



Society and Women Whom the Razor Have Not Gone Under Their Skirts: Female Genital Mutilation among LAK Women, In Iran

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Abstract

The present study was carried out to explore the tendency of Lak women toward female genital mutilation (FGM) and their views toward this practice. Interviews were performed with 26 women who had experienced FGM. Based on the findings, the women's definition of FGM and its goals and factors varied among the three generations. Women of the first generation had been forced into FGM by society, women of the second generation by their families, and the third generation by men.

The findings also revealed that the tradition of FGM was not a rough obligation among women in this region, and gypsies encouraged women of the first and second generations to undergo FGM by resorting to religious principles and the specific economic situation of the region, and cosmetic advertisements were what provoked the young women to undergo FGM.

Keywords: Female Genital Mutilation, Lak, Lorestan, Iran

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I. Introduction

Female genital mutilation (FGM) refers to "all procedures involving partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or another injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons (WHO,2008).

Internationally, the debate over Female genital mutilation began in the 1960s, when the United Nations and the World Organization were reluctant to end F.G.M. Information on the subject was very limited at the time, the Sudan Conference in 1979 placed the issue of circumcision permanently on the international agenda, and the World Health Organization, along with other UN families, began to pursue it. And finally, the World Health Organization culminated its struggle in 2008 with the adoption of a resolution on female genital mutilation.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the fight against female genital mutilation at the regional, national, and international levels. Internationally, female genital mutilation is recognized as a human rights violation. Despite these successes, the rate of reduction in female genital mutilation has been slow (Johansson, 2008). According to UN statistics, at least 200 million girls and women have been circumcised in 30 countries. This action has short-term and long-term consequences, in the short term it causes infection and death of girls, and in the long term, it causes problems in childbirth and increases the readiness for AIDS, such an act, according to UN General Assembly resolutions, is a form of violence against women and girls and a

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serious violation of human rights (United Nations, 2002, 1995)ⁱ. To this end, historians and anthropologists have conducted numerous studies to shed light on the historical origins of female genital mutilation. These researchers traced it back to more than 2000 years and generally point to ancient Egypt, specific areas around the Nile, as its geographical heartland from where it spread (Lightfoot-Klein, 1983). Researchers regard F.G.M as an act the Egyptians did to prevent women from getting pregnant, especially slave women, Stone Age way of “protecting” young females from rape (Lightfoot-Klein, 1983), initiation of girls into womanhood; traditional views on female decency, control of female sexuality or reduction of female sexual desires, enhancement of fertility, and child survival; religious requirements, especially for Muslim populations (Simister, 2010, Leonard, 1996, Ben-Ari, 2003, Yoder, Abderrahim, Zhuzhuni, 2004).

Increased migration of people from practicing countries has resulted in the spread of FGM to other parts of the world. It was practiced by Australian Aboriginal communities, the Phoenicians, the Hittites, the Ethiopians, and ethnic groups in Amazonia, some parts of India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. In the 19th century, FGM was practiced in Europe and the US, where some physicians embarked on clitoridectomy to prevent masturbation or counteract female homosexuality and some mental disorders such as hysteria (Brown, 1866). FGM can be seen to a lesser extent in Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and India (Isiaka, and Yusuff, 2013).

International organizations provide statistics on FGM in different countries every year, but there is no trace of FGM among Iranian women in the published statistics of international organizations. However, the practice of FGM among Iranian women cannot be denied.

In Iran, FGM has a long history in the Sunni Shafi religion, and this procedure is prevalent in the southern and western areas of the country, mainly in the rural areas and suburbs of the four provinces of Hormozgan, Kermanshah, Kurdistan, and West Azerbaijan (Meho, 1997, quoting Ahmady, 2015).

The lack of accurate statistical data and the secret nature of the subject of FGM in Iran has led to a scarcity of studies on this subject. Medical research into FGM among Iranians was initiated in 2003 (Ahadi et al., 2003), and more studies on the social and cultural aspects of this subject began being conducted in 2007ⁱⁱ, and around the same time, FGM was examined from a legal point of viewⁱⁱⁱ. These studies have been mostly performed in the western and southern regions of Iran.

