

CHAPTER 10

FEMALE CIRCUMCISION

Female circumcision is widely practised in all regions of northern Sudan, although there is variation in prevalence, type of circumcision, and associated customs. Female circumcision is called *Khifad* in classical Arabic, which means reduction. In popular Arabic and in Sudan, it is called *Tahur*, meaning purity and cleanliness.

There are three types of female circumcision in Sudan. Sunna circumcision, the mildest type, consists of removing the tip of the prepuce of the clitoris, and is analogous to male circumcision. The second type is Pharaonic circumcision, which consists of removing the clitoris, labia minora and labia majora and sewing the two sides of the wound together. Pharaonic circumcision is, in fact, excision plus infibulation, i.e., closing of the vagina by various means so that only a small opening is left for passage of urine and menstrual blood. The third type, *Matwasat*, or intermediate circumcision, came into being after legislation forbidding Pharaonic circumcision was passed in 1946. This type lies between Sunna and Pharaonic circumcision in terms of the amount of tissue excised; *Matwasat* varies greatly, but generally entails removal of the clitoris, anterior parts or all of the labia minora, and some or all of the labia majora. The two sides are then stitched together as in the Pharaonic form, but the opening left may be slightly larger.

The practice of female circumcision in Sudan is based mainly on tradition and not on religion. Female circumcision is not explicitly enjoined in the Koran, although according to an *Ahadith* (saying of the Prophet) male circumcision is an ordinance while female circumcision is said to be "preferable," *makrama* or embellishment. In most areas there exists strong social pressure to maintain the tradition and uncircumcised girls are generally viewed as unmarriageable. Traditionally, some tribes in northern Sudan did not have female circumcision, but the practice was adopted after coming in contact with tribes that did. The circumcision operation is performed on girls as young as a few days old to a maximum of eleven years, although the most common age is six to eight years.

As early as 1946, legislation was passed banning Pharaonic circumcision, but the law was not enforced. In 1947 a national committee was formed, the Committee for Fighting Female Circumcision, comprised of members from various social and professional groups. After a number of nongovernmental conferences and seminars were held (including a World Health Organization seminar in 1979), the government approved the WHO's recommendation for an explicit policy to abolish the practice; however, the government has not yet declared an explicit policy or enacted specific laws to eradicate female circumcision, although it supports private efforts to abolish the practice.

The SDHS questionnaire included a series of questions on female circumcision. The main aim was to assess the impact of the eradication campaign and to collect data on women's attitudes and behaviour regarding the practice. In addition, the questionnaire sought to obtain women's suggestions for ways to structure new campaigns to abolish the practice.

Data were collected on the type of circumcision received by respondents and who performed the operation. Women were asked if their daughters were circumcised and whether they planned to have all their daughters circumcised. Questions were asked about attitudes toward female circumcision in general and reasons for supporting or opposing the practice. Women who said they were opposed to female

circumcision were asked why they thought the practice continues and what the best way is to eradicate it. In the case of married women, data were collected on their perceptions of their husbands' attitudes toward female circumcision and the type of circumcision their husbands preferred.

10.1 PRACTICE OF FEMALE CIRCUMCISION

Prevalence of Female Circumcision

Table 10.1 indicates that 89 percent of ever-married women in Sudan are circumcised, which represents a slight drop from the 96 percent reported in the 1977-78 Sudan Fertility Survey. The SDHS data show practically no difference in circumcision prevalence by age, the lowest being among teenage

<u>Prevalence and types of female circumcision</u>							
Table 10.1 Percentage of ever-married women circumcised and the percent distribution of circumcised women by type of circumcision, according to selected background characteristics, Sudan DHS 1989-90							
Background characteristic	Percentage of women circumcised	Type of circumcision ¹			Total percent	Number of circumcised women	Number of ever-married women
		Pharaonic	Intermediate	Sunna			
Age							
15-19	86.8	73.9	4.2	21.8	100.0	330	380
20-24	89.7	77.9	3.2	18.8	100.0	841	938
25-29	88.6	81.0	2.7	16.3	100.0	1201	1355
30-34	89.7	83.6	3.0	13.4	100.0	870	970
35-39	89.0	85.1	2.6	12.3	100.0	932	1047
40-44	89.0	84.7	2.5	12.7	100.0	561	630
45-49	90.9	88.8	1.8	9.4	100.0	491	540
Residence							
Urban	93.0	82.1	3.9	14.0	100.0	2028	2181
Rural	86.9	82.5	2.1	15.4	100.0	3198	3679
Region							
Khartoum	96.1	83.6	5.5	10.9	100.0	1200	1249
Northern	98.7	98.2	0.3	1.5	100.0	389	394
Eastern	86.5	73.1	1.9	24.8	100.0	577	667
Central	94.6	85.7	1.5	12.7	100.0	1512	1599
Kordofan	95.5	82.5	2.4	15.1	100.0	867	908
Darfur	65.3	71.2	3.5	25.3	100.0	681	1043
Religion							
Muslim	90.0	82.9	2.6	14.5	100.0	5170	5745
Christian	46.8	26.9	26.9	46.2	100.0	52	111
Total	89.2	82.3	2.7	14.8	100.0	5226	5860

