60314 - Circumcision of girls and some doctors' criticism thereof

the question

Nowadays we hear that many doctors denounce the circumcision of girls, and say that it harms them physically and psychologically, and that circumcision is an inherited custom that has no basis is Islam .

Detailed answer

Firstly:

Circumcision is not an inherited custom as some people claim, rather it is prescribed in Islam and the scholars are unanimously agreed that it is prescribed. Not a single Muslim scholar – as far as we know – has said that circumcision is not prescribed.

Their evidence is to be found in the saheeh ahaadeeth of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), which prove that it is prescribed, for example:

1-

The hadeeth narrated by al-Bukhaari (5889) and Muslim (257) from Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him), that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "The fitrah is five things – or five things are part of the fitrah – circumcision, shaving the pubes, cutting the nails, plucking the armpit hairs, and trimming the moustache."

This hadeeth includes circumcision of both males and females.

2-

Muslim (349) narrated that 'Aa'ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "When a man sits between the four parts (arms and legs of his wife) and the two circumcised parts meet, then ghusl is obligatory."

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) mentioned the two circumcised parts, i.e., the circumcised part of the husband and the circumcised part of the wife, which indicates that a woman may be circumcised just like a man.

3-

Abu Dawood (5271) narrated from Umm ‘Atiyyah al-Ansaariyyah that a woman used to do circumcisions in Madeenah and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said to her: “Do not go to the extreme in cutting; that is better for the woman and more liked by the husband.” But the scholars differed concerning this hadeeth. Some of them classed it as da’eef (weak) and others classed it as saheeh. It was classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Abi Dawood. The fact that circumcision for women is prescribed in Islam is confirmed by the ahaadeeth quoted above, not by this disputed hadeeth. But the scholars differed concerning the ruling, and there are three opinions:

1 – That it is obligatory for both males and females. This is the