The most comprehensive research on this subject is entitled “In the Name of Tradition^{iv}”, which has investigated FGM in most parts of Iran. That research argues that FGM has not existed in Shiite women in Lorestan^v Province and that it has been fully abolished in Lakestan^{vi}. Hence, lack of studies on the practice of FGM among Lak women as well as the lack of awareness about this subject motivated us to carry out this study.

II. Method

This study was conducted among the Laks of Lorestan Province in Iran. This province houses two tribes, namely Lur and Lak tribes, which are separated by language as their border.

We interviewed people in the Lak-populated areas of Lorestan Province. During the interviews, we realized that participants from different generations had different viewpoints and we decided to perform the interviews with women of different generations. We used an international age classification and divided the participants into groups aged 25-45 years (young age), 45-64 years (middle age), and above 65 years (old age); (Statistical Center of Iran, 2019: 16).

Due to the sensitivity of the issue of FGM, finding women who were willing to express their experiences about FGM was difficult. Therefore, we began the interviews among our relatives, and through their collaboration, in Delfan city, gained the trust and cooperation of other women who were then referred to us. To familiarize ourselves with these women and find interviewees in Aleshtar and Kohdasht cities as other Lak people in Lorestan province, we participated in some of the ceremonies attended by these women, which helped gain the trust of women in these two cities and attract their cooperation and also facilitated our work in other

ⁱ. UN. DOC. A/Res/56/ 128 and see: A/Res/52/99 and A/Res54/132.

ⁱⁱ. Parisa Rezazadeh, 2007; Fatemeh Karimi 2010; Kamil Ahmadi, 2015; Rayekeh Mozaffarian, 2014

ⁱⁱⁱ. Fahimeh Hassanian, 2012; Elham Mandegari, 2011

^{iv}. Kamil Ahmadi, 2015

^v. A province located in western Iran

^{vi}. Lakestan, Lak and Lak women will be described as the field of the study.

Lak-speaking cities, as the women introduced their relatives with an experience of FGM in other cities of the province, and the interviews were then held with them in a friendly environment. Interviews were performed with 26 women who had experienced FGM. Provided that the women gave their permission, the interviews were recorded, and thematic analysis was used for data analysis.

The Lak ethnicity as the field of the study

Laks are scattered across most provinces of Iran, and in previous centuries, many of them were forced to move to different regions of Iran by the rulers of their time. Today, groups of Laks live in Kelardasht and Noshahr in Mazandaran Province and also in different areas of Qazvin Province (MousaviNami, 1984: 270). For the most part, however, Lak people reside in four western provinces of Iran, namely Ilam, Lorestan, Kermanshah, and Hamadan (Aalipour, 2004: 17). Laki language is the most important feature of the ethnic identity of the Laks (Vedadhir et al., 2014: 85).

Most Laks are Shiite Muslims and some are followers of Yarsan or Ahl-e Haqⁱ (Izadpanah, 1997: 182).

