


The education as a tool to eradicate the female genital mutilation

La educación como instrumento para la erradicación de la mutilación genital femenina

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35622/j.rie.2020.04.008>

Recibido 08/09/2020/ Aceptado 20/11/2020

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

KEYWORDS

Education, genital mutilation, women, eradication.

ABSTRACT. This article was elaborated to illustrate the use of education as a tool to eradicate the female genital mutilation. The current text was structured doing an introduction about the theme, presenting results about general aspects of the female genital mutilation, the education as an agent to change societies and the educational process as a catalyst to eliminate such practice. Due to this, a qualitative documental investigation was constructed, concluding that this procedure brings physical and psychic consequences on women, and it is through the leaning that this reality can be changed to promote respect to the human rights.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Educación, mujeres, mutilación genital, erradicación.

RESUMEN. Este artículo fue elaborado con el propósito de ilustrar la utilidad de la educación como instrumento para erradicar la mutilación genital femenina. El texto se estructuró utilizando una introducción sobre el tema, la presentación de resultados con respecto a los aspectos generales de la ablación genital femenina, la educación como agente de cambios sociales y el acto educativo como catalizador para la eliminación de esta práctica. Para ello se construyó una investigación cualitativa de tipo documental, por medio de la cual se llegó a la conclusión de que el procedimiento aquí discutido produce graves consecuencias físicas y psíquicas sobre las mujeres, por lo que a través del proceso de aprendizaje puede cambiarse tal realidad en beneficio del respeto a los derechos humanos.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Educating, according to the Royal Spanish Academy (2014), is “developing or perfecting the intellectual and moral faculties of the child or young person through precepts, exercises, examples” (definition 2). Also, it should be noted that education "consists of preparation and training to inquire and search with wisdom and intelligence, increase knowledge, give sagacity to thoughts, learn from experience, learn from others" (León, 2007, p. 602). That is why, according to the previous statements, the educational process must not only be configured as a way to preserve academic knowledge, but it is also a tool to perpetuate social conventions, provoke paradigm changes, redirect inappropriate behaviors, protect the social heritage, comply with the purposes of the State, among others.

According to León (2012), “education seeks human excellence and happiness from an early age, and it does not end. It is permanent” (p. 4), which is why through its implementation the integrality of the human being is oriented towards potential. So, the educational act becomes an agent for the positive changes that are socially required. One of those changes that can be promoted is to achieve the protection of the most vulnerable human groups, because even when they are considered to be legally weak, education can initiate the redirection of perceptions that are held in different cultures, and it can even help to adapt legal rules to this purpose in a given territory.

One of the groups that have historically been minimized in different areas belongs to women. In fact, even in the current year, from reviews of the United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF (2020) considers that there are “many girls, teenagers, young people and women who are silenced or are made invisible” (p. 1) and It is also stated that when pursuing the equality of this segment, it refers especially to the equity that must exist in terms of the rights they possess due to their human condition.

As a matter of fact, by virtue of the preamble to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women developed in the United Nations, UN (1979) “the maximum participation of women in all spheres, under equal conditions with man, it is indispensable for the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace” (p. 1). For this reason, safeguarding the physical and mental integrity of women is essential to build a fair and balanced environment where everyone can freely develop personality.

However, in different latitudes of the world, threats still persist against women. One of these dangers is determined by the practice of female genital mutilation or cutting. Regarding it, the United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA (2019) has clarified that, among other reasons, it is due to cultural and sociological reasons, since “FGM is seen as part of the initiation rite that marks the transition from girl to woman and as an intrinsic part of the cultural heritage of a community” (p. 1), and it is because of this statement that education becomes a determining factor to act against the perpetuation of this custom and redirect a change of conception on that matter.

With the previous idea, it is pertinent to quote Hernández (2017) when he states that “education as a transversal factor that imprints all aspects of society and human activities is considered the best way to take that society to higher stages of development, democracy, solidarity and participation” (p. 1). Thus, it is understood that the advances of society are interconnected with educational change, and that is why their scope must be accepted when changing paradigms such as those connected to the practice related to this paper.

Also, it is worth asking ourselves: what is female genital mutilation (FGM)? What is the importance of eradicating this procedure directed towards women? How can education be a determining factor in stopping the practice of female genital mutilation? And by elaborating these questions, the purposes of the research carried out can be constructed.

