will not be able to have a nikah, a Bohra religious marriage ceremony, if they do not have khafd. Women who support the practice of khafd feel it is a means to control their sexual urges towards men other than their husband, and these women view this in a positive light. One “We Speak Out” study participant referred to the prepuce of

the clitoris as “an irrelevant appendage” [22]. Women who were against FGC believe it was detrimental to their sexual pleasure. Many women did not use the word for clitoris, nor did they understand the function of the clitoris. Many of the women in the “We Speak Out” survey referred to it with vague words such as “skin,” “flesh,” “it,” or “that” or used language that connoted sin [22].

Srinivasan, a journalist, wrote about Bohras and khafd in a 1991 newspaper article. She highlights how the living situation affects the amount of pressure a family feels to continue khafd for their children. Bohras often live with extended families. Usually the elder women, and sometimes the elder men, demand strict adherence to customs. Multiple women have reported pressure from fathers or father-in-laws as well as elder women such as grandmothers to have khafd performed. It is easier for women who live independently from extended family to abandon the practice [29]. Many women deceive their families by lying about having the procedure done to preserve their family’s and daughter’s reputation and avoid shame. These women do not agree nor wish to subject their daughters to khafd but feel heavy social pressure to continue the practice [30, 31].

When

At the age of 7, a girl is nadan (innocent) and nasamaj (not capable of understanding) [8]. Shortly after the age of seven, khafd is performed by Dawoodi Bohras [27••]. Girls are told not to discuss it. Sometimes they are told a worm is being removed from their stomach. They are often deceived and told they will be getting a chocolate or a sweet. Some girls are given no information prior to the procedure [32, 33]. In the Australian case of two girls who had FGC, there is a transcript that speaks to the secrecy around the practice. The child states, “my mum tells me not to go around telling everyone that much.” The mother says “You told them everything. I told you not to say...We told you my child this is...big secret, never tell anyone” [34]. Adult non-Bohra women who marry into the Bohra community are asked to have khatna before marriage [8].

Who

Identifying who performs the procedure varies depending on the region of the world. In Sri Lanka, urban areas of India and Pakistan, and the USA, it is often performed in a medical or hospital setting under sterile conditions. One woman in Sri Lanka reported poorer families seek an Osthamaami who usually “nicks the clitoris...educated families get...lady doctors who cut off part of the foreskin of the clitoris” [35]. According to filmmaker Fathima Majitha, the osthamaami does not consider hygiene and sterilization is not mentioned.

Some women in her documentary reported Osthi Maami use their nails to nick clitoris [36].

Ghadially profiled a traditional circumciser. She had no formal education. Her grandmother performed khatna, but her mother did not as she married a more well-to-do man, so money was not needed. This traditional circumciser was widowed at a young age and had 3 sons to support. She gained permission from a clergy and performed circumcisions for nearly 35 years until her eyesight failed. The circumciser who was interviewed learned the practice from a woman who her grandmother had taught. She taught her 3 daughter-in-laws to carry on the practice with the clergy's permission. She gained the support and care of the community including food rations. Her equipment included a razor blessed by the clergy kept in a rusted box, a stone to sharpen the razor, small paper to wrap foreskin and throw it away, a box of indigenous medicine, and small cloths to manage bleeding. She reports that if the girl is cooperative it takes a few seconds but if the girl is agitated it takes several minutes. "Because of this practice, Bohra women, unlike other Muslim women, are permitted in cemeteries, mosques and can touch the stone of Kaaba in Mecca" [8, 29].

In Srinivasan's 1991 newspaper article, one doctor reports that it would be impossible to identify if a girl has been cut unless there is gross mutilation. Another Bohra doctor reported she performed the practice, although she was against it. She reports the skin removed is very small and the cut is often symbolic so the healing is fast, and the scar would not be visible. Dr. Zainab Cutlerywalla detailed complications she had encountered related to khafd, namely infection, swelling, severe bleeding, and shock. She details one case of a girl who refused to speak nor to eat for one week and ultimately was found to have had khafd one week prior. She describes extensive counseling and reassurance after which the girl returned to normal behavior [29]. There has been an attempt by Bohra doctors within the community to work with clergy to reform or to stop khafd but without success [8].