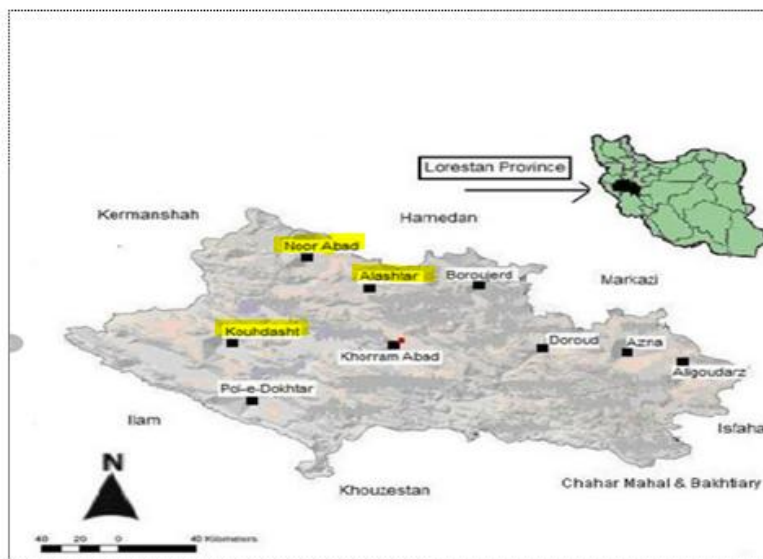


Figure 1. A map of Lorestan Province

Factors encouraging FGM

A. Gypsies as practitioners

The interviews revealed that gypsies have been most involved in persuading the first and second generations of women to undergo FGM; however, their role was diminished among the women of the third generation, as only a few women in this generation accepted them as practitioners. The truth is that the poor and uneducated young women still preferred gypsies, as midwives' wage for this job was five million Iranian Rialsⁱⁱ while gypsies received 300 thousand Rials instead.

Gypsies are circular groups that interact with people from different countries. They are not physically limited to any particular land and are scattered throughout continents, including Europe, Africa, America, and Asia, and are also dispersed throughout most parts of Iran, including Lorestan Province (Afshar Sistani, 1998: 17-27).

Gypsies do not produce any raw materials for food, and to supply their food, they need to exchange items with other nomad or settled communities. It should therefore be noted that exchange with others forms one of the main structural bases of gypsy groups (Asfari, 2015: 19). On the other hand, there is a well-known proverb in Lorestan that says: "*Donyagahkelmahast*", which means 'The world is all about exchange' (Farhadi, 2009: 336). The importance of exchange among the Laks justifies their communication with gypsies. In this

ⁱAhl-e Haq comprises one of the branches of Yarsan that is affiliated to Shiite Islam and is a collection of mythological ideas and beliefs from ancient Iran. Ahl-e Haq believers are mostly dispersed in western Iran (JeyhounAbadi, 1982: 5).

ⁱⁱThe national currency of Iran.

province, gypsies make a living by painting tattoos on people's seidob, playing musical instruments, circumcising boys and girls, cupping, making wooden dishes, etc. (Feilberg, 1990: 227-238). The presence of gypsies among the Laks in Lorestan Province facilitated the spread of FGM. The arrival of gypsies to Lorestan was during the summer harvest season to sell farmers' tools for their work, such as shovels, rakes, sieves, etc. While selling their products among the Laks, gypsies also told stories about the benefits of FGM Lak women. They then collected any interested women in places far from the sight of men, such as by the river, at a stable, or in a house. Then performed FGM using rudimentary tools such as sharp knives or blades. After FGM, gypsies cleaned their knives with a cloth and began FGM on the next woman. Sometimes, the razor blade or knife would turn blunt, and they would then sharpen it with a special rock they brought with them.

If FGM caused bleeding, they would put ash, dough, soil, oak soil, or salve (ointment), which the gypsy would bring along with herself, on the genitalia, or she urged the woman to urinate to stop the bleeding. In the case of acute bleeding, however, other methods were used.

Nourmalekⁱ, age 60, had a terrible experience with FGM. She said:

"I bled terribly. Even fainted several times. My mother-in-law crushed dried sickleweedⁱⁱ and put it on my genital area and boiled the sickleweed plant and I drank the juice".

In other regions of Iran where this procedure is conventional, FGM practitioners are native. Karimi (2010) noted that, in Paveh, Kermanshah Province, FGM practitioners are composed of midwives, mothers, aunts, and neighbors. Mozaffarian (2014) revealed that in Qeshm, southern Iran, local nannies, and Mullahs are FGM practitioners.

Gypsies resort to religious beliefs and the economic situation to encourage women to undergo FGM; for instance, to persuade Sakineh, who held Islamic beliefs but whose husband was among Ahl-e Haq religion, they had told her: *"Your fasting and prayers are not accepted [by God]. Circumcision is a tradition. Just as Sayyidsⁱⁱⁱ cut the front part of their mustache, this, too, is your mustache front to be removed".*

Gypsies' adnagaporp greatly influenced the people in these regions, and some women admitted that they were deceived by this propaganda. Sanambar, age 57, recited a memory on this subject:

"Gypsies told us lies and we believed them. For example, they said, 'Take beads of chicory with you and your husband will love you. Our fields were full of these beads, but we bought them from the gypsies'".