The general purpose of this study was to illustrate the usefulness of education as an instrument to eradicate female genital mutilation. On the other hand, the specific purposes conceived of the text were: 1) To expose the consequences of female genital mutilation, 2) to establish the role of education in the redirection of social behaviors not adapted to the protection of human rights over women within the framework of female genital cutting and, 3) determine the role of educational activities to promote respect for the physical and mental integrity of women. This is the starting point of this investigation

2. METHOD AND MATERIALS

This article was made in accordance with the qualitative research paradigm, since the analysis of a phenomenon is carried out to understand it. Sánchez (2019) indicates that “research under the qualitative approach is based on evidence that is more oriented towards a deep description of the phenomenon in order to understand and explain it” (p.104). In this case, it is studied the role of education to eradicate female genital mutilation.

Based on the above-mentioned, a documentary investigation was constructed and enriched by secondary sources of information. Brito (2015) points out that "... the researcher analyzes the different phenomena of reality obtained and recorded by other researchers in documentary sources" (p. 8). Regarding its specific type, the support website for multinational companies QuestionPro (2020) calls it informative documentary research because "it is responsible for showing relevant information on a specific topic that comes from various sources without approving them" (p. 1). Besides, it is necessary to indicate that the bibliographic investigation of this article consists of the following: "Qualitative documentary research ... focuses your interest on the present or near past. Knowing a social and cultural phenomenon from written texts (for example, about the gender problem, one could study health legislation, the press, women's associations, etc..." (University of Jaén, 2020, p. 1).

In order to achieve these goals, techniques for document management and analysis were used, such as: documentary observation, underlining, in-depth reading and analytical summary. Besides, a critical analysis was carried out as a cohesion factor in the text.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

For the purpose of writing these lines, material was found for the exposition of female genital mutilation as a procedure that depends, among others, on cultural factors. The following is a schematization and explanation of the constitutive theoretical support found and collected to achieve the objectives proposed in this research.

3.1. Generalities of female genital mutilation

FGM "is a procedure that is performed on a woman or a girl with the aim of altering or injuring her genital organs without any medical reasons that justify it" (UNICEF, 2020, p. 1) and this action mainly consists in the absolute or partial removal of the victim's external genitalia. Regarding this practice, Ontiveros (2019) maintains that according to the United Nations, one out of every twenty girls and women has undergone this procedure, which is why an approximate 200 million of them have been affected by such situation.

According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, specifically the Office on Women's Health (2019), the prevalence of FGM "... tends to occur in parts of North and Central Africa, in the sub-Saharan region and in some regions of the Middle East and Asia" (p. 1). However, it must be clarified that as a consequence of global migratory phenomena, ablation has unfortunately been disseminated in different territories where there was typically no previous

record of major incidents. The World Health Organization, WHO (2020) estimates that “some forms of female genital mutilation are reported in other countries, particularly among certain ethnic groups in Central and South America” (p. 1), and also by the mobilization of people, there are references of women who have suffered FGM even when they are outside their countries of origin.

Even despite the fact that in Europe the practice of ablation is prohibited and penalized, there are references that “in Spanish health centers they have been detecting this practice for years to which girls are subjected due to social, cultural and historical pressures, when They return from their countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Asia” (La Vanguardia, 2017, 1). Thus, it is observed that because of the actions of customs in the villages, women can become victims of this type of socially preserved action despite the transfer due to migration, since families that have grown up with these beliefs perform FGM when visiting their original territories.

Besides that, girls and women of certain indigenous populations suffer of this injury. Telesur (2019) indicates that “according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Colombia is the only country in Latin America in which female genital mutilation is practiced, whose victims are indigenous girls (p.1). Tobella (2015) clarifies about this illustration that it is the Embera-Chamí ethnic group that supports this practice in a cultural way because it considers the woman's body as an almost sacred space, so various cases of damage caused to members of this group have been documented. As it can be seen, this procedure is more widespread than is commonly believed. Also, FGM can be categorized like this:

- Type I: Partial or total resection of the clitoris and / or foreskin (clitoridectomy).
When it is important to distinguish between the main variations of type I mutilation, the following subdivisions are proposed: type Ia, resection of the hood or foreskin of the clitoris only; type Ib, resection of the clitoris with the foreskin.
- Type II: Partial or total resection of the clitoris and labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora (excision).
When it is important to distinguish between the main documented variations, the following subdivisions are proposed: type IIa, resection of the labia minora only; type IIb, partial or total resection of the clitoris and labia minora; type IIc, total or partial resection of the clitoris, labia minora, and labia majora.
- Type III: Narrowing of the vaginal opening with the creation of a seal by cutting and repositioning the labia minora and / or majora, with or without excision of the clitoris (infibulation).

