

Capstone Project

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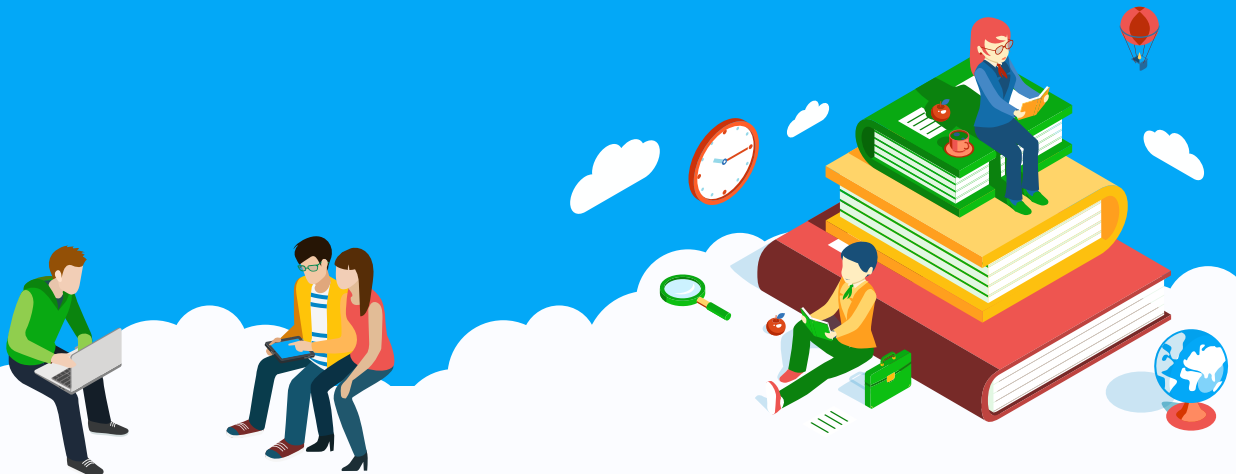


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Introduction

This Capstone project is based on an extended study and a critique of Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. This is an interesting novel which provides a discussion on issues focusing on the subjugation of women. In this novel, the writer focuses on the ritual carried out on females and the impacts on young girls. The story in the novel is based on a young African woman named Tashi who decided to undergo the right of passage, known as female genital mutilation. This woman is depicted to have two cultures: an African culture as a child, and an American or western culture as an adult. At an adult age she appears haunted by the things which she never did when she was young. It makes us wonder why she declined to take the practice when it was due as a young girl if she was real committed to her African culture as she appears as an adult. Nevertheless, her desire to do this practice at adult age shows that she has some cultural attachments to her ancestral traditions. The writer also examines the reasons for her decisions, and the consequences which emanated from it. One thing that comes out clearly is

the influence that a misguided loyalty to culture can have on the struggles to overcome a problem that is based on culture and traditions of a given community.

The consequences that befall her are real scarcely. Throughout her lifetime she struggles to overcome trauma which came as a result of her accepting to undergo this practice. Despite many attempts to make her regain consciousness, this psychological effect would not be cured even by the greatest mind like Freud and Jung.

Female genital mutilation is a right of passage among females, which entails cutting of the sexual organ and to close the vagina. This is a practice which varies across communities, but involves cutting some parts or the whole of the vulva and then sewing the female organ, leaving only a very tiny opening. Most communities practice this activity, in order to render any act of sexual intercourse needless and painful. The main aim of undertaking this practice is to discourage women and girls from having any urge of sexual intercourse with any person. The other reason is to provide the husbands with an opportunity to show their strength when having sexual intercourse with their wives. Therefore, the central theme of the novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* is the cause and consequences of female genital mutilation. This practice has been regarded by most communities as a right of passage, hence, it is a cultural practice.

The writer demonstrates how and why the practice is still prevalent in some communities, and how women allow their younger siblings to be mutilated. In addition, the writer also informs the audience how women carry out the activity for young girls who are brought to them. In addition, the novel also provides insights how and why the men's behaviors ensure that the practice is continued from one generation to the other. The author also introduces the readers on the physical and health implications of the practice of cutting the

female's sexual organ, as well as, other risks which are associated with the practice and the permanent damage it present to the health of females, even if the practice is conducted successfully. The author also describes the perceptions and feelings of women, by emphasizing that they are emotionally affected, since they often lock weeping young girls within their custody, since, it is the only way which the girls can survive.

Types of FGM

There are three types of female

1. Genital mutilation: clitoridectomy, the partial or whole removal of the clitoris in which the bleeding is stopped with pressure or a stitch
2. Excision, where both the clitoris and the inner lips are amputated and the bleeding is stopped with stitching
3. Infibulation, the removal of the whole clitoris and some or all of the labia minora. Infibulation also includes incisions in the labia majora, done to create raw surfaces, which are either stitched together or kept in contact by tying the legs together as they heal until a "hood of skin" covering the urethra and most of the vagina appears.

Cultural belief of FGM

The cultural practice is performed by some communities who believe it reduces a woman's sex drive in order to prevent or lower the sexual desire of girls and women and preserve their "sexual honor" before marriage.