¹The "other" responses are included in the Intermediate category and the percents for six missing cases are not shown but are included in the total percent.

women (87 percent) and the highest among women 45-49 (91 percent). As mentioned earlier, the tradition of female circumcision is not confined to Muslims; 47 percent of Christian women have also been circumcised. Differentials by region reflect the fact that certain tribes in the Darfur and Eastern regions do not practice female circumcision. Only 65 percent of women in Darfur and 87 percent of women in the Eastern region are circumcised, compared with at least 95 percent of the ever-married women in other regions. Since the two regions with lower levels of female circumcision are largely rural, a slightly higher proportion of women residing in urban areas (93 percent) than in rural areas (87 percent) report having been circumcised. The differentials by education are not considered because women are circumcised at too young an age for education to have any effect.

Type of Circumcision and Circumcision Provider

Table 10.1 also shows the percent distribution of circumcised women by the type of circumcision performed. The overwhelming majority received Pharaonic circumcision (82 percent of circumcised women). Fifteen percent underwent Sunna circumcision, and 3 percent had the intermediate type of circumcision. Although the prevalence of circumcision has not changed appreciably over the years, it appears that the Pharaonic type is on the decline and the Sunna type is on the rise. Sunna circumcision is more than twice as prevalent among women below 25 years of age (about 20 percent) as it is for those in their forties (10 percent). The proportions of various types of circumcision in the urban and rural areas are almost identical. Pronounced differentials are observed between the regions. One-fourth of women in the Eastern and Darfur regions (regions with the lowest proportions of women circumcised) were Sunna circumcised, while only a negligible proportion of those residing in the Northern region (less than 2 percent) had the same type of circumcision. The proportions of women in other regions with Sunna circumcision vary only slightly and range between 11 percent (Khartoum) to 15 percent (Kordofan). Among Christian women, Sunna was more common (46 percent) than Pharaonic (27 percent) and intermediate (27 percent).

Table 10.2 shows that traditional birth attendants (TBA) perform most circumcisions (64 percent), while trained midwives perform around one-third and doctors less than one percent. However,

Persons who perform female circumcision

Table 10.2 Percent distribution of circumcised women by person who performed the circumcision according to the type of circumcision, Sudan DHS, 1989-90

Type of circumcision	Type of circumcisor					Total percent	Number of women
	Doctor	Trained midwife	TBA	Other	Missing		
Pharaonic	0.3	33.9	65.3	0.3	0.2	100.0	4303
Intermediate	2.9	64.0	32.4	0.7	0.0	100.0	139
Sunna	2.2	35.0	61.9	0.4	0.5	100.0	775
Total	0.7	34.9	63.9	0.3	0.2	100.0	5226

Note: Total includes nine women whose circumcision type was "other" or not given.
TBA = Traditional birth attendant

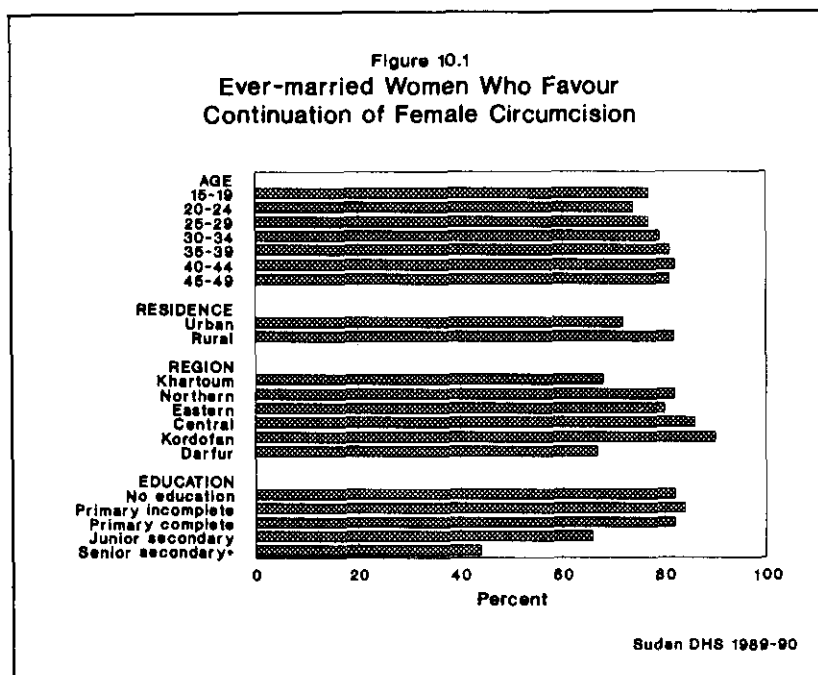
the intermediate type of circumcision is twice as likely to be performed by a trained midwife (64 percent) as by a TBA (32 percent).

