

ABSTRACT

Context: This study seeks to examine the relationship between female genital cutting (FGC) and the sexual behavior of women in Kenya and Nigeria. Although research evidence has shown that female genital cutting is a serious problem in many countries and needs to be eradicated, prevalence in many countries remains high. One of the reasons given for the continuation of this harmful practice, despite widespread global campaigns against it, is that it is deemed an essential aspect of grooming the female child in preparation for marriage. It is supposed to control female sexuality thereby ensuring that a girl remains a virgin until marriage and it enhances her chances of marriage. Little research has been carried out to evaluate how far FGC tempers the sexual behavior of women.

Methods: The study uses the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey of 2008/09 as well as the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey of 2008. The population being examined is sexually active women who knew about circumcision and were thus asked if they had been circumcised or not to which the response was either yes or no. The sample size for Kenya is 5 187 women while in Nigeria it is 12 253 women. The study hypothesis is that there is a difference in the sexual behaviour of women who are circumcised and those who are not circumcised. Multiple linear regression, logistic regression as well as Poisson regression were used examine the effect of selected predictor variables on sexual behaviour. The outcome variable is sexual behavior which was measured using age at first intercourse as well total lifetime number of sexual partners.

Findings: The study results suggest that there is no association between female genital cutting and the sexual behaviour of women in Kenya and Nigeria. There was no difference in the age at which women first engage in sexual intercourse and in the number of sexual partners for women who were circumcised and those who were not. Thus there is no scientific evidence that the practice of FGC could control the sexual activities of women.

Conclusions: Female genital cutting does not have any effect on the sexual behaviour of women in Kenya and Nigeria. There is no difference in the sexual behaviour of women who are circumcised and those who are not circumcised in both countries. This is an indication that FGC does not serve the purpose it is purported to serve and should therefore be eradicated.