

# Chapter 26: Male Inferiority and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

## THE BIBLE OF MALE INFERIORITY

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) refers to a range of harmful practices involving the partial or total removal of external female genitalia, or other injuries inflicted on female genital organs for non-medical reasons. These procedures, though deeply embedded in certain cultures, carry no health benefits and instead result in severe physical, psychological, and social consequences. FGM is globally recognized as a violation of human rights, affecting an estimated 200 million women across Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Asia. It leaves deep scars—both physical and emotional—and undermines the dignity and well-being of girls and women worldwide.

Historically, the roots of FGM run deep, tracing back thousands of years. It has long been associated with cultural traditions that prioritize control over female sexuality. Embedded in the fabric of patriarchal societies, FGM is often seen as a means to preserve chastity, ensure marital fidelity, and uphold family honor. While the exact origin of the practice is unclear, its perpetuation is linked to male-dominated hierarchies that aim to curtail women's autonomy, making FGM not just a cultural practice, but a powerful tool in the oppression of women.

At the core of FGM lies a fundamental issue of control—specifically, male control over female bodies and sexuality. This chapter explores how the practice of FGM is rooted in male inferiority: an underlying anxiety that seeks to suppress women's sexual autonomy and reinforce patriarchal dominance. By delving into the historical, psychological, and cultural dimensions of FGM, this chapter argues that male inferiority and insecurity about women's sexual power have sustained this deeply harmful tradition, ensuring the continued subjugation of women under patriarchal systems.

### Understanding Male Inferiority and Its Link to FGM

At the heart of many patriarchal practices lies a deep-seated anxiety among men about the potential power and autonomy of women—particularly their sexual power. This anxiety gives rise to what we can describe as male inferiority, a psychological state driven by a fear of losing control over women, both socially and sexually. Male inferiority is rooted in the belief that male dominance is fragile, easily threatened by female autonomy. In response to this insecurity, patriarchal societies have historically constructed systems that reinforce male authority, often by restricting women's freedoms and limiting their influence. Female sexuality, seen as a particular threat to male control, has become a key battleground in this struggle, with practices like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) emerging as one of the most extreme ways to suppress and regulate women.

The practice of FGM represents one of the most violent and direct methods of patriarchal control over women's bodies. Male-dominated societies have long imposed various forms of control over women's sexuality, from restricting reproductive rights to enforcing cultural taboos around sexual behavior. In many of these societies, women's sexuality is seen as something dangerous that needs to be curtailed in order to preserve family honor, maintain male authority, and ensure social stability. FGM, in particular, is a tool that ensures female submission, often justified as a way to guarantee chastity, prevent promiscuity, and secure a woman's "marriageability." By regulating women's bodies through such invasive practices, patriarchal systems create a tangible expression of male dominance, both physically and symbolically.

FGM serves as a tool of suppression by directly targeting women's sexual organs and, by extension, their sexual agency. The procedure is intended to suppress a woman's sexual desire, making her more "manageable" in the eyes of male authority. It not only robs women of sexual pleasure but also reinforces the notion that their bodies exist primarily for male approval and control. This suppression of female sexuality serves to reaffirm male superiority, as FGM ensures that women's physical and emotional autonomy remains limited. The practice sends a clear message that female sexuality is dangerous unless controlled and that women must conform to male-driven standards of morality and behavior. Through FGM, male inferiority manifests in the need to diminish women's sexual agency, reinforcing a societal structure where men remain dominant, and women are subjected to both physical and psychological subordination.

### **Historical and Cultural Justifications for FGM**

The practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) has ancient origins, with evidence suggesting it dates back thousands of years. It is believed that FGM began in regions such as ancient Egypt and Nubia, where it was initially tied to purity rituals, fertility practices, and the control of women's reproductive abilities. Over time, the practice spread across Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Asia, becoming deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of societies that valued patriarchal dominance. As these societies evolved, FGM was institutionalized as a way to control women's bodies, ensuring they remained submissive to male authority. The geographical spread of FGM reflects the influence of patriarchal norms that prioritized male control over female autonomy, particularly in relation to women's sexuality.

