



The Lutheran World Federation/Department for World Service Eritrea Program

Hazards of Old Traditions

Because of the existing social traditions like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), many children in Eritrea are subject to physical and emotional suffering.

The prevalence rate of Female Genital Mutilation in Eritrea is 89%.

The Lutheran World Federation/World Service-Eritrea Program has been involved in implementing HIV/AIDS and Reproductive Health and Rights Education Project in Mai Edaga and Himberti villages since 2003.

Mrs. Rishan Bahta is 77 yrs old. She is a mother of 5 girls and 6 boys. She is a well known and respected circumciser in her village. She was very proud of what she was practicing until she was told what she has been doing is very risky and is a violation of children's right.



Mrs. Rishan Bahta with her granddaughter

She explained how she became a circumciser as follows: "I was only 15 when I start practicing circumcision. I have learned it from my mother. She

was a well known traditional birth attendant and circumciser. I used to help her since my early teenage years.

When my mother died I took over and started doing the same. I have done it for more than 50 years. Until very recently I was the only birth attendant and circumciser in the village. Many people from the surrounding villages also come here to get the service. On an average, I circumcise 2-4 children every month.

For many years I used a knife like sharp instrument to circumcise. That instrument was also used by my mother. When it become blunt I just use stone to sharpen it and clean it with kerosene. Unfortunately I lost it few years back. Lately I have been using razor blade. Some people bring with them new razor blades but if they don't bring one, I use mine after heating it and cleaning it with kerosene or alcohol, whatever I have at home.

I have never heard of any child who died as a result of undergoing circumcision. That is why the community respect me.

Now I am well informed about the consequence of circumcision. I have totally stopped circumcising girls. For your information, my granddaughter is not circumcised. But I am still doing it for boys with best care. I don't give the service if mothers don't bring with them a new razor.

My mother was giving this service for free and I continued to do the same. I have never taken money from the people. What I enjoyed is the respect of the community."

Since the start of the project in the two villages, significant number of circumcisers became aware of the consequences of FGM. Out of the 24 traditional practitioners 7 have totally quitted the practice. The remaining 17 also declare they have stopped but some of them found to do afterwards. As it has been practiced for generations it will require a good deal of time to stop it.