10.2 ATTITUDES TOWARD CIRCUMCISION

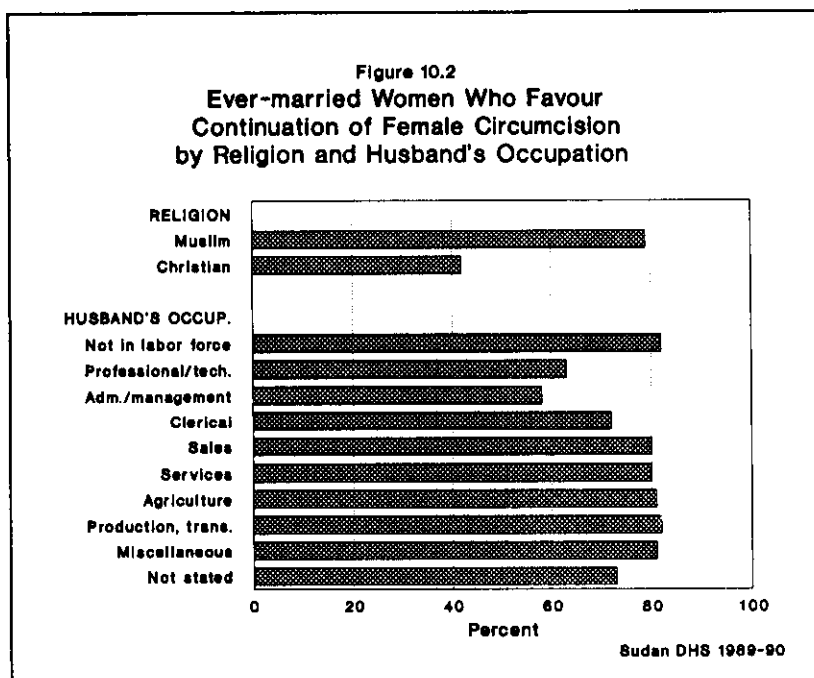
Women's Attitude Toward Female Circumcision

All women surveyed were asked, "Do you think female circumcision should continue?" Those who supported retaining the practice were also asked the type of circumcision they preferred.

The majority of ever-married women (79 percent) support female circumcision (Figure 10.1), although younger women are less likely to support the practice than older women; 74 percent of women age 20-24 support continuation of female circumcision, compared with 80 percent of women over 34 years. Also the proportion of women who think circumcision should continue is smaller in urban areas (72 percent) than in rural (82 percent). The greater opposition to female circumcision among urban women may be explained by higher education in urban areas. Only two-thirds of women with junior secondary and less than half (44 percent) of those with secondary or higher schooling support the practice



of female circumcision, compared with over four-fifths of less educated women. Regarding regional differentials, two factors seem to be operating in women's attitudes toward female circumcision—education of women and the proportion of women circumcised. Less than 70 percent of women in Khartoum and Darfur, around 80 percent in the Northern and Eastern regions, and 90 percent in the Central and Kordofan regions approve of circumcision. The lower level of support in Khartoum is presumably related to the presence of more highly educated women, while the lower level of support in Darfur is most likely due to the fact that circumcision is not uniformly practised there. As expected, Christian women are much less likely to approve of female circumcision than Muslim women (Figure 10.2). The relation between husband's occupation and wife's attitude toward female circumcision shows that women whose husbands had administrative or professional jobs were less likely to approve of the practice than wives whose husbands were employed in other types of jobs.



Attitude Toward Circumcision of Daughters

In addition to a question on attitudes toward circumcision in general, respondents were asked two questions to ascertain their attitude towards circumcising their own daughters. All women who had living daughters were asked, "Are all of your daughters circumcised?" Those who had one or more daughters still uncircumcised were also asked, "Do you plan to have all your daughters circumcised?" Table 10.3 compares circumcision approval rates for respondents' own daughters and for female circumcision in general according to the type of circumcision the respondent had and also according to the circumcision status of their daughters. The table reveals that, except for those who were themselves not circumcised, the support for circumcising daughters is even stronger than support for circumcising women in general. For example, among those who had Pharaonic circumcision, although only 85 percent say they favour the continuation of female circumcision, 94 percent plan to circumcise their own daughters. Thus, 9 percent of women with the Pharaonic type of circumcision do not favour the practice of circumcision but feel compelled to have their own daughters circumcised.