Religious and social rationalizations have played a significant role in perpetuating FGM, even though no major religion explicitly endorses the practice. In some Muslim-majority regions, for instance, FGM has been defended as a way to uphold modesty and ensure chastity, despite the absence of any scriptural mandate in the Quran. Similarly, in certain Christian communities in Africa, FGM has been linked to ideas of purity and family honor, even though it is not rooted in Christian doctrine. These religious justifications often stem from patriarchal interpretations of sacred texts, where male-dominated structures use religion to validate the

control of women's bodies. The association of FGM with religious morality, though unfounded, allows the practice to persist, as it is framed as a necessary part of a woman's spiritual and social identity.

In honor-based societies, FGM is closely tied to the concept of female purity and the preservation of family honor. In these societies, a woman's value is often measured by her perceived sexual purity, and FGM is seen as a way to ensure that women conform to societal expectations of chastity. By altering or removing parts of the female genitalia, FGM is believed to suppress sexual desire, thereby guaranteeing that women remain "pure" until marriage. This system is inherently patriarchal, as it places the responsibility for upholding family honor on women's bodies while granting men authority over their sexual behavior. Through FGM, women's sexuality is strictly regulated, reinforcing the idea that female autonomy is a threat to the social order. The practice serves to perpetuate male dominance by ensuring that women remain under the control of fathers, husbands, and other male figures, whose sense of honor and power is closely tied to women's subjugation.

### **Psychological and Social Impact of FGM on Women**

The consequences of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) reach far beyond the immediate physical effects. The procedure itself, often performed in unsanitary conditions and without proper medical care, can lead to severe infections, hemorrhaging, and long-term complications such as chronic pain, cysts, and difficulty with menstruation. Women who have undergone FGM often experience extreme pain during sexual intercourse and face heightened risks during childbirth, including obstructed labor, which can lead to maternal or infant death. The physical trauma is compounded by the psychological damage that many women endure, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The violation of their bodies at such a young age often leaves emotional scars that can last a lifetime, affecting their mental health, relationships, and sense of self-worth.

Beyond the physical and psychological trauma, FGM represents a profound loss of agency for women. It is a practice that is often performed on young girls who have no say in the matter, stripping them of control over their own bodies. This violation of bodily autonomy sends a clear message: women are not entitled to ownership of their bodies, which are instead subject to the control of societal norms and patriarchal structures. This lack of agency fosters a sense of learned helplessness, where women come to internalize the belief that they are powerless to change their circumstances. As they grow older, this learned helplessness reinforces their subordinate roles in society, as they may feel incapable of challenging the norms that oppress them. FGM, therefore, not only causes immediate physical harm but also instills a long-lasting sense of disempowerment that perpetuates gender inequality.

The long-term social consequences of FGM extend far beyond the individual women who undergo the procedure, affecting entire communities. Women who have been subjected to FGM often face significant

barriers to education and employment, as the physical and emotional toll can prevent them from fully participating in society. The health complications associated with FGM can lead to missed schooling, while the psychological impact may cause women to withdraw from social and economic opportunities. In many cases, women who undergo FGM are married off at a young age, limiting their ability to pursue education or careers, and perpetuating cycles of poverty and dependency. Additionally, the stigma and discrimination surrounding FGM can isolate women from broader societal participation, further reinforcing their marginalization. In this way, FGM not only suppresses women's individual potential but also hinders the development and progress of entire communities, as half of the population is deprived of the opportunity to contribute fully to society.

### **Global Efforts to Combat FGM**

Around the world, the movement to end Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) has gained momentum through a combination of international laws, grassroots activism, and efforts to shift cultural norms. These initiatives, driven by international organizations, local communities, and individual activists, work towards eradicating FGM and ensuring the protection of women's rights. While progress has been made, the fight continues, as the deeply ingrained cultural practices that support FGM require sustained and multi-faceted efforts to dismantle.

### **International Laws and Campaigns**

International organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the World Health Organization (WHO), and UNICEF have taken a strong stance against FGM, recognizing it as a violation of human rights. These bodies have launched widespread campaigns aimed at raising awareness, providing education, and supporting policy changes to combat the practice. The UN General Assembly passed a resolution in 2012 calling for the elimination of FGM, and campaigns such as the "Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation" initiative have sought to mobilize global action.

