

Alþingi
Kirkjustræti
150 Reykjavík

26 March 2018

Ágæta Alþingi / Dear Members of the Parliament

I write as a male survivor of neonatal genital mutilation. As such, I might ably attest to the lifelong psychological, sexual and social harms that have arisen as a consequence of this medically unnecessary procedure. However, I would appeal to the parliament's reason, rather than seek to elicit its sympathies.

Any law which protects females—but *only* females—from genital mutilation, is unjust and arguably unlawful. Such a law discriminates on the basis of gender against one half of the population: men and boys, as well as intersex children. Anti-FGM legislation also privileges the religious or cultural practices of certain groups (e.g. Judaism) while prohibiting the practices of others (e.g. Islam).

There is simply no ethical or legal basis for differentiating “female” from any other form of non-consensual genital mutilation. Each of the human rights said to be contravened by FGM—including the right to non-discrimination, to protection from physical and mental violence, to the highest attainable standard of health, and in extreme cases, the right to life—is violated or negated by the “routine” practice of male circumcision. As reported by the International NGO Council on Violence Against Children:

Until recently, male circumcision has generally been challenged only when carried out by non-medical personal in unhygienic settings without pain relief. But a children's rights analysis suggests that non-consensual, non-therapeutic circumcision of boys, whatever the circumstances, constitutes a gross violation of their rights, including the right to physical integrity, to freedom of thought and religion and to protection from physical and mental violence. When extreme complications arise, it may violate the right to life. It is reported that male circumcision can result in numerous physical, psychological, and sexual health problems during the surgery, afterwards, and throughout adulthood, including haemorrhage, panic attacks, erectile dysfunction, infection (in severe forms leading to partial or complete loss of the penis), urinary infections, necrosis, permanent injury or loss of the glans, excessive penile skin loss, external deformity, and in some cases even death.¹

It follows that existing FGM legislation must be either (a) repealed or (b) amended so as to extend its protections to all children—irrespective of age, gender, or parental religion.

In dark times such as these, Iceland is currently given a unique opportunity to lead the world into a brighter future for all children, one in which genital autonomy, human dignity, and social justice might prevail. I beseech the Icelandic parliament to legislate for the advancement of universal human rights.

Yours sincerely

Dr Chris Coughran

¹ *Violating Children's Rights: Harmful Practices Based on Tradition, Culture, Religion or Superstition. A Report from the International NGO Council on Violence against Children* (2012) pp. 21–22.
https://www.crin.org/en/docs/InCo_Report_15Oct.pdf