Considering the circumcision status of daughters and approval of female circumcision, Table 10.3 shows that the approval of circumcision is less than 20 percent among women whose daughters were uncircumcised, although they had attained the age at which the operation is generally performed, compared with 90 percent or more among those who had either all or some of their daughters circumcised.

Type of Circumcision Preferred

It should be noted that the type of circumcision preferred was asked only of those who approved of female circumcision in general, thus, the results may not necessarily reflect the attitudes of women regarding their own daughters. Nevertheless, it is useful to examine the type of circumcision preferred by circumcision status of the respondent as well as of her daughters. Table 10.3 indicates that Sunna circumcision (48 percent) is slightly more favoured than Pharaonic (46 percent) and only 5 percent prefer the intermediate type.

Preferred type of female circumcision according to circumcision status of respondents and respondents' daughters

Table 10.3 Percentage of ever-married women who plan to have their daughters circumcised and who think female circumcision should continue, and among those favouring continuation of circumcision, the percent distribution by type of circumcision favoured, according to the type of circumcision they have had and whether their daughters have been circumcised, Sudan DHS 1989-90

Circumcision status	Plan daughters' circumcision	Favour continuation of circumcision	Among those favouring female circumcision in general, the type of circumcision preferred					Total per-cent	Number of women	Number of ever-married women
			Pharaonic	Inter-mediate	Sunna	Other	Missing			
Respondent's status										
Never circumcised	15.6	16.9	15.0	5.6	73.8	5.6	0.0	100.0	107	634
Pharaonic	94.4	85.4	56.7	4.4	38.4	0.4	0.1	100.0	3675	4303
Intermediate	88.4	83.5	3.4	49.1	47.4	0.0	0.0	100.0	116	139
Sunna	92.2	89.7	2.4	1.0	96.4	0.1	0.0	100.0	695	775
Daughters' status										
Have no daughters	NA	69.3	44.6	4.6	50.1	0.7	0.0	100.0	1022	1474
All circumcised	NA	87.7	54.9	4.8	39.8	0.3	0.2	100.0	1230	1403
Elder daughters circumcised	97.2	95.0	46.1	5.5	47.9	0.5	0.1	100.0	1072	1128
Daughters not old enough	85.5	81.7	39.6	5.4	54.2	0.7	0.1	100.0	1206	1477
Daughters old enough but not circumcised	19.6	19.1	29.6	2.8	64.8	2.8	0.0	100.0	71	372
Total	81.6	78.5	46.1	5.0	48.2	0.6	0.1	100.0	4602	5860

Note: Total includes nine women whose circumcision type was "other" or not given and six women whose daughters' circumcision status was missing.

NA=Not applicable

Table 10.3 also shows that a large majority of uncircumcised (74 percent) and Sunna circumcised women (96 percent) favour the Sunna type. It is noteworthy that 15 percent of the uncircumcised women who favour continuation of the practice prefer Pharaonic circumcision, the most severe form. The difference in attitudes is most noticeable among those who received Pharaonic circumcision. A substantial minority (38 percent) of these women prefer Sunna, the less severe type of circumcision, although most (57 percent) would still like the Pharaonic type to continue.

The majority of women with no daughters, with no daughters circumcised, or with daughters not old enough to be circumcised favour Sunna circumcision, while the majority of mothers whose daughters have all been circumcised show a preference for Pharaonic circumcision.

Table 10.4 gives preferred type of circumcision by selected background characteristics. In general, the weaker the reported support for female circumcision, the stronger the preference for the Sunna type. For example, younger women and urban residents favour Sunna circumcision slightly more than older women and rural dwellers. It is also notable that only 10 percent of women in the highest education category and less than 25 percent of women living in Darfur region prefer Pharaonic circumcision, while 85 percent and 68 percent favour Sunna circumcision. The type of circumcision preferred is sometimes influenced by tribal affiliation. Thus, although women in the Kordofan region overwhelmingly support female circumcision (90 percent), the majority prefer Sunna circumcision, while

Preferred type of female circumcision according to selected background characteristics