To persuade those with a poor economic status, gypsies resorted to another method. Mona, age 67 from Khohdasht, said:

"Gypsies talked loudly about the advantages and disadvantages of circumcision, and that whoever does not get circumcised, blessing and abundance will disappear from their life, and whatever they touch, be it tea, flour, etc., they will run out of. And it was not like nowadays that our houses are filled with packs of matches, we only had one pack and couldn't afford to run out of it for months".

The factors to which gypsies resorted to encouraging FGM differed among women from different groups. If seeking out Ahl-e Haq women, they would refer to notions such as blessing the woman's hands^{iv} and possessions^v and making her body and consequently all that was performed by her body *halal* (permissible), such as the preparation of food and sex with the husband and developing kindheartedness in the woman. If seeking out Muslim women, gypsies additionally said that God's acceptance of a woman's prayers and fasting

i. To comply with the ethics of research, alias names common in Lak-populated areas have been used.

ii. *Falcaria vulgaris*; Paghazeh is the native name of this plant.

iii. In Ahle-haq religion, the mustache was important, and they do not cut it, but they cut the front part of their mustache.

iv. The proverb "My hands are not blessed" is generally used among the Lurs for referring to ungrateful people (AskariAalam, 2008). Meanwhile, for Laks, this blessing ritual was believed to positively contribute to their possessions, especially food possessions, and prevent their loss and shortage.

v. Some respondents declared that they had also cut a nutmeg in addition to doing FGM in order for their possession to become blessed. Surrendering is one of the primary principles for Ahl-e Haq, in which they also cut a nutmeg. In this ceremony, a table prayer associated with blessing is recited, but this ceremony is not necessarily for the sake of receiving blessing. It is a kind of allegiance. However, people believe that anyone who surrenders, their hands will be blessed.

was contingent on her getting circumcised and said that the clergy had deemed FGM necessary and thus persuaded Muslim women to undergo FGM too.

Our findings revealed that gypsies received their wages before performing the circumcision. Their wages varied depending on the region's product. For example, if the women had sheep and cattle, they would give animal products in return for the operation, and if they were farmers, they would give from their crops, and if they were city-dwellers, they would give them some tea leaves and rice and they rarely asked for money. When a woman paid insufficiently, gypsies would ruin the woman's reputation in front of other people and speak ill of them.

Shah Sanam, age 72 from Delfan, said:

"A little flour and a small amount of money were paid to the gypsies as their wage. They did what they did out of shortage and poverty".

Shahin also said:

"I was circumcised twice; after the first time, the gypsy said to me, 'You did not give me a good wage, I'm not satisfied, so your hands will not be blessed!'"

The FGM wage was different in other areas; for example, in some areas, the practitioners did not demand anything in return for performing FGM, as they believed they were doing their job for God's sake Ahmady (2015), Mozaffarian (2012), and Karimi (2010).

Sometimes, when the women had a small clitoris, the practitioners did not perform a circumcision on them and instead dropped down a knife three times from underneath their clothes and chanted, "Be purified! Blessed be your hands!" However, the purification and blessing in these cases had an expiry period. After some years, the gypsies would re-examine these women, and if their clitoris was still small, they would repeat the ritual and get their wage. Latham (2016) reported the same ritual in the Khuzestan Province of Iran as well.

B. Community, family, husbands, and FGM

Women of the first generation who were interviewed, socialized in traditional communities. One of the most important characteristics of these communities is their precise definition of norms, which makes people pay close attention to each other's behavior and feel a norm-based control. Abnormal behavior is thus very much restricted in these areas, and social control is applied more severely by the people (Rafipour, 1999: 205). According to the findings, even though FGM was not performed under parental coercion among the older women, their community forced them to undergo this procedure with their willingness so as to increase their chance of marriage. Khanoum Tala said on this subject:

"Both the single and married women got circumcised. If they had gotten married without being circumcised, they would be taunted by their husband's families. They believed that a woman was derelict if not circumcised; that is, her family did not care enough about her to get her circumcised".