Type IIIa, resection and repositioning of the labia minora; type IIIb, resection and repositioning of the labia majora.

- Type IV: All other harmful procedures of the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, such as puncture, perforation, incision, scraping or cauterization (WHO, 2020, p. 1).

Female genital cutting produces consequences for its victims. According to López (2015), there is a range of damages that this procedure entails and among them are the following:

- a) Immediate complications such as fractures, organ injuries, hemorrhages and infections.
- b) Late incidents such as tetanus, hepatitis or HIV, in the same way that it generates more intense menstrual pain, cysts, fistulas or retention of menstrual waste.
- c) Death and perinatal death of one or two people in proportion to 100.
- d) Lack of greater elasticity at the time of giving birth.
- e) Psychological trauma regarding rejection of their own ethnicity, sexuality or body. Women who are subjected to this practice can still develop depressive behavior, episodes of night terrors. Mothers who promote the procedure on their daughters can develop guilt patterns.

For all the reasons stated above, UNICEF (2020) considers that FGM is a violation of human rights in the international field. It is for this reason that for its eradication, society can use education as a channel to raise awareness about the implications of this phenomenon.

3.2. Education as a tool to redirect behaviors

According to Rodríguez (2011) “teaching is a cultural process. In this sense, the actions that take place within this process respond to cultural assumptions that shape the predefined objectives that mark the content...” (p. 53). In this way it is observed that in the educational act, culture is decisive and at the same time, conditions it.

Education is a way of preserving social customs and conventions, but at the same time it represents a practice that can generate positive changes. As Arciga indicates (2007) “once teaching is understood as a kind of praxis, the responsibility to teach is a moral obligation that requires more than technical knowledge” (p. 86) and this is due to the fact that according to the knowledge that society helps to build, it can evolve or degenerate.

Based on the orientation in values that should be promoted in the educational action, it is assumed that redirecting inappropriate behaviors would translate into their duty to be, which Albornoz (1997) defines as “what can be expected or required to happen based on certain norm to



which validity is recognized” (p. 37). In this case, the guideline should be respect for the rights of other people, specifically women.

Rodríguez-Mena and García (2003), estimate that educational institutions must adapt “from a means to reproduce society, to a lever for social change” (p. 318). In that channel to generate modifications, different factors converge that, through their combination, produce such a consequence. UNICEF (2020) indicates that planning, adequacy of resources, pedagogical aspects, the teacher, the administrative staff and curricular cuts converge here.

It can be said that all these facts imply a kind of symbiotic relationship because "on the one hand, education collaborates in the growth of society and society also contributes to the education of the child" (Fernández, 2014, p. 1). In other words, one element feeds the other. Thus, it is understood that the contents that are provided or the competences promoted constitute a way of conditioning the social scaffolding and in the same way the latter leads to what it is desired to teach. Society is a “natural or conventional grouping of people, they are a different and superior unit than that of its individual members, which, with the cooperation of its members, fulfills a general purpose, of common utility” (Ossorio, 1998, p. 931) and for this reason, the learning that is promoted helps it to evolve or stagnate.

Education goes hand by hand with society because it is a right, which was found in Bou Franch (2003), is included in various international instruments through the agreements that govern the nations that sign them. Just to name one example, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations, UN (1948) it is stipulated in its article 26.2 that “education will have as its objective the full development of the human personality and the strengthening of respect to human rights and fundamental freedoms; it will favor understanding, tolerance...” (p. 5). Education is therefore, legally, a catalyst for the promotion of fundamental rights.

Also, in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the UN (1966), establishes in its article 13.1: “The States Parties to this Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education should be oriented towards the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity” (p. 7). This is related to the topic of this section because legal norms regulate the behavior of humans in society, so with these guidelines the role of education as a promoter of decency within the different communities is consolidated.

