

**Mobilizing
Men Towards Combating
Female Genital Mutilation
(FGM)**

Dr. Tandiar Samir Mossaad

Reproductive Health Specialist

St. Mousa Association

- **El-Zahraa Community:** one of the most crowded slum communities, very poor in infrastructure & facilities
 - More than 200.000 inhabitants
 - Mostly migrants from Upper Egypt , moving with their cultural traditions
 - Illiteracy rate is high among women (70%) with high drop out rates
 - Male-dominated, even in women-related issues

St. Moussa Association

- A registered local NGO
- Serving the whole community regardless sex or religion
- Funding: members' fees, individuals donations, Laubach Literacy Int'l., Bishop's contributions
- Working directly with community volunteers
- Implements integrated projects working with different sectors (women / children)

Problem: Female Genital Mutilation

- 97% of Egyptian females are circumcised (*DHS 2000*)
- A tradition that is not related to religion, economic class nor educational level
- This operation is done in a non-hygienic circumstances with non trained barbers or midwives, specially in poor slum areas
- FGM leads to different physiological, and psychological complications. Also, it is the cause behind many sexual problems after marriage

Goal: raise cultural, social and health awareness in this community



Objectives

- Present the different possible FGM complications
- Highlight the facts that FGM is not based on any kind of religious or medical basis
- Creating social norm against this harmful practice
- Emphasizing on the role of men in combating FGM

Target audience:

- **Primary: Men married to women in reproductive age (newly married and fathers).**
- **Secondary: Mother in Laws (mother in laws exert social influence on parents to do the FGM for their daughters), mothers, local community leaders, and religious leaders**

Project duration:

2 years

Total cost:

US\$ 18000

Pilot project activities:

- **Capacity Building:** Participatory training and education was provided to field workers and volunteers who are currently carrying out the work.
- **Situational analysis** on FGM status
 - **Interviews** with local community leaders, religious leaders, physicians, and other NGOs about the objectives of the program
 - **Focus-group discussions** with men at homes to convince them to participate in the project
- Preparing **educational aids** for illiterate participants

- **Health Awareness Campaign:** Conducted with women on reproductive health issues (mainly hazards of FGM). The campaign was held on weekly basis at the association's premises.
- **Advocacy:** Advocating against FGM with the community and the parents.
- **Seminars:** A series of seminars were held by local religious leaders (Muslims and Christians) for around 1,300 participants, targeting men.

Impact Assessment Methodologies

- Baseline formative study
- Home visits and in-depth interviews
- Post intervention in-depth interviews with parents
- Post intervention Focus Group Discussions with local community leaders and men

Monitoring Activities & Tools

- Weekly home visits and interviews by trained community field workers
- Regular trouble-shooting meetings with local community leaders

Obstacles & strategies used to overcome them

- High illiteracy rate:
 - Designing educational materials for illiterates
 - Opening literacy classes for women and men
- Religious misconceptions:
 - Involving of Christian and Muslim clergy men in the program
- Medical misconceptions regarding FGM:
 - Involving of a female physician
- Resistance to approve the harmful effects FGM:
 - Using case studies from men that decided not to do this harmful practice with their daughters and the reason behind this decision.

Opportunities Built On

- Establishing the National Council for Women
- Holding the annual conference on population and development
- Government policy towards health issues in general and FGM in particular
- Priority given to women and girls in terms of education, prevention of early marriage and prevention of FGM

Lessons Learned

- Men play a crucial role in shaping women's health and well-being
- Traditions and deeply rooted beliefs sometimes support bad practices
- Creating a social norm is important to the success of any behavioral change
- Involvement of religious leaders, and local community leaders proved to have a strong influence on the opinion of men, specially regarding deeply rooted practice such as FGM
- Sometimes, local cultural beliefs and traditions have stronger influence on shaping people behaviors than religion
- All stakeholders should be involved from the beginning in any FGM intervention

Future Plans

- Involving more local community leaders
- Establishing a local committee advocating against FGM
- Developing a manual to train illiterate people on this combating this problem
- Address local and international funding agencies to provide financial and non-financial support
- Expand and diversify services provided by the project