

**Launch of the Innocenti Digest No. 12,  
“Changing a Harmful Social Convention: Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting”**

**SPEAKING OUT AGAINST FGM/C IN EGYPT**

*Mohamed Taha Naguib is a primary school teacher in the village of Zawyat Sultan, in the Upper Egyptian governorate of Minya. Aged 37, he's married with two children, including an 8-year old daughter. Mohamed is also a volunteer with the Better Life Association for Comprehensive Development, one of a number of NGOs UNICEF is working with to further the campaign for FGM/C abandonment. In Minya, as elsewhere in Upper Egypt, FGM/C is widespread, among both the majority Muslim and minority Christian population.*

"I first became aware of FGM/C as a child. I remember watching a celebration for girls in the village who had just had the operation, and being told that it was something normal. It was only much later that I heard about the marital problems some of my friends and acquaintances had because their wives were circumcised.

Then 3 months ago I attended a symposium about FGM/C in the village. Until then, I believed that the practice was approved by Islam. What I heard was something quite different: the Sheikh pointed out that the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Mohamed) related to FGM/C were very weak. That prompted me to do my own research, during which I discovered that out of 2,000 Hadith, not one mentioned FGM/C.



Mohamed Taha Naguib with his daughter Basma (Copyright UNICEF Egypt)

Later I attended another session about the health and medical effects of FGM/C on women. This totally convinced me that FGM/C was wrong because it touched on a problem that I face in my own marriage. Like all the girls in the village, my wife was circumcised. This problem is that she feels no pleasure from our sexual relationship. This is a sensitive issue to discuss, and I am only doing so to warn other people about the repercussions of subjecting their daughters to FGM/C.

When I became an advocator against FGM/C, I started with my family and my colleagues at school. I'm proud that the first session against FGM/C in my area was conducted in my house. Now, whenever I have the chance to talk about the dangers of FGM/C I do so. Of course some people argue, but step by step some of them begin to change their opinions. I really believe that by meeting and talking again with these people they will eventually be convinced that FGM/C is a very harmful practice.

I must admit that my wife and my mother still think FGM/C is necessary. They say it's a thing that all the girls have been through and we should follow our community's customs and traditions. Of course my first concern is for my daughter, Basma. She is 8 now, and I'll keep talking to her mother and grandmother, telling them about FGM/C's dangerous effects until the time she reaches the age of circumcision. When she reaches that age, the decision will of course be mine, and under no circumstances whatsoever would I allow her to be circumcised.

People call me Mr. Objection, because whenever this issue is opened for discussion I strongly argue against it and against a custom that has been there for ages. I don't care what anyone says. What I couldn't bear is what my daughter might go through in her marital life if she were to undergo FGM/C."

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