To comply with these legal mandates, those who participate in the educational act must be clear about the importance that lies in it because it conditions people. This implies that what arises

in academic institutions is crucial to consolidate any social practice, which according to Núñez (2000) "summarizes the problems of man and the world in the current degree of evolution of human history and thought" (p. 14), so that it can be redirected in terms of its negative elements while, on the other hand, the positive ones are reinforced, as long as education fulfills its goals.

Awakening people's conscience is decisive if we want to cause changes in how their actions can modify the surrounding world and that is why "in social psychology it is clearly established that the sense of individual responsibility of a person for a negative action ... can be reduced considerably when several people participate in it" (Olweus, 1998, p. 64). In this way, it is understood that the perceptions that each of the people have, can change in a positive way if the system (such as the educational system), collaborates for this, because important cultural transformations can be caused that go in favor of respect for human rights.

Not in vain Alfaro (2000) notes that "from a renewed and current pedagogical perspective, teaching is a process whose fundamental purpose is to support and guide student learning through the cognitive mediation that the teacher must carry out" (p. 9), while Camps and Giner (2000) clarify that "the ethical basis of coexistence is the precept 'do not do to others, what you do not want them to do to you'" (p. 25). With this, it is observed that teaching action is crucial to channel inappropriate behaviors and if in its function it inculcates that it is necessary to treat peers equally, changes can be promoted from the school or university outside of them for the sake of replication of that maxim.

For Díaz-Aguado and Medrano (2000), it is necessary to promote "a comprehensive education such as that proposed through...curricular cuts" (p.9), since they are an instrument to channel values. Also, Lucini (2000) states that due to the importance that these cross-cutting themes also have, they entail "the great challenge of the development of humanism, that is, in being able to provide humanistic content to the globality of our educational projects" (p. 13). For these reasons, to generate beneficial behavior changes for society from a citizen perspective it is convenient to combine the work between the State (through the promotion of a curriculum fed by transversal topics in values) and human resources.

Hicks (2000) establishes that "learning must be linked to the vital force of the learner places personal development at the core of the curriculum" (p. 45), so that if in the pedagogical act they collaborate in a combined way protagonist along with others, the genesis of a culture in positive values of respect for others could be more effective. These factors can accelerate positive social mutations from school and also from higher education, because as Santos (2000) points out, "the

University can press and know the course of educational action in Centers and classrooms” (p. 16), apart that within its spaces future professionals are trained and they will have the responsibility of guiding children, adolescents and adults in the framework of civics.

In the case of this article, the study of the use of education to eradicate FGM was proposed, since it is a form of violence that should not exist in a globalized society such as that of the 21st century in which there is defense of human rights, since according to Cruz (2000) “violence is disproportion in the relationships that the human being maintains with himself and with the other” (p. 142). Therefore, it must be understood that to achieve balance in social treatment, the integrity of everyone must be respected regardless of their sex, sexual orientation or identity, creed, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, physical condition, age, ideology, among others differentiating aspects. This is crucial for this text because "today there is a new confidence in the ability of education to fight discrimination" (Díaz-Aguado, 2000, p. 15) and in this sense, it ideally strengthens respect for the female conglomerate.

The educational process can help to redirect inappropriate behaviors and even collaborate with the modification of social structures or normative systems in the countries, so that when correctly applied it enhances social achievements. That is why it should be considered that "many of us are faced with unexpected changes that represent an opportunity to transform and improve our living conditions" (Sepúlveda, 2005, p. 103), and thus it is understood that such reconditioning is possible from the classroom and the same is necessary to break with old schemes that do not contribute to human development.

3.3. Education as a determining factor for the elimination of female genital mutilation

Education can bring changes about the conception of the female genital cutting around the world and many texts concrete facts that have been carried out to this goal. UNICEF (2019) maintains that the role of the State is fundamental to achieve the expansion of the culture against the application of FGM and thus indicates that “in order to be effective, the plans must include budget items for comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, education, social and legal assistance”(p. 1). So, the process from institutions such as schools and universities must start, according to the resources provided in the State, initiating transitions within the same learning process, because in this way the necessary paradigm modification occurs and in the same way, the Legislators having knowledge on the subject, can adapt the legal systems that protect women to combat this scourge. It is also important that societies are aware of the consequences of this

practice, therefore the replication of information is decisive to achieve it. López (2018) has written that:

The associations that fight against FGM / C coincide in pointing out which is the most effective weapon for its eradication: the education of women (since it is, they who carry out FGM), of families and of health and social agents. In short, the education of the whole society (p. 1).

