

while, but she was monitoring me from the nurses station. Technology has replaced the human care and touch of nursing and midwifery that I knew at home.

A Somali woman tried to explain FGM to me. She said that a Somalian woman experiences three sorrows in her life. The first sorrow is when she is infibulated. The second sorrow is her wedding night. The third sorrow is the day she gives birth.

For the first time these women will learn that what was done to them was unnecessary and will bring them a lifetime of pain and medical problems. They will learn that female genital mutilation is against the law. They will learn that FGM has nothing to do with their Muslim religion for 95 per cent of Muslims around the world do not infibulate their women.

At Kipling Collegiate in Etobicoke, Ontario, we have begun to address the needs of our female Somali students. In the fall of 1993, Kowser Omer Hashi, a qualified nurse, midwife, and reproductive health counselor came into the school when the Somali girls were scheduled to have their sex and health education classes. Kowser met with the Somali girls and addressed the same topics that were being covered by the health teacher with the other students. She brought in visuals and other items such as an artificial penis, and various birth control devices. Her expertise with the Somali culture and language facilitated the process. The girls responded favourably to her classes and insisted that they continue even after the health program was completed. We have made arrangements for these sessions with Kowser to continue during the lunch hour one day a week.

An all day session at the school for the female Somali students was conducted in English and Somali. The school invited Somali women to speak about general health issues, human sexuality, venereal disease and FGM. At the end of this day the students had an opportunity to share their concerns and give input as to where we can go from here.

The Somali students need to have

opportunities to discuss and understand what happened to them and why. Involving supportive and respected female members of their culture is essential. Co-operatively, we can ensure that the students become more knowledgeable about the health problems they are likely to experience. We can provide them with resources within the community to help them address their needs in relation to this issue. Throughout this process the students will also be made aware of the legal and moral ramifications of continuing this practice in Canada.

FGM is not a black women's issue, it is a human rights issue. We need every woman to support us without passing judgement and work with us to eradicate this human tragedy.

Hopefully, the next generation of Somali girls will grow with love, guidance, and strong Somali values that will encourage them to make healthy choices in an informed, positive way about their own sexuality. Hopefully, these girls will become mothers of daughters who will not experience female genital mutilation.

Kowser Omer Hashi is a Somali nurse and midwife who lives in Toronto where she works as a reproductive health counsellor at the Birth Control and VD Information Centre. As an FGM consultant, she provides pre/post-partum assistance as well as labour support to women who have been genitally mutilated. She sits on the advisory boards of various women's community projects and is a member of the Ontario FGM Prevention Task Force.

Joan Silver is a teacher who has worked with Somali students for the last three years at Kipling Collegiate in Toronto. She has learned a great deal about female genital mutilation from her Somali students.

References

Hedley, Rodney and Efua Dorkenoo. Child Protection and Female Genital Mutilation Advice for Health, Education and Social Work Professionals. London, England: FORWARD Ltd.

KAILI GLENNON

I am afraid. We are walking and walking and I do not know if this line will ever end. This is a line of hatred, a line that is being held up by whips, guns, and anger. I am so tired and hungry. I scream out for help. I receive nothing but a whip on my back, but it does not hurt my back. It hurts in my heart, because my dream has been shattered. A dream that we will all be equal.... someday.

Kaili Glennon lives in Toronto. She is thirteen years old.