FGM is continually practiced and accepted by the victims regardless of its medical and psychological complications. It is believed to promote cultural, educational, social, moral, and religious cohesiveness among the members of

the communities where it is practiced and plays a major role in initiating individuals to adulthood. These beliefs compel those otherwise wishing to elude the practice to accept to undergo the painful ritual practice for fear of becoming an outcast in a community and thus suffer the consequences of rejection throughout lifetime.

Consequences of FGM

FGM practice poses several health concerns immediately or afterwards. The immediate FGM consequences include severe pain to the victim, infections due to the use of unsterile gadgets and conditions, waves of pain when urinating caused by the damage to the urethra or anus, which may be caused by an inexperienced circumciser or sudden movements by the girl due to pain and fear, it also causes trauma to the victim.

Several health issues can arise after the circumcision. Intercourse is difficult to achieve for many couples. These complications are especially escalated in the case of infibulation. The possibility of hemorrhage is greater and, because the wound area is so much larger, so is the risk of infection and abscesses. Urine retention is also common since the skin is stitched over the urethra more. Long-term effects can include "sexual frigidity, genital malformation, delayed menarche, chronic pelvic complications, recurrent urinary retention and infection, and an entire range of obstetric complications"

Historical context

Female circumcision is a phenomenon throughout human history and existence. However, there is no clear evidence as to the exact origin of the act. However, there are myths which state that the practice began way back in

ancient Egypt and spread to Somalia. Other stories suggest that female genital mutilation originated as an old Africa rite of passage to puberty that was adopted in Egypt by discussion, and developed independently in different parts of the world at various times in history. Many societies considered the female genitalia to be unclean and deformed, while other communities considered it to be monstrous. In some societies, female genital mutilation is considered as a pre-marital rite for women. Female circumcision, commonly referred to as female genital mutilation (FGM) is a cultural female initiation ceremony commonly practiced by several communities in 28 countries in western, eastern, and north-eastern Africa, in parts of the Middle East, and within some immigrant communities in Europe, North America, Australasia. It is estimated that 100–140 million women and girls around the world have experienced the procedure, including 92 million in Africa. FGM procedures involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

Despite the fact that female genital mutilation is associated with Africans, it exists in many countries, while other societies consider it as an offering to God, in order to ensure a state of purity. In addition, the practice can be traced back in the history of ancient Rome where it was commonly practiced by the slaves to prevent them from becoming pregnant by placing one or more rings on their labia majora. The practice is also prevalent in other parts of the world, such as, U.K where it is practiced by physicians to treat female deviances, such as, masturbation, lesbianism, as well as, hysteria.

In most nations, female genital mutilation is a practice conducted as a result of customary practices, religious practices, or as a traditional rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. However, there have been efforts to eradicate the practice with suggestions being made that females have a right to make a decision on the matter. The major obstacle is that even if a true choice is allowed, there are hindrances such as pressure, age-old belief systems, as

well as, the need to uphold the family honor, as well as, the fear of rejection which in most cases compel women to submit to the practice. There are also instances where religion and influences the practice of supporting or condoning it.

Rationale

This is a practice that is so harmful to women as far as evidence is concerned from women who have already gone through practice. Despite so much information about the practice especially n how it hurts women, there are men and women who continue to perpetuate the practice. It will be unfair for rational human beings, not influenced by our cultural practices to keep silence from raising alarm at all times and places about this problem. It will be too much to assume that all people are aware of the extent to which this practice hurts women. This is because there are differences in literacy levels globally from one community to another. The value attached to education is not similar across all the communities in the world. It is important to provide a systematic source of information which can be made available to people with low literacy levels, written in a simple way they can understand. This critique will provide a simple structured option which individuals who have the passion to end this practice can use.

Goals and Objectives

The objective of this study is to obtain enough information which can help in advising policy makers and advocates of women rights on the best approach they can use in fighting this painful practice. This is going to be achieved through several specific objectives.

1. To demonstrate the reasons behind the perpetuation of this practice
2. To explain the side effects of this practice
3. To describe factors which are important in fighting this practice with a high degree of success

Statement of Purpose Literature Review

This literature review will contribute to generating more information on the topic of female genital mutilation. Its great contribution will be enhanced understanding of the historical traditional aspect of this practice and the best way to handle these cultural dimensions of the problem. The literature further explores the dilemma women find themselves in when they feel so much under pressure to undergo this practice despite their understanding of the hurt it causes them. Once these dilemmas are understood it will be easier to help these women deal with them.

Discussion

In a period when talk on female mutilation isn't common in many countries this book provides continuous means of awakening interest and reminding both individuals and their leader that this problem exists and a permanent solution need to be found. Although there is so much available about this practice, there is so little that is going on to discourage this practice. There is so much politics in the minds of many people and as the world becomes a global village, it is so easy for people to be interested in political debates on events happening in several countries until they forget the present issues affecting their own countries. Many times the things that people give so much focus to are not even relevant to any one or to the country.

