**ESSAY TITLE: A STORY OF MY EXPERIENCE WITH FEMALE GENITAL MULTILATION (FGM)**

**AWARD WINNING ESSAYS**

**ESSAY NUMBER ONE**

**BY FERDY MBAGWU CHIZUBEREM OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT GIRLS’ COLLEGE (FGGC), OWERRI**

Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) otherwise known as Female circumcision is one of the deep rooted beliefs and cultural practices in my village during the olden days. According to my mother, it was a normal practice held 8-40 days after child birth or few days prior to childbirth. It was an event of transition from adolescent into adulthood for girls. Families who did not let their girls go through this ritual were discriminated against. My mother said that her parents told her that she narrowly escaped being a victim of circumcision, because the practice stopped two years before she was of age for the ritual.

Usually, my family traveled to the village every Christmas since my siblings and I were born. Our grandmother, Mama Nnuku used to tell us moonlight stories and stories of her past too. She told us literary everything that ever happened to her since her birth. She had a very good memory. However, she never told us anything pertaining to FGM, although we were already aware of its existence in the past. She never told us until one Christmas holiday we visited.

As usual, we went to her room and waited. As she came in, we noticed that her mood had changed. She was sober. We asked her what the matter was and she said that there was something she wanted to tell us. She said she did not want to tell us until we were grown up enough to understand. Then she said it was about the harmful practice of FGM during her time. She called it female circumcision. She said circumcision was done for males and females but that while the male was as it was in the bible, there was no reference of female circumcision in the bible. She added that female circumcision was believed to keep a girl chastised and a virgin until she was married. It was seen it as a means for curbing promiscuity among girls. They did not see the harmful side of the practice.

Mama Nnuku said her two older siblings underwent this process during their adolescent age as a rite of passage to womanhood. According to grandma, her elder sister, ChiChi was the first to be cut. She was taken to their traditional specialist the day she turned fifteen. On their arrival, she was taken into a small hut and she saw around her pairs of scissors of different kinds, knives, pieces of glass and stones. Then she was told to lie down on the mat which was on the floor. A man and a woman where sitting on the same mat. A soon as she lay down, an old grey-haired woman emerged from the corner of the hut and told ChiChi to remove her pant. She hesitated, but eventually took off her pant. Immediately she did that, the gray-haired woman held her by the legs and asked her to spread her legs wide open. The man and the woman sitting on the mat held legs and the old woman grabbed a pair of scissors and snipped off her clitoris.

Mama Nnuku said her sister let out a loud cry from the hut and she wanted to go inside the hut to see what was wrong, but she was held back. Her sister bled for a long time and did not stop crying for a long time. She too was crying because her sister was obviously in pain, though at that time she did not know the cause of the pain.

Next in turn, on the same day was Ngozi, who was about two years younger than Mama Chi Chi. According to grandma, after witnessing her elder sister’s crying in such pain, Ngozi resisted going into the hut. However, their mother forced her into the hut, saying that she cannot be put to shame because of her daughter’s refusal to be circumcised. Immediately she was forced unto the mat, the grey-haired woman grabbed the scissors again and inserted it in Ngozi’s vagina to cut the clitoris. In the struggle to hold the victim down, the scissors cut deep into the vagina and caused a deep wound. The more the little girl struggled and screamed in pain, the more she bled. The grey-haired woman continued to shout at her to be quiet. Ngozi kept on screaming and calling for help. Eventually, the old woman got angry and stormed out of the hut, leaving Ngozi in a pool of her own blood. Grandma said she was watching from a distance, and as soon as the woman left the hut, she ran in to save her sister because their mother was taking care of Chichi who was still groaning in pain. Inside the hut, Grandma said she saw her sister laying pitifully on the floor, abandoned by her assailers. Ngozi’s screaming grew less and less loud until she was silent. Grandma said she was thankful that her sister had stopped crying. But on a closer look, she saw that her sister was still. She called her name several times, expecting a response. She got scared, ran outside and called her mother who immediately left Chi-chi to her care and rushed into the hut with the old grey-haired woman in tow.