The situation was different in some other regions of Iran where FGM was common, and girls had to undergo FGM during childhood. Rezazadeh Jalali (2007) demonstrated that infants as young as 40 days would undergo FGM. Karimi (2010) and Mozaffarian (2014) also reported that girls underwent FGM at only a few months old, and Ahmady (2015) also showed that FGM began from the age of 3-6 years.

Norms also affect the social activity of individuals. One of these normative pressures can be observed in the individuals' membership in traditional cooperatives. For example, *Shirvareh* is a traditional cooperative among women based on the exchange of milk. Having common features is one of the main conditions for any woman's membership in this cooperative, and if violated, the cooperative can be threatened.

Fouzieh discussed a memory her grandmother had shared:

"There was a woman in our village who had not gotten circumcised. When her neighbors found out, they told her, 'Your hands are not clean, we will not exchange milk with you'".

Lak women who opted to not follow the social norms would be hurt. Farhadi (2009) reported that to escape some coercions, people accepted other coercions voluntarily (P. 363), which is demonstrated in the Persian proverb saying "If you do not want to be disgraced, be in harmony with the public".

Khodabas, from Aleshtar, whom we met at a ceremony, said:

"When I was pregnant and in my last month, all the neighbors' women went to get circumcised. My mother-in-law told me, 'You should not do it, it's dangerous for you!' But I did it. I wanted to be like everyone else".

The living situation of the first and second generations of women was nearly the same, but after the implementation of the land reform in this period, followed by the disappearance of traditional agricultural cooperatives such as Boneh, the abolition of feudal land pihrenwo, the transfer of land ownership to families and the increase in families' productivity (Safinejad, 1974: 180-178), the norms governing the community gradually began to change.

After land reform and the division of land among the peasants, most of them became landowners (Ashraf, Benoazizi, 2008: 77), and gradually, families' productivity increased, and now values formed in a family-oriented way.

This situation reduced the strength of social values, and instead of making efforts for the benefit of society, people made efforts for their families. Among the second generation of women, the fear of unacceptance by the community was replaced by the fear of rejection by the family.

Saltanat said:

"Before I was circumcised, if ever we were running low on flour or sugar, my mother-in-law would say that I was to blame because the razor had not gone under my clothesⁱ. So, I got circumcised to escape these allegations".

When a woman became a bride and went to live in the groom's house, the first thing the family and relatives of the groom demanded was her blessed step, because they believed in the proverb that "The bride with her step, and the shepherd with his stick", meaning that when you bring a bride or hire a shepherd, their step has to be blessed. Therefore, if an undesirable event happened when bringing the bride to the groom's family, the bride would be treated with disregard and distrust for the rest of her life (Izadpanah, 1997: 103). It was thus the duty of the bride to do all her best not to cause any bad events in her husband's family. Women got circumcised because they did not want to be blamed for the family's resources running out.

Middle-aged women got circumcised after marriage and even after giving birth. Zomorrod, Delfan, said:

"My sister had two children when she got circumcised because of the taunts".

FGM helped brides be accepted into their husband's families, though many women pointed out that it was not important for their men whether they were circumcised or not, whenever a woman got circumcised, her husband would thank her with a satisfied smile.

KhorshidKhanoum, age 60, said:

"Men were not stupid; they understood. Since circumcision was for the family's sake, they thanked us with an archly smile".

Saki believed that, during the past centuries, women in Lorestan manifested lady-like characteristics in all the different periods of their life. They were brave and chaste as girls, intimate and compassionate as wives, and sympathetic and self-sacrificing as mothers (Saki, 1964: 86).

Mona said:

"I used to be highly defiant against my husband; my mother-in-law told him that if I got circumcised, it would get better and I would become an obedient woman".

Zarkhanoum, age 58 from Khohdasht, said:

"Circumcision was to lower the thorns in their testiclesⁱⁱ. When women, got circumcised, we made less noise, at first because we had pain and no longer fought with our husband and mother-in-law, but after a while, because we got used to less fighting".

These women did not believe that they had any rights for themselves, because the community around them had trained them this way, and they were not much informed beyond the limits of social convention.