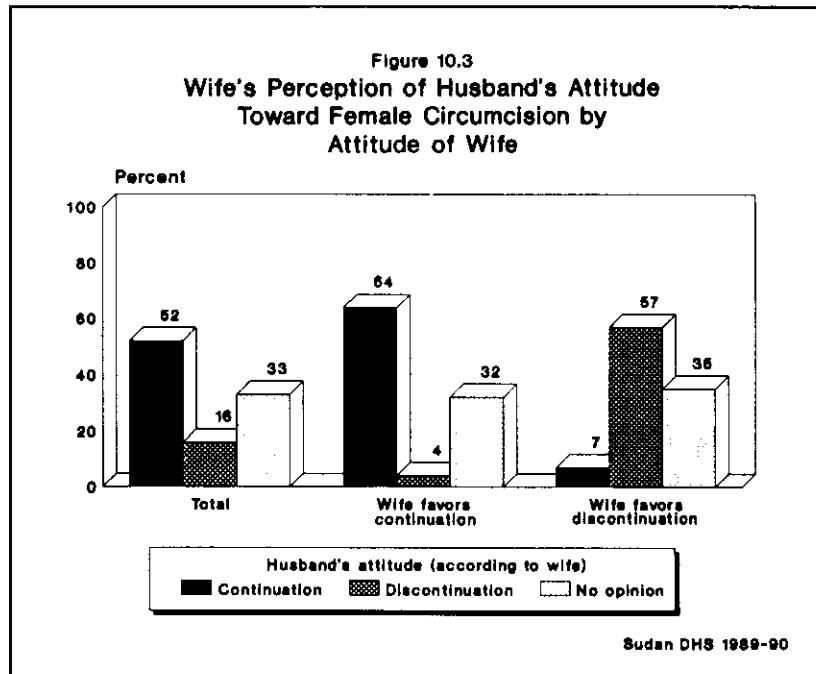
Table 10.4 Percentage of ever-married women who favour continuation of female circumcision, and among those favouring continuation, the percent distribution of the type of circumcision favoured, according to selected background characteristics, Sudan DHS 1989-90

Background characteristic	Favour continuation of circumcision	Among those who favour continuation of circumcision, the type preferred					Total Percent	Number of women	Number of ever-married women
		Pharaonic	Inter-mediate	Sunna	Other	Missing			
Age									
15-19	77.1	47.4	3.4	48.8	0.3	0.0	100.0	293	380
20-24	74.4	45.4	4.6	49.1	0.9	0.0	100.0	698	938
25-29	76.7	42.5	5.0	51.8	0.7	0.0	100.0	1039	1355
30-34	78.9	44.1	4.6	50.5	0.7	0.3	100.0	765	970
35-39	81.2	46.8	5.9	46.6	0.6	0.1	100.0	850	1047
40-44	82.2	51.2	5.4	43.4	0.0	0.0	100.0	518	630
45-49	81.3	51.3	5.7	42.1	0.7	0.2	100.0	439	540
Residence									
Urban	72.1	39.7	6.2	53.4	0.6	0.1	100.0	1573	2181
Rural	82.3	49.5	4.4	45.4	0.6	0.1	100.0	3029	3679
Region									
Khartoum	68.1	42.8	7.6	48.5	1.1	0.0	100.0	851	1249
Northern	81.7	67.7	2.5	29.5	0.3	0.0	100.0	322	394
Eastern	79.9	54.2	2.8	42.4	0.4	0.2	100.0	533	667
Central	85.9	52.6	4.2	42.5	0.6	0.1	100.0	1374	1599
Kordofan	90.3	43.9	4.3	51.6	0.1	0.1	100.0	820	908
Darfur	67.3	24.1	7.3	67.7	0.9	0.1	100.0	702	1043
Education									
No education	82.4	50.7	4.4	44.3	0.6	0.1	100.0	2822	3425
Primary incomplete	84.3	46.4	6.2	46.8	0.4	0.1	100.0	963	1142
Primary complete	82.3	43.3	7.3	48.2	1.2	0.0	100.0	330	401
Junior secondary	65.8	29.2	5.3	65.1	0.4	0.0	100.0	281	427
Senior secondary+	44.3	10.2	4.4	84.5	1.0	0.0	100.0	206	465
Religion									
Muslim	79.2	46.4	4.9	48.2	0.5	0.1	100.0	4551	5745
Christian	42.3	27.7	21.3	44.7	6.4	0.0	100.0	47	111
Husband's occupation									
Not in labor force	82.1	34.8	17.4	47.8	0.0	0.0	100.0	23	28
Professional/technical/ Administrative/ managerial	62.8	31.2	6.3	61.8	0.6	0.0	100.0	317	504
Clerical	72.3	37.9	4.5	57.6	0.0	0.0	100.0	269	372
Sales	80.0	49.9	4.1	45.3	0.4	0.3	100.0	735	919
Service workers	79.6	45.2	5.7	48.7	0.4	0.0	100.0	787	989
Agricultural, animal husbandary	81.1	49.4	3.9	46.0	0.6	0.1	100.0	1569	1935
Production, transportation	81.5	43.3	7.5	48.4	0.8	0.0	100.0	637	782
Miscellaneous worker	81.0	52.9	4.6	41.2	1.3	0.0	100.0	238	294
Not stated	73.0	51.9	3.7	40.7	3.7	0.0	100.0	27	37
Total	78.5	46.1	5.0	48.2	0.6	0.1	100.0	4602	5860