International legal frameworks like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child explicitly call for an end to harmful traditional practices, including FGM. These conventions place responsibility on governments to protect women and girls from FGM and to implement laws that criminalize the practice. While many countries have introduced national laws prohibiting FGM, enforcement remains inconsistent. International pressure has been crucial in holding governments accountable for implementing these laws, but the challenge lies in translating legal frameworks into real change on the ground.

### **Local Activism and Female Resistance**

At the heart of the movement to end FGM are the voices and actions of local activists, many of whom are survivors of the practice. These women have been instrumental in driving change within their own

communities, raising awareness about the dangers of FGM and advocating for alternative rites of passage that do not involve cutting. Grassroots organizations have played a pivotal role in community education, working to shift attitudes and challenge the deeply ingrained cultural beliefs that perpetuate FGM.

Female activists have often been at the forefront of resistance, using their own experiences to speak out against the practice. In countries such as Kenya, Somalia, and Sierra Leone, women-led organizations have created safe spaces for survivors to share their stories and heal from the trauma of FGM. These activists engage in dialogue with community leaders, religious figures, and families to educate them about the health risks of FGM and the importance of women's rights. By working at the grassroots level, they are able to confront the cultural norms that fuel the practice and slowly shift community perceptions towards gender equality and bodily autonomy.

### **Cultural Shifts and Male Accountability**

One of the most important aspects of combating FGM is fostering cultural shifts that promote gender equality and challenge patriarchal traditions. A key part of this effort involves engaging men and boys in the conversation about FGM, educating them about the consequences of the practice and encouraging them to become allies in the fight for women's rights. In many societies, men hold positions of power and influence within families and communities, making their involvement essential for lasting change. Without addressing the male inferiority complex that underlies the control of women's bodies, efforts to eradicate FGM will be incomplete.

Cultural shifts require challenging the very ideas that have long supported FGM, particularly the notion that a woman's value is tied to her sexual purity and conformity to patriarchal standards. Programs that involve men in discussions about healthy masculinity, gender equality, and the benefits of empowering women have shown promising results in changing attitudes toward FGM. Male leaders, both religious and political, are increasingly being called upon to publicly denounce FGM and advocate for its eradication. Holding men accountable for their role in perpetuating the practice is critical in breaking the cycle of gender-based violence that sustains FGM.

The global fight against FGM is a complex and ongoing struggle, requiring collaboration between international bodies, local activists, and community leaders. By fostering cultural change, educating both men and women about the harms of the practice, and enacting and enforcing legal protections, the global community can work towards a future where FGM is no longer a threat to the health and rights of women and girls.

### **Male Inferiority as the Root Cause**

At the heart of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) lies a deeply embedded patriarchal system that seeks to control women's bodies and sexuality, fueled by male anxiety and insecurity. Male inferiority, characterized by a fear of losing power and control over women, is a driving force behind the practice of FGM. By examining how male fear and insecurity sustain this harmful tradition, it becomes clear that FGM is not merely a cultural practice but a manifestation of male attempts to maintain dominance through the suppression of female autonomy.

### **The Role of Male Anxiety in Maintaining FGM**

FGM is fundamentally rooted in male insecurity about female autonomy, particularly in the realm of sexuality. In many cultures, the practice is seen as a way to ensure that women remain sexually "pure" and loyal to their husbands, controlling their bodies and desires. This anxiety about women's sexual freedom stems from a broader male inferiority complex, where men fear that women's autonomy could challenge or destabilize their dominance. FGM, by limiting women's sexual pleasure and ability to express themselves freely, becomes a tool for reinforcing patriarchal authority, keeping women in a submissive role while maintaining the illusion of male superiority.

Male anxiety around female sexuality often manifests in the need to control and regulate it. For instance, in many societies where FGM is practiced, there is a belief that women's sexuality, if left unchecked, would lead to promiscuity, dishonoring families and destabilizing the moral order. In reality, this fear reflects men's insecurities about their own power and their inability to control women without resorting to physical mutilation. The practice of FGM, therefore, is a symbolic expression of this male inferiority, seeking to "tame" female bodies and keep them in line with societal expectations that prioritize male dominance.