ⁱMeaning'She had not been circumcised'.

ⁱⁱ.When a bull made a lot of noise, they tore a little partof its testicles, so that it would not make noises again.

Therefore, a woman could easily be regarded as part of her husband's property rather than his partner, and in the local tradition, women had to show obedience to their husband (Goudarzi, 1995: 95).

In this study, women became more submissive when they underwent FGM, and the ruling power thus confined them for its exploitation. Karimi (2010) considered submission and obedience the reason for the prevalence of FGM among Kurdish girls in Paveh.

Different factors affected the submission and obedience of a woman's body under FGM in the different generations examined. As previously noted, in the first generation, the community and its beliefs were responsible for this domination, and in the second generation, the family exerted this domination. The mechanism changed in the third generation with the modernization of the society, the restructuring of the family and its miniaturization, and the changes in the meaning of family from an economic firm to a place for peace and joy. According to Behnam and Rasekh, the increasing social and economic independence of women has made them not have to accept a husband merely for their livelihood and survival anymore. Furthermore, having multiple children and several wives as means of economic support and workforce became outdated (1969: 163). Marital relationships changed, and women are no longer easily subjected to the dominance of their mother-in-law and father-in-law, and demand a separate and independent house from their husbands. They consider their husband's formation of another family forbidden and expect them to do their best to be at the service of their family (Behnam, Rasekh: 1969: 181). This expectation is not always met by the husbands, and women still do different things to attain and maintain their desired conditions –circumcision is one of them. The woman's submission of her body under FGM thus has a different meaning in our contemporary time compared to the time in which the first two generations of interviewed women lived and were born.

Shahnaz, age 42 and a teacher, said:

"My husband said, 'My colleague said his wife got circumcised and after that, the sex has been enjoyable'. You have to do it too to see how it is".

Our interviews revealed that FGM was performed for different reasons in the contemporary period than in the past; for example, it is no longer performed for blessing the woman's hands and getting her accepted into her husband's family. In the previous generations, the main function of FGM was to serve the family's economy, but in contemporary times, what is important is the greater pleasure derived from sex for men whose wife has been circumcised. Our interviews indicated that no woman undergoes FGM before marriage at our times; rather, they undergo this procedure after marriage and for the sake of their husband.

For the new generation of women, men and their desires are the main reason for undergoing FGM. Susan said:

"My husband goes to the port for work, I'm all worried about him remarrying in that city, so I got circumcised to get my sexual organ tighter, so that he'll like it and won't pay attention to other girls".

Young women looked for their husband's satisfaction when they underwent FGM and defined themselves as their husbands and preferred their husband's demands over their own.

In addition to attracting the attention of their husband, the young women interviewed were drawn to FGM under the influence of midwives and gynecologists who recommended it for better health in old age.

Manijeh, age 33 from Aleshtarand, said:

"When I gave birth to my baby, the midwife told me, 'Having a circumcision does not let your bladder drop-down when you get old and you will not suffer from frequent urination this way".

In other regions in Iran studied by Mozaffarian (2014), Karimi (2010), RezazadehJalali (2007), Ahmady (2015), Erfani (under print), and Simister (2010), FGM was carried out for different reasons, with religion and the preservation of virginity being the most remarkable ones. Meanwhile, none of the Lak women interviewed in this study noted such reasons.

Type of FGM

The type of FGM among the three generations of Lak women is different. The first generation referred to FGM as removing a small portion of the clitoris, like the first type of FGM presented by the World Health Organization (WHO)ⁱ.

according to KhanomTala who is one of our relatives and is 80 aged:

« A small part as the size of a lentil or a raisin was cut and we did not feel any pain. »

ⁱ.To learn more about the different types of FGM, see the WHO report of2008.

The type of FGM among middle-aged women varied from that given by the older women, as they considered circumcision as removing of labia minora of the women's sexual organs. The type of FGM among this generation is close to the definition of the second type of FGM proposed by the WHO.

Noghreh who is 63 aged and comes from Aleshtar city told us:

"The gypsy puts the labia of both sides of the sexual organ next to each other and fully cuts them".