Role of Men

The role of men in continuing khafd is unclear. Per Ghadially, men in the community did not know about it [8]. Contrary to Ghadially's depiction of men, the "We Speak Out" study participants describe involving men in decision-making, the fathers often transport girls to where they have the procedure and pay for it [22]. Out of 385 Sahiyo respondents, 72% said men are aware of FGC, but this was in contrast to another question, which asked if men were told when a female relative was undergoing khatna, and only 27% told the men in the family [32]. It is certainly possible that the role of men has changed over the last fifty years.

Bohra Women Advocacy Organizations

As FGC has come into the public eye, advocacy groups have risen to end the practice as well as protect the right to perpetuate the practice. Mariya Taher and Aarefa Johari founded Sahiyo in 2015. The organization's mission is to empower Dawoodi Bohra and other Asian communities to end FGC and create positive social change through dialogue, education, and collaboration based on community involvement. They do not have an affiliation with the orthodox nor progressive Dawoodi Bohra community [37]. In India, "We Speak Out" was formed in 2015. Their mission is to work for equal rights for Bohra women in all spheres of life, specifically agreeing that FGC has no place in their lives, and they want it banned [38].

The Dawoodi Bohra Women's Association for Religious Freedom (DBWRF) formed in May 2017, has more than 70,000 members out of the estimated one million Bohras. Their stated mission is to stand for the rights of traditional Dawoodi Bohra women in India by ensuring that the freedom given to other citizens are not denied to them. They have developed a social media campaign to counter the advocacy efforts of more liberal Dawoodi Bohra women who wish to end the practice of khafd. They have testimonials from women who declare it was a harmless religiously mandated procedure that their mothers did to them, and they have had done to their daughters [39]. A very public dialogue about a once-private practice is now underway.

Discussion

Historically, FGC practices were perpetuated by groups who trace their religious heritage to places where it was indigenous to the culture and the local Islamic jurisprudence dictates FGC is an obligatory (not a preferred) practice [6••]. Nizari Ismaili Aga Khanis have similar jurisprudence, similar religious heritage, one supreme religious leader who they follow, and share the same primary text as Bohras, the *Da'a'im al-Islam*, but they migrated through Persia for multiple centuries, where they most likely abandoned the practice of FGC. FGC is not practiced by the majority of Shia Muslims in present-day Iran.

The central Bohra religious authority has remained relatively quiet on the topic. Sahiyo initiated a dialog with the clergy, but this was not sustained.

Given that FGC and male genital cutting or male circumcision is sanctioned and mandated by the Dawoodi Bohra faith and other subsets of Islam, involving religious clergy and leaders is likely to be more challenging than in communities who practice FGC more on the basis of tradition and culture. However, just because a practice is sanctioned or mandated by religion does not protect the right to practice it. Brian Earp gives compelling examples of an ultra-orthodox Jewish

practice Metzitzah b'peh which involves the mohel, traditional cutter, sucking the circumcision wound. In 2015 and 2016, this practice has led to the spread of HSV in neonates and death of infants undergoing circumcision [40]. The lack of data and research on khafd does not translate into it being harmless. This review shows evidence of psychopathology involving negative sexual and emotional impact on women.

Within the Dawoodi Bohra community the religious texts suggest it enhances sexual pleasure, and some women perceive this as an honorable rite of passage that helps distinguish them from other women [27, 31]. This highlights the importance of understanding the motivation and beliefs behind the practice specific to a particular community.

Conclusion

History, religion, and culture all influence a community's beliefs and practices. Trying to distill the Bohra community's practice of khafd as solely religious or solely cultural is inherently erroneous. There is clearly a genuine component of historical and cultural influence from the Fatimid caliphate in ancient Egypt. There is also a well-defined religious component that drives the practice of khafd in the Bohra community as outlined in this review. Neglecting the reality of both the historical and the religious influences on khafd will perpetuate the stalemate in dialogue that currently exists. Acknowledging both the cultural anthropology and the religious foundation of khafd will foster better communication between stakeholders and hopefully allow the dialogue to move forward.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest Yasmin Bootwala declares no potential conflicts of interest.

Human and Animal Rights and Informed Consent This article does not contain any studies with human or animal subjects performed by any of the authors.

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