### **Comparing FGM to Other Forms of Gender-Based Violence**

FGM is not an isolated phenomenon but rather a part of a broader pattern of gender-based violence that stems from patriarchal efforts to suppress female autonomy. Similar to domestic violence, sexual harassment, and honor killings, FGM reflects a pervasive fear within patriarchal societies that women's independence, particularly in terms of their sexuality, poses a threat to male control. All these forms of violence share a common thread: they are mechanisms used by men to assert dominance and keep women subjugated.

In cases of domestic violence, men often exert physical or emotional abuse to maintain power over their partners. Similarly, sexual harassment and assault are used to intimidate women and remind them of their "place" within male-dominated spaces. FGM functions in much the same way—it is a method of controlling women's bodies to ensure they conform to societal standards that prioritize male authority. By comparing FGM to other forms of gender-based violence, it becomes evident that male inferiority and the fear of losing control over women are central to these harmful practices. Patriarchal structures rely on these forms of violence to

sustain the power imbalances that keep men in positions of dominance.

### **Breaking the Cycle**

To truly dismantle the practice of FGM, it is essential to address the root cause of male inferiority and the broader patriarchal systems that sustain it. Challenging the cultural perceptions of masculinity that drive men to control women's bodies is a crucial step in breaking this cycle. Educational programs that promote healthy masculinity, emphasize gender equality, and encourage respect for women's autonomy can help reshape attitudes and reduce the insecurity that fuels gender-based violence, including FGM.

Men must be engaged as allies in the fight against FGM, recognizing that the practice harms not only women but society as a whole. By promoting dialogue around the harmful effects of patriarchal control and the benefits of gender equality, communities can begin to shift away from practices that devalue women. Education is key to this transformation—teaching both men and women about their rights, the importance of bodily autonomy, and the dangers of adhering to outdated gender norms.

Breaking the cycle of FGM and other forms of gender-based violence requires a cultural shift that addresses the root causes of male inferiority and the power dynamics that perpetuate patriarchal systems. By confronting the deep-seated fears that drive men to control women's bodies, we can move towards a more equitable society where both men and women are free to exercise their autonomy without fear of violence or oppression.

### **Reclaiming Female Autonomy and Agency**

The fight against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) cannot be won without reclaiming women's autonomy and agency. Empowering women to take control of their bodies, lives, and choices is essential in dismantling the systems that have kept FGM entrenched for centuries. This reclamation involves a combination of education, cultural transformation, and the involvement of men as allies in the fight against patriarchal practices. To end FGM and other forms of gender-based violence, society must prioritize female empowerment, challenge harmful narratives, and encourage men to actively support gender equality.

### **Education and Empowerment of Women**

Education is one of the most powerful tools in reclaiming female autonomy and challenging the practice of FGM. When women and girls are educated about their rights, their bodies, and the harmful consequences of FGM, they are better equipped to reject the practice and advocate for themselves. Education provides women with the knowledge to make informed choices, understand the dangers of FGM, and recognize that their worth is not tied to outdated notions of sexual purity or submission. It also helps dismantle the culture of silence that surrounds FGM, encouraging women to speak out and share their stories.

Empowering women through education goes beyond simply raising awareness about FGM; it involves teaching women about their rights as individuals, their right to bodily autonomy, and their place as equals in society. Educational programs that focus on gender equality, human rights, and reproductive health can empower women to assert control over their lives and bodies, rejecting harmful traditions that seek to limit their freedom. Furthermore, when women are empowered, they can take on leadership roles in their communities, becoming powerful advocates for change and inspiring others to stand against FGM.

### **Shifting Cultural Narratives**

To fully reclaim female autonomy, it is necessary to shift the cultural narratives that have long supported the subjugation of women. Patriarchal traditions and values that uphold FGM are rooted in the belief that a woman's worth is tied to her sexual purity and her adherence to male-dominated expectations. These narratives reinforce male superiority and perpetuate harmful practices that deny women their agency. To eradicate FGM, society must confront and challenge these beliefs, creating new cultural narratives that celebrate women's autonomy, strength, and independence.