The type of circumcision among young totally varied from that in the two previous generations; about her circumcision, Samaneh is 35 aged and is from Aleshtar said:

"The doctor removed the extra parts of my sex organ, and now it's flat, and there is nothing extra except a little hole in it."

In fact, the type of FGM among the young generation coincides with that presented by the WHO about the third type of FGM.

The WHO has referred to only two types of FGM in Iran in its reports (the first and second types) (United Nations report, June 6, 2014). Of course, the findings in the studies by Erfani (under print), Ahmady, 2015; Karimi, 2010; Mozaffari, 2014 also indicated that the first and second types of FGM were carried out in their study areas, but this research revealed that young generation has performed the third type of FGM.

FGM from the women's point of view:

Lak women had different views about FGM. The first-generation women viewed FGM as a procedure that was approved in the past and continued to be so in the present. These women felt impunity and sin before FGM. Tajbanou, age 76 from Delfan, said:

"Before circumcision, I thought that my hands were not clean and that this caused us to run out of oil so soon".

FGM was thus a sign of honor and courage among the older Lak women, and avoiding it would lead to negative labeling by the community. Dowlat, age 65 from Khohdasht, confessed:

"Circumcision was an honor. Anyone who had not undergone circumcision we would say about her that 'A razor has not passed beneath her clothes'".

Sanginbanu said:

"Honestly, we didn't know if the gypsies were right or not, but we felt the positive effect of circumcision ourselves".

The deep acceptance of FGM by the older Lak women made them feel the positive consequences of FGM as a result of their belief; these women still believed in the positive outcomes of this erudcorp but were skeptical about the gypsies' stories about FGM.

The condition was more complicated for the women of the second generation. Depending on different factors, such as the level of literacy and their children's education, and also their use of different media, their views changed about FGM.

The middle-aged women who were not very well educated told us that FGM had blessed their possessions.

Mina, age 59 from Delfan, said:

"Honestly, before I got circumcised, we couldn't save anything, from food to other things; after my circumcision, everything lasted longer for us. So it was all true and not a lie".

Mina continued:

"If it was now, I would never have gotten circumcised. Nowadays, we have everything. In the past, we had to worry about running out of our food resources".

According to Safinejad's study, Lorestan's economic situation was unfavorable in the past due to the lack of agriculture and commerce (2002: 641). As stated in Iranian folklore, "Need makes a fox out of a lion" (Dehkhoda, 2004: 51). Needs also to change nature. Unfavorable economic conditions among Lak women had led them to accept the belief that FGM leads to blessing and wealth. Latham (2016) argued that FGM has originated in resource-scarce societies (P. 111).

Khavar said:

"Before I was performed circumcised, I did not feel good about myself, because my mother-in-law's hands were so blessed but mine wasn't. Moreover, before I got circumcised, I had to make three bowls of rice to suffice for the whole family, but after getting circumcised, two bowls were enough to make everyone full"

The perspective toward FGM was different among the middle-aged women who had education or children with university degrees

Saltanat, Shazadeh, and Banu, who were from different cities but all had educated children, said:

"It was all stupidity and illiteracy. Gypsies also abused us for our ignorance and unawareness".

This group of women believed that they had been deceived and that the removal or non-removal of a part of the clitoris did not result in blessing and chastity. They believed that they were uninformed and trapped in superstitions.

The young generation of women was more influenced by cosmetic advertising, and from the point of view of some young women, FGM was similar to conventional cosmetic surgeries.

Somayyeh, age 25 from Khohdasht, said:

"For those who have an ugly and long clitoris, circumcision can be fine, to make them a little beautiful".

Some of the young women, however, did not have a good attitude toward FGM, as they believed that FGM had bad effects on their life, adversely affected their health and hygiene, and reduced their sexual pleasure.

Samaneh said:

"Since I exercised circumcise, my urine pours over my body all the time when I pee, and then I have to take a shower each time".

ZamanehKhanoum, an employed woman aged 36, said:

"Do not impair yourself for a man's sake; that is no good at all".

