

Mauritania fatwa bans female genital mutilation

Bob Trevelyan, *BBC News*, 18.01.2010



Mutilations are carried out for a mixture of cultural and social reasons

Thirty four Islamic scholars in Mauritania have signed a fatwa, or religious opinion, banning the practice of female genital mutilation.

The fatwa, signed in the Mauritanian capital Nouakchott, states that the procedure has been proven to be harmful either at the time or subsequently.

Many Mauritanian women have welcomed the move.

Female genital mutilation has been recognised globally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women.

But that message has been slow to filter down in parts of north, east and west Africa where the practice is still widespread.

Health campaigners estimate that more than 70 percent of Mauritanian girls undergo the partial or total removal of their external genitalia for non-medical reasons.

The World Health Organisation says there are no health benefits and many potentially damaging consequences, from severe pain and blood loss to recurrent infections, infertility and an increased risk of complications in childbirth.

Taboo 'smashed'

Mutilations are carried out for a mix of cultural and social reasons, and many believe the practice has Islamic religious support, even if this isn't always the case.

A law professor at Nouakchott University said the collective fatwa would greatly reduce female genital mutilation in Mauritania because it would remove what he called the religious mask that the practice hides behind.

Mauritanian women in Nouakchott also welcomed what one said was the smashing of a religious taboo.

However, others have cautioned that a publicity campaign will now be needed if the fatwa's message is to be spread into outlying areas where genital mutilation is most common.