This piece of information provides enough evidence for people who may not have undergone through the practice physically to use in defending their cause against it. The setting is in an African country, and the focal person is an African lady. The events which she goes through her mind and life as well communicate so much what it means to go through the process in reality. There are many African women who advocate for the practice by calling it female circumcision so that it doesn't appear what truly it is. This experience truly illustrates so much that the practice is really a mutilation act on a woman. When the advocates of the act speak so much good about it, it can make those who are against and have never gone through it appear naïve and ignorant. However, such an encounter which appears as true as it is, is indeed a wonderful evidence against the practice. It would be easier for those women who have gone through the process to come out and speak what they generally feel about it and open debate on whether it should be continued or not, based on the traditional reasons associated with it. It would be easy to conclude against this practice if there were other sources of information from different settings where this practice is promoted.

Loyalty to Culture

While it may not be a bad thing to be committed to sustaining one's culture, it is important to be informed on how worthy such a move is based on its benefits and demerits. The Western culture is associated with many of the moral problems which many countries face. As a solution governments and community leaders might encourage their people should become faithful to their culture. One of the best option in dealing with this problem will be to clearly analyze the contents of any given culture and illustrate to people how much it will add to their lives if they became loyal to such practices. There is a big role of educators which must be played to make such an activity come out with success. In every community there are people who are not satisfied with following the teachings of their fore fathers blindly. Some of them challenge

these practices openly by living lives which are totally contrary with what is expected of them culturally. There are others who are not strong enough to come out and show their position this matter. Once education and advocacy programs are organized and necessary support be provided it is very much possible to secure the loyalty of these people to civilization. These are the people who must be given more insight in addition to what has already triggered their positions on this issues and with necessary support they will be able to assist others in their community to come out of such problems. The methods which will be used in training them as peer educators for their communities must be those which are scientifically sound and there is enough evidence that they can help achieve the objective of behaviour change through communication.

Unlikely Means of Cure

There are many interventions which have been put in place to deal with this problem in several countries where the problem is still present but to no avail. During her time, Tashi was treated by many great minds of her times but all were unable to give her back what she had lost through the trauma. While she was committed to her culture and subjected herself to a very painful process she was not able to convince herself that the practice was worthy the pain. There was no medicine which would cure her since her problem was due to unanswered question. The moment her question was answered through study of mythological explanation of the practice she felt relieved as she realized how foolish she and several other women and girls had been in following something they never understood its origin. It is important that both women and men who live in the 21st century do not honor cultural practices based on belief. People should learn to demand evidence for every single practice they seek to perpetuate or dismiss from any given society. In an information age, it will be safe to look at our traditions from the light of science and technology and subject them to all means available to ensure they are worthy the pain

sometimes we go through to fulfil them. The basis of every practice in life must be known to all and efforts be made towards living in such a manner that shows informed intellect and opinion.

What to do with Western Culture

It has been said among many advocates of the practice that Western culture has helped in bringing up sexism and its associated practices in non Western countries. While this may seem true, there is need to investigate what exactly are the reasons behind moral breakdown in the world. There are still several countries in the world where morality is very high despite the presence of Western culture. These notions and many others which remain unsaid can be silence if only the roots of such practices can be known and an opportunity be given for those who have gone through this brutal experience to relate what exactly it mean to go through this rite of passage. Others can even argue that Alice Walkers had never been to Africa and thus she presents her own thoughts influence by the western culture to discourage the only safeguard African people have to protect themselves and preserve their moral standing. This being a practice that is so common in several African countries, there is a likelihood that there are some common factors which have made the perpetuation of this practice so rampant across these countries. There is need to obtain responses from these countries in order to be able to conclude that these facts are true or not true.

Or maybe we shall never get other voices to this debate since there are many other girls like Tashi's sister who bleed to their early death with nobody courageous enough to say their story.

Role of Men in Fighting FGM

Or may be this practice is existing because of the role women play or do not play in their communities? Men from the communities where this practice is encouraged perceive this practice as a necessity since they feel married to a real woman when they know that the women they marry went through this practice when they were young. In this story the husband does not restrain her from going back to her village to undergo such a wild although being much more informed about the hurt this practice produces in a woman's life. There are several men in these communities which do nothing to stop this archaic practice as it is being done on their daughters despite the much evidence available against this practice. This silence leaves the woman in a dilemma for too long until she decides to do something which she believes may bring her happiness, only to realize there is no happiness when it is too late. Instead of the husband helping her wife, he draws away from her at a time she needed him most in their marriage life. Instead of helping her, persuading to talk her deepest struggle to him, he turns away to another woman. This contributed further her emotional disturbance until she decides to seek answers from her culture. May be she felt the solution would be to please her ancestors who were against her since she had abandoned to go through such a practice. Men should learn to listen to their wives and be fully committed to giving them the very best especially in their low moments. A woman can always reveal what her troubles are so long as she is assured of love and confidentiality from a man she loves. The most important thing that a man can do is not to show his wife that he is tired of her and wants to seek satisfaction from elsewhere. How comes a woman has spent so much of her adult life in the US without being influenced to abandon her culture for good? Is the Western culture to blame for the moral breakdown among African people if an African in the middle of America remains so sold to her culture so firmly?