A tangible example of the above is the statement by Vicente (2019), who points out that in places like Kenya, programs to raise awareness about this problem as well as the distribution of anti-ablation combos, symbolic acts, among others, have served to mitigate the practice. Even the club-forums for women have been crucial in this African region, since they discuss the adverse effects of FGM and this has led to some potential victims who have strongly opposed having the procedure performed. In fact, it is known that in Kenya, "the power of books and education has contributed...to reduce ablation and child marriages, practices still present in some tribes such as the Samburu" (EFE, 2016, p. 1) and because of that educational work is an agent for catalyzing important and historical changes.

The Apoyo Positivo Foundation (2016) considers that "the eradication of female genital mutilation and, therefore, the defense of women's rights and respect for their physical integrity, passes through legislating but also educating and raising awareness", being that such an assertion was made within the framework of the changes on this issue that have taken place at the parliamentary level in Africa. This is logical since nothing is done changing laws if people are unaware of their contents.

In European territories such as Spain, people have tried to implement protocols that promote a chain reaction to prevent the execution of FGM. Ramos (2013), when asking what is the solution to control this situation, watching the fact that migrants perform it when they go on vacation to their countries of origin, indicates that education is the answer in this way:

If we can convince adults of the terrible consequences that this practice entails for the health of their daughters, as well as of the possibility of substituting the ritual for one without violence, we will not only avoid that when they travel to their places of origin they do not mutilate the girls, but will spread that information among their African relatives (p. 1).

With these ideas, the government of Colombia has also used educational strategies to eradicate ablation in the Embera Chamí community. It should be remembered that there is great

"importance of working more on awareness...with courses that are taught to professionals and people" (La Vanguardia, 2018, p. 1) and therefore training human beings in this regard is crucial to achieve the goal to abolish FGM by the year 2030. From this country it is stated that "with the indigenous communities we are working so that they themselves, through reflection and dialogue, try to commit themselves to eradicate this practice that in reality does not give any benefit to girls"(RCN radio, 2018, p.1). For this reason, the Ministry of Health (2020) has been in charge of instructing the ethnic group about the falsehood of myths such as that of considering that clitoris can be lengthened to become a penis.

It is not surprising that against genital cutting "... experts only see one way. *Education, education and more education*. For women and for men. Also, for midwives and for local health personnel" (Martín and Pérez, 2020, p.1). As long as opposition to FGM is cultivated through different means, it will be possible in one way or another to witness the impact that the educational action has in the fight against the realization of this damage to adult women, teenagers and little girls.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Due to the purposes of this research, the following conclusions could be reached:

1. FGM causes physical and psychological damage that is difficult to reverse in women, so a practice for cultural reasons cannot take precedence over the fundamental rights of women.
2. Education is a way to channel inappropriate behaviors, so through its empowerment, the State will have in its hands a way to consolidate the culture of civility and empathy among the members of its nation.
3. The educational act can be decisive to eradicate FGM if, hand in hand with the legislative bodies, it is in charge of replicating the disadvantages of its realization, and favors through different channels and institutions the recognition of a true empowerment of women over their bodies.

It is also recommended that higher education institutions and schools organize courses, workshops, seminars, conferences and other activities, through which the general population is informed about the implications of FGM. In this way, a chain will be built to reveal crucial



information that helps to understand why this procedure should be suppressed. Research clinics and topics on the subject would also be helpful to achieve this goal.

Everybody must recognize the value that women have, because the stale structures that in previous centuries considered them as inferior have been demolished with the arrival of the 21st century in most of the planet. That is why her body cannot be taken as an object on which any mechanism can be applied to condition her sexuality or equality in society. If all people commit to put a grain of sand in order to avoid the degradation of women through archaic practices such as the one discussed in this article, there will be light on the shadows of ignorance and above all, of inequity. Fighting against FGM depends on the work of the State and educational centers, but also the citizens will have the responsibility of making this dream a reality as builders of the society.

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Conflicto de intereses / Competing interests:

El autor declara que no incurre en conflictos de intereses.

Rol de los autores / Authors Roles:

No aplica.

Fuentes de financiamiento / Funding:

El autor declara que no recibió un fondo específico para esta investigación.

Aspectos éticos / legales; Ethics / legals:

El autor declara no haber incurrido en aspectos antiéticos, ni haber omitido aspectos legales en la realización de la investigación.

