

Former Somali circumciser promotes abandonment of FGM/C

Somalia has one highest prevalence rates in the world for Female Genital Cutting. More than 98% of Somali girls between the ages of 7 to 12 are cut. One woman, a former circumciser, tells of her decision to abandon the practice and instead, to advocate against FGM/C.

By Ahmed Aden Jama

After over twenty years as a circumciser, nurse-midwife Warda Abukor no longer circumcises girls.

A mother of eight, Warda lives in Jowhar, in the Middle Shabelle region in the south of Somalia. Though she stopped practicing the more extreme form of FGM/C (known as 'pharonic') in 2002, in the last three months she made the decision to stop the practice entirely.

"When there were complications in cutting I saw how much I risked serious prosecution. I understood that under Islamic law circumcisers are liable to pay the "dia" (compensation) if they perform infibulations. Although I also saw a change within the society - shifting from the worst form of circumcision to light type of circumcision - I decided to halt the circumcisions in the best interests of my children. I decided to work with others to challenge the practice: to take a stand"

Since that decision, Warda, together with her husband (who works at the local hospital) also resolved not to cut her six-month old daughter, the last of her three girl-children.



Instead, Warda now plays active role in the community to promote the abandonment of FGM/C. She helps to bring women and young people together to discuss social and development issues in the community. They explore different ways to halt the practice through word-of-mouth advocacy and the mass media. She also allows her home to be used by young people who are being assisted by UNICEF to improve their broadcasting skills, to show their videos and other development programmes.

This is quite an about face for Warda who used to enjoy some level of fame as a circumciser in her home town. "I used to get paid up to \$5 for my services although it was more about meeting a social responsibility than earning an income". Villagers and rural residents usually circumcise their girls in a group during the rainy seasons of 'Gu' and 'Deyr' which last approximately three months each. Said Warda, "Sometimes during those seasons, I used to circumcise an average of 35 girls per month. The rest of the year there may have been only one or two per month."

Now Warda strongly believes that circumcision is a violation of the rights of children that requires a lot more attention in Somalia, "It's an emergency situation," she says. "We must protect our girls because [FGM/C] not only causes serious medical problems but it puts at risk the girl child's life at risk."

Photo caption: Warda Abukor and her youngest daughter. **Credit:** UNICEF Somalia/2005/CSZoffice.

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