Veiled pain. Psychological, social and relational consequences of FGM among immigrant women in the NL

This study investigated the mental health status of adult women who have undergone genital mutilation in their youth in Africa and later in life migrated to Europe. The psychological, social and relational impact of female genital mutilation was assessed in 66 circumcised women originating from five different African countries (Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Eritrea and Sierra Leone) who have migrated to the NL. Also, risk factors for the development of mental health problems for these immigrant circumcised women were determined. An in-depth interview and four standardized questionnaires were used to assess levels of traumatisation, psychiatric illnesses, and potential risk factors. One third of the circumcised women met criteria for affective or anxiety disorders, and indices for posttraumatic stress disorder were presented by 16% of the subjects. A lively memory of the circumcision, an avoidant coping style (in particular substance abuse), infibulation as type of circumcision, and lack of a job or income were significant factors associated with psychopathology. Interestingly, women originating from Somalia reported the least problems. There is no reason to pathologise the consequences of female genital mutilation in immigrant women, but specific attention to the serious psychosocial problems among a considerable minority group at risk is warranted.

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