Moments later, only the old woman came out of the hut. She told grandma and Chi-chi to go home; stating carelessly that their mother and sister were gone. Neither grandma nor Chi-chi understood what the old woman meant, but they went home. It was a painful walk for Chi-chi. The old woman walked hurriedly past them, sobbing silently.

On reaching their house, a crowd was gathered and people were crying loudly. Grandma got to know that she was motherless, and had just lost a sister; while another was in dire pain from FGM. Maybe that incident was why she was not subjected the ordeal that took the life of her sister and mother on the same day. Her mother had fainted on sighting the lifeless body of the daughter and never came back to life.

After the story, grandma and all of us wept until we slept off. FGM is evil and must be stopped.

**ESSAY NUMBER TWO**

**BY NWOSE SOPURUCHI DONATUS: COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY, ABAKALIKI**

When I was younger, I usually heard rumours of young girls of 8 – 10 years of age being taken to the outskirts of the village at midnight. Each time I asked my mother if it was true, she would either ignore me or tell me to avoid whoever told me that. As naïve as I was, I took that it was all rumours.

Then it happened that one certain night, I overheard my parents discussing in low tunes about my older sister who was 9 years older than I. I decided, out of curiosity to listen. It took a lot of mental concentration to grab a few words from their almost silent dialogue and the last words I heard freaked me out a bit. I heard the word ‘circumcision’ in my local dialect.

I struggled a lot in my thoughts as I ran back to my room to tell my sister. But unfortunately, she wasn’t there. The anxiety and fear of what would happen to my sister lingered in my head until I slept off. Later that night. I heard a creaking sound of our front door. It was loud enough to wake me up. Immediately, the thought of my sister flashed through my head so I hurriedly went to check who was at the door. My dad appeared from nowhere and grabbed my hand, sternly directing me to go back to sleep and that my mother and my sister were to meet an appointment.

Curiosity took the toll on me as I quietly leaped out of the window of my room and tracked my mother and sister. It was not long before I dimly sighted them at the outskirts of the village, close to our border. I wondered what they were doing there and then I remembered the rumours and my mother’s evasive answers to my questions.

I discreetly followed them at a distance until they reached a dead end, with a hut right in the middle of the narrow path. I was petrified with fear as my mother and sister entered the hut. Uttermost fear struck my bones as my mother and sister went into the hut. I had to know what was going to happen inside. Before reaching the hut, I heard my sister screaming out loud and I became as silent as a graveyard. Out of curiosity, I hurriedly climbed to a little opening I found on top of a hut and took a peek. What I saw made the peek the longest peek I ever saw. I saw women, old women, about six of them holding my sister as she struggled. One was covering her mouth, four were pinning down her hands and legs while the last woman with a razor blade with blood all over her hands. I watched as my sister continued struggling and crying but the women were too strong for her. I wanted to jump and rescue her but fear held me back. I wanted to shout out to stop them and let passersby come to her aid but it was midnight and fear again kept me quiet. I just watched with tears rolling down my cheeks as my sister suffered in agony.

Soon the old women left her limbs and I saw thick blood all over her pubic region, flowing like a stream. It really took time before they could stop the bleeding. My thoughts knocked hard against me as I wondered what they did to my sister. Just then, I heard one of the old women call her name. It was the woman that earlier covered her mouth to stop her from screaming. While all of these was happening, thoughts of shock and dismay on why my mother will allow all of these happen to my sister filled my mind. I even heard her say it was an obligation for my sister.

Out of anger and anguish, I screamed out at my mother, letting my thoughts flow through my mouth but then, someone dragged me down from where I was and I looked to see who it was; it was my dad. The experience was too terrible for me that I gave up consciousness.

The next day, when I woke up, I saw my mother crying heavily and my father sobbing for the first time since I have known him. When I asked what happened, my mother looked at me with tear-filled eyes as she burst out wailing louder than before. I didn’t know why but my eyes soon became soaked with tears. All I thought of was questions about what happened to my sister.

It was later that afternoon that I discovered that my sister was no-more. She had lost a lot of blood and later became numb, DEAD. From that day, I blamed my parents and myself for what happened to my sister, but I was too young, what else could I have possibly done to save my sister?

THE END