The young generation of women did not have unpleasant feelings about themselves before undergoing FGM and saw not criticized by the family and the community. What differed in this generation was that they had a dual feeling after FGM; the women who had university degrees and were employed felt regna neddih for exposing their body to surgery because of another person (i.e. men) and said that they were not pleased with FGM, as it had affected their health. The women without academic education and who were unemployed, however, were satisfied with the pleasure they had given their husbands and felt satisfied with FGM.

III. Conclusion

The lack of studies on FGM among Lak women was the main motivation for conducting this study, which can further help promote studies on FGM in other native regions of Iran. By our focus on the existence of FGM among Lak women, we tried to identify the mechanism of formation of the FGM tradition in this region and the women's perspective toward it.

Gypsies as a practitioner were the main drive behind the encouragement of the first and second generations of women to undergo FGM. Gypsies attempted to persuade women to undergo FGM by resorting to the common religious beliefs of the region, such as the blessing of hands and becoming *halal*. The table prayer among Ahl-e Haq followers in various ceremonies, such as surrender and vowing ceremonies, is praying to become *halal* and get blessed (Mashkour, 2005: 87). There are also many verses and narratives¹ in Islam that promote purity and *halalness*, so gypsies persuaded women to undergo FGM with an emphasis on the existing themes. Another factor contributing to the gypsies' propaganda was the adverse economic conditions in the region, as the two beliefs of *halalness* and, in particular, *ehtblessing* could have improved their economic situation.

FGM was one of the traditions imported into the society of Lak women. In other regions of Iran where FGM is customary, practitioners were native to their societies, but in Lak society, gypsies were hawkers and had transferred this tradition to Lorestan from another region. In addition, the payment of wages to practitioners was of great importance among Lak women, as gypsies received their wages before performing FGM, and if a woman did not pay enough, she would be backbitten. Gypsies' request to be paid for performing FGM was a truth unlike that in other regions where FGM was customary; in these other regions, FGM practitioners did not ask to be paid, as they believed that they were doing their job for God's satisfaction and rarely asked for money in return. Moreover, in other regions, women whose clitoris was small were known to have been circumcised by nymphs and did not need to undergo FGM again. In Lak-populated areas, however, gypsies symbolically performed FGM on this group by throwing a razor under their clothes, so that they could still force a wage from them.

¹ Surah At-Tawbah (9), verse 108; "And Allah loves those who make themselves clean and pure". Cleanliness is a part of faith (Almostadrak al-Masa'il and Mostanbat al-Mustael, P. 319, vol. 16, quoting from Nouri, 1408 AH)

Since FGM was imported from other areas, the practice was not rough coercion among Lak women. Today, this tradition with old-fashioned tools is not yet fully abolished; and it is rarely, performed among women. Over time, a lot of changes were made to the process of FGM among Lak women; for example, older women underwent FGM to obtain social incentives and be in harmony with society. They even felt pleased after FGM. However, today, some women are skeptical about the stories practitioners tell about the positive consequences of FGM.

Middle-aged women had different ideas about FGM. Like the older women, they did not feel satisfied with themselves before FGM. For the middle-aged women in this study, FGM was performed to their family's resources under the concept of blessing, purity, and family obedience. Today, some women in this generation continue to believe that FGM brought blessing to them, but some other women whose status had changed (i.e. they had become literate or had educated children) confessed that they were deceived and believed that the practitioners had abused them for their ignorance and illiteracy.

Young women had undergone FGM in clinics and after marriage to please their husbands and protect their health. Among the women of this generation, FGM was only one of the various types of cosmetic surgery performed on women. Unlike the two previous generations, these women did not feel bad about themselves before undergoing FGM. The group of young women with university education and appropriate jobs felt hidden anger after undergoing FGM, but the other group of women without academic education or occupation felt that FGM was pleasant because it made their husbands satisfied.

Women were influenced by different factors during the different periods studied. The identity of women of the first generation was formed under the strict control of social norms, and the identity of the second generation was limited by family beliefs, and third-generation women were the objects of men's demands. The individuality of women tends to be formed outside their will and does not belong to themselves –rather to others.

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