in the Northern region, two-thirds of the women prefer Pharaonic and less than one-third Sunna circumcision. The husband's occupation is associated with the wife's attitude regarding preferred type of circumcision. Wives of men in professional/technical/administrative/managerial, or clerical occupations are not only less likely to favour continuation of female circumcision, but among those who favour continuation a majority prefer Sunna (58-80 percent). The support for Sunna circumcision is not as strong among women whose husbands have been engaged in other occupations (41 to 49 percent). The preferences of Christian women closely parallel their level of practice and they are less likely than Muslim women to favour Pharaonic circumcision.

Husbands' Attitudes Toward Female Circumcision

Currently married women were also asked about their perception of their husband's attitude toward circumcision. The data are presented in Figure 10.3 and Table 10.5. The figure shows that overall 52 percent of the husbands are perceived to be in favour of the continuation of circumcision and 16 percent in favour of discontinuation; one-third of currently married women either did not know their husband's opinion or stated that their husbands have no opinion about female circumcision. In general,



women think their husbands have attitudes toward female circumcision similar to their own. Only 7 percent of women who favour discontinuation believe their husbands favour continuation, while 4 percent of those who favour continuation believe their husbands favour discontinuation.

Husband-wife preferences for the type of circumcision are also examined in Table 10.5. The wives' preferences and their perception of their husbands' preferences differ only slightly. A substantial proportion of women reported that their husbands had no opinion on female circumcision, probably implying that men were less concerned with the practice. Women generally reported that their husbands

Husband's attitude toward female circumcision

Table 10.5 Percent distribution of currently married women by husband's attitude toward female circumcision, according to wife's circumcision preference, Sudan DHS 1989-90

Wife's circumcision preference	Wife's perception of husband's attitude toward female circumcision							Total percent	Number of wives
	Husband favours circumcision				Husband favours discon- tinuation	Husband has no opinion	Wife does not know/ missing		
	Pharaonic	Inter- mediate	Sunna	Other					
Pharaonic	58.3	0.3	5.4	2.0	2.3	31.5	0.3	100.0	1943
Intermediate	6.1	46.2	7.5	4.2	4.2	30.7	0.9	100.0	212
Sunna	2.9	0.8	55.5	2.3	5.6	32.9	0.1	100.0	2051
Other	3.8	0.0	7.7	38.5	0.0	50.0	0.0	100.0	26
Favours discontinuation	2.8	0.5	3.4	0.3	57.4	35.4	0.2	100.0	1164
Total	22.9	2.3	24.1	2.0	15.5	32.9	0.2	100.0	5400

Note: Total includes four women whose circumcision preference was missing.

who had an opinion on the subject, preferred the same type of circumcision as they themselves did. Overall, husbands are perceived as having about equal preference for Sunna (24 percent) and Pharaonic circumcision (23 percent). Women are also equally divided in their preferences for the two types of circumcision; 38 percent of currently married women prefer Sunna circumcision and 36 percent prefer Pharaonic circumcision.

10.3 REASONS FOR ATTITUDES TOWARD CIRCUMCISION

Reasons for Favouring Continuation of Female Circumcision

Respondents who favoured continuation were asked the reason for their attitude. Table 10.6 summarizes respondents' answers to the question, "Why do you think female circumcision should continue?" The first and second reasons (if any) given by each respondent were recorded. Table 10.6 shows that more than two-thirds (68 percent) of women who support continuation want the practice to continue because it is a "tradition" and 19 percent consider female circumcision a "good tradition." Although female circumcision is not explicitly enjoined in the Koran, almost one in seven women gave "religion" as a reason for supporting it. The other reasons mentioned were "cleanliness" (8 percent), "preserves virginity/prevents immorality" (7 percent), and "better marriage prospects" (5 percent). Except for some minor differentials according to respondents' area of residence and education, the order of reasons given is the same. Surprisingly, among urban and more educated women a high proportion approve of circumcision because they believe it is a religious demand, or that the practice results in "cleanliness," or that it helps "preserve virginity/prevent immorality."

