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A qualitative study of women's lived experience after de-infibulation in the UK

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Objective: To explore women's experiences of de-infibulation and it's after math.

Design: A qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with data collection via audio-recording and field notes. The audio recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) method for qualitative data analysis.

Setting: Recruitment for the study was carried out in an African Well Women Clinic in London, United Kingdom.

Participants: There were nine women participants of Somali and Eritrean origin who had female genital mutilation (FGM) type III previously and underwent de-infibulation between January 2008 and September 2009.

Findings: Key themes identified were the cultural meaning and social acceptability of de-infibulation; the consequences of de-infibulation within marital relationships; feelings about the appearance of genitalia post de-infibulation and thoughts on re-infibulation.

Conclusions: Marital factors and stability of the relationship influence the experience of de-infibulation. Those women who said they had discussed de-infibulation with their husband in advance, and that he had agreed to the procedure, reported less problems afterwards. Single women who had de-infibulation before marriage may face more difficulties in terms of social acceptability within their community.

Implications for Practice: Sensitivity to social consequences of de-infibulation is important as well as recognition that these consequences vary. When de-infibulation is carried out for medical purposes some women may appreciate the offer of an official letter from a health-care practitioner confirming the medical nature of the procedure. The data suggests that de-infibulated women may dislike the new appearance of their genitalia; therefore, the practicality of performing a concurrent minor cosmetic surgery with de-infibulation procedure may need to be examined. The need for further research conducted in women's primary language is pressing and should explore issues such as the situation of single women, men's knowledge of the complications associated with FGM and the benefits of de-infibulation for infibulated women.

Biography

Faezeh Safari is a Senior Midwife at King's College London-Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital, NHS Trust, London since 2003. She is currently practicing as a Community and Birth Centre Midwife. She has completed her BSc in Midwifery at Survey University in Iran in 1999. She has completed her MSc in Advancing Women's Health Care at King's College London University which led her to research and publication on women's experience of de-infibulation in the UK. She is a Member of the Royal College of Midwifery in the United Kingdom. She also worked as a Research Midwife in the Department of Maternal and Fetal Research Unit at King's College London. She is a strong advocate of midwives and natural childbirth. She is a mentor and sign off mentor for clinical practice of student midwives.

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