Shifting cultural narratives means changing how women are perceived and valued in their communities. Instead of seeing women as objects to be controlled or molded to fit patriarchal standards, cultures must embrace the idea that women are equal partners in shaping society. This shift can be achieved through education, storytelling, media representation, and the celebration of women who defy traditional roles. When women are portrayed as leaders, decision-makers, and agents of change, it becomes easier to challenge the patriarchal values that have sustained practices like FGM for generations.

Cultural transformation also involves acknowledging the role that traditions and rituals play in community identity. While FGM is often justified as a cultural practice, it is important to show communities that their cultural heritage can be honored without resorting to harmful practices. Alternative rites of passage that respect women's autonomy and celebrate their transition to adulthood without mutilation can help preserve cultural identity while protecting women's rights. By reimagining cultural practices in ways that uplift women rather than control them, societies can foster healthier, more equitable environments.

### **Men as Allies in the Fight Against FGM**

The eradication of FGM and the broader fight for gender equality cannot be achieved without the active involvement of men. Patriarchal traditions are sustained not only by women's submission but by men's complicity in these systems of control. For true cultural change to occur, men must be engaged as allies who reject toxic masculinity and advocate for women's rights. Men play influential roles in their families and communities, and when they speak out against FGM, they can help shift societal attitudes.

Educating men about the harms of FGM and the importance of gender equality is critical in dismantling the systems that support this practice. Men must understand that their sense of superiority is often rooted in fear and insecurity and that true strength comes from respecting women's autonomy. By promoting healthy models of masculinity that value equality, respect, and emotional intelligence, men can help break the cycle of male dominance and female suppression.

Involving men in discussions about gender equality and FGM can also foster mutual understanding and cooperation between genders. Men must recognize that women's empowerment benefits everyone—when women thrive, communities thrive. By advocating for women's rights and standing against harmful practices like FGM, men can become catalysts for change, helping to create societies where all individuals, regardless of gender, are free to live with dignity and autonomy.

Reclaiming female autonomy and eradicating FGM requires a multifaceted approach that includes educating women, shifting cultural narratives, and involving men as allies. By empowering women, challenging harmful traditions, and fostering gender equality, societies can take significant strides towards eliminating FGM and ensuring that future generations of women grow up free from violence and oppression.

### **Summary of Key Points**

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) represents one of the most extreme manifestations of male inferiority, a deep-seated fear and insecurity about female autonomy and sexuality. This practice, rooted in patriarchal systems, has been used for centuries as a tool to suppress women's sexual expression and reinforce male dominance. By physically altering women's bodies, FGM aims to restrict their agency, keeping them subordinate to societal structures designed to maintain male superiority. Throughout this essay, we explored the historical, psychological, and cultural dimensions of FGM, highlighting how male insecurity has driven the control of women's bodies and how this fear has been ingrained in social and religious norms. The fight against FGM requires a deep examination of these gender imbalances and an active effort to dismantle the patriarchal frameworks that sustain them.

### **Reflection on Ongoing Efforts**

While significant progress has been made in raising awareness, enacting laws, and mobilizing communities to fight against FGM, it is clear that the struggle is far from over. The deep cultural roots of FGM, combined with ongoing patriarchal traditions, continue to make its eradication a difficult challenge. Grassroots activism, international campaigns, and educational initiatives have begun to shift attitudes in many regions, but resistance persists in communities where FGM is still seen as a necessary rite of passage or a means of preserving honor. Recognizing the cultural, emotional, and social complexities surrounding FGM is critical in ensuring that ongoing efforts remain respectful, effective, and comprehensive.

## Call to Action

The fight against FGM requires sustained collaboration and commitment. Governments, activists, and communities must continue to work together to create policies that protect women's rights, enforce legal frameworks that criminalize FGM, and promote education that shifts cultural perceptions of gender and sexuality. Men must be held accountable for the roles they play in perpetuating patriarchal norms, while women must be empowered to claim their bodily autonomy and challenge the structures that have long oppressed them. By fostering a culture of gender equality, where both men and women are encouraged to embrace healthy expressions of their identities, we can ensure that practices like FGM are relegated to history. Together, we must promote empowerment, advocate for women's rights, and build a future where every individual can live free from violence, oppression, and control.