Reasons for favouring continuation of female circumcision

Table 10.6 Among ever-married women who favour continuation of female circumcision, percentage giving specific reasons for their attitude, according to area of residence and level of education, Sudan DHS 1989-90

Reason for favouring continuation ¹	Area of residence		Level of education					Total
	Urban	Rural	No education	Primary incomplete	Primary complete	Junior secondary	Senior secondary+	
Tradition	62.6	71.3	71.2	65.1	68.2	64.4	49.0	68.3
Good tradition	18.8	18.4	19.5	18.3	17.3	14.6	13.6	18.5
Religious demand	14.9	13.6	13.2	14.7	13.0	17.4	19.4	14.0
Cleanliness	11.1	5.7	5.8	8.1	7.9	12.8	21.8	7.6
Better marriage prospects	4.6	5.0	4.4	6.5	5.2	3.6	5.3	4.9
Greater pleasure for husband	2.2	1.2	1.2	2.1	1.8	1.8	3.4	1.6
Preserves virginity/prevents immorality	11.8	5.2	5.6	9.4	8.5	10.3	17.5	7.4
Increases fertility	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.6	0.4	1.0	0.3
Never thought about reason	2.3	1.8	1.9	2.0	1.8	2.1	2.9	2.0
Other	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.6	1.1	1.0	0.5
Missing	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.0	0.4	0.5	0.4
Number of women	573	3029	2822	963	330	281	206	4602

¹The percentages do not sum to 100 percent because up to two reasons were accepted.

Reasons for Not Favouring Continuation of Female Circumcision

Those who indicated that they would like to see female circumcision stopped were asked why they were opposed to female circumcision. For these respondents, as for those who favoured continuation, the first and second reasons were recorded. As Table 10.7 shows, half of the women cited medical complications as a reason for their opposing the practice, while over one-fourth cited pain associated with the operation. Surprisingly, over one-fourth said that female circumcision was not a Sudanese custom. Religious prohibition was mentioned as a reason for opposing the practice by one in eight women who do not support female circumcision. There was equal mention of the religious prohibition by urban and rural women, but urban women were much more likely to oppose female circumcision because of the medical complications arising from the operation or because it is a painful experience, while rural women were more likely to say that circumcision is not a Sudanese custom. Similarly, educated women were much more likely than uneducated women to oppose circumcision because of medical complications or on the grounds that the practice was a painful personal experience.

Reasons for favouring discontinuation of female circumcision

Table 10.7 Among ever-married women who think female circumcision should not continue, the percentage stating specific reasons for their attitude, according to area of residence and level of education, Sudan DHS 1989-90

Reason for favouring discontinuation ¹	Area of residence		Level of education					Total
	Urban	Rural	No education	Primary incomplete	Primary complete	Junior secondary	Senior secondary+	
Medical complications	69.7	30.7	16.6	74.9	74.6	81.5	83.8	49.6
Not Sudanese custom	9.5	48.0	59.7	3.9	2.8	0.7	0.0	29.4
Painful personal experience	40.6	17.3	8.0	48.0	52.1	44.5	47.5	28.6
Religious prohibition	11.5	12.8	16.0	8.9	4.2	8.2	10.0	12.2
Failure to achieve sexual satisfaction	9.4	2.2	0.8	8.4	5.6	10.3	12.4	5.7
Against woman's dignity	3.0	1.1	0.8	1.7	1.4	3.4	4.2	2.0
Missing	2.0	2.8	3.3	1.7	2.8	0.0	1.9	2.4
Other	1.8	2.6	3.3	1.7	0.0	0.0	1.9	2.2
Number of women	608	648	601	179	71	146	259	1256

¹The percentages do not sum to 100 percent because up to two reasons were accepted.

10.4 ERADICATION OF FEMALE CIRCUMCISION

Why Female Circumcision Continues

Ever-married women opposing continuation of circumcision were asked why they think female circumcision continues. The results in Table 10.8 reveal that fear of social criticism (27 percent), ignorance of the consequences (21 percent), and the influence of old women/grandmothers (13 percent) are the answers most frequently given. However, it should be pointed out that one in four women overall, four in ten rural women and almost half of the uneducated women said that they do not know why the practice continues. Among urban women only 5 percent women said "don't know." Among those who gave specific answers, higher proportions of urban women and of women with post-primary education mention the influence of old women/grandmothers than of rural women and of those less educated. Other urban-rural and educational differentials in reasons cited for continuing the practice are minimal.

Reasons female circumcision continues

Table 10.8 Percent distribution of ever-married women who oppose continuation of female circumcision by the reason they think female circumcision continues, according to selected background characteristics, Sudan DHS 1989-90

Reason practice continues	Area of residence		Level of education					Total
	Urban	Rural	No education	Primary incomplete	Primary complete	Junior secondary	Senior secondary+	
Fear of social criticism	34.0	20.5	17.5	39.7	32.4	34.9	34.7	27.1
Ignorance of consequences	27.6	15.4	11.8	25.1	33.8	27.4	34.0	21.3
Influence of old women/grandmothers	17.4	8.0	6.5	17.9	12.7	19.2	19.3	12.6
Fear of initiating social change	4.9	3.4	3.3	5.0	4.2	4.1	5.4	4.1
Influence of parents	3.8	2.0	2.2	2.8	2.8	5.5	3.1	2.9
Men like it	2.1	2.9	4.8	0.6	0.0	1.4	0.0	2.5
It is a custom	0.5	3.4	3.8	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.4	2.0
Other	1.6	1.5	2.0	1.1	2.8	2.1	0.4	1.6
Insufficient health education	0.8	0.8	0.2	0.6	4.2	2.1	0.8	0.8
Lack of government effort	1.0	0.2	0.0	0.6	2.8	1.4	0.8	0.6
Law not enforced	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.2
Don't know	5.3	41.4	47.4	5.0	2.8	1.4	0.8	23.9
Missing	0.7	0.3	0.3	1.1	1.4	0.0	0.4	0.5
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of women	608	648	601	179	71	146	259	1256

Abolishing the Practice of Female Circumcision

Ever-married women who disapprove of female circumcision were asked their opinion about the best way to abolish the practice. Again, a large proportion of rural (53 percent) and uneducated (60 percent) women did not give a definite response to the question (Table 10.9). Education campaigns for women and enforcing laws against the practice of were most often mentioned as the best ways to abolish female circumcision. Fifty-five percent of urban women and 27 percent of rural women suggested education campaigns for women as the best way to abolish the practice. The higher the level of education, the greater the proportion of women who gave this suggestion for the eradication of female circumcision. But these differences are in fact minimal; the proportion of women who responded "don't know" is so large it distorts the picture. Only a small percentage of women suggested involving fathers, improving women's status, or sex education as the best way to abolish circumcision.

Women's opinions of the best way to abolish female circumcision

Table 10.9 Percentage of ever-married women who oppose continuation of female circumcision by best way to abolish the practice, according to selected background characteristics, Sudan DHS 1989-90

Best way to abolish female circumcision	Area of residence		Level of education					Total
	Urban	Rural	No education	Primary incomplete	Primary complete	Junior secondary	Senior secondary+	
Enforce laws	23.8	15.7	15.1	26.3	23.9	30.8	18.1	19.7
Education campaign for women	54.9	26.7	20.6	51.4	52.1	61.0	63.7	40.4
Involve fathers	4.8	3.2	3.0	4.5	8.5	2.1	5.8	4.0
Improve women's status	0.8	0.3	0.2	1.1	0.0	0.7	1.2	0.6
Sex education	0.7	0.5	0.2	0.6	1.4	1.4	0.8	0.6
Other/don't know	14.3	52.8	60.2	15.1	12.7	4.1	9.7	34.2
Missing	0.7	0.8	0.7	1.1	1.4	0.0	0.8	0.7
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of women	608	648	601	179	71	146	259	1256

10.5 CONCLUSIONS

While a large majority (78 percent) of women in northern Sudan still favour the continuation of female circumcision, most prefer to see a less severe form of the practice. The reasons cited by those who favour continuation of circumcision (tradition and good tradition) and by those who favour discontinuation for why the practice continues (fear of social criticism, ignorance of consequences) make it clear that change is extremely difficult to bring about in a traditional society such as Sudan. The reasons for favouring discontinuation of the practice (namely, medical complications, painful personal experience, and the fact that female circumcision is not obligatory in Islam and is not viewed as a Sudanese custom by many) can be used in educational campaigns to eradicate the practice. Female educational opportunities, by themselves, may contribute to changes in attitudes and loosen the hold that tradition plays in the continuation of the practice among many who might want to discontinue it. The other approach mentioned—enforcing laws against female circumcision—would require enactment of laws declaring all female circumcision illegal or at least enforcement of laws against Pharaonic circumcision. The chances of the enactment of new laws to abolish female circumcision totally are not promising, especially in light of the recent movement toward conservatism in the country. The increasing level of women's education and the efforts being made to improve the role of women in society are positive factors for those who would like to see the practice of female circumcision made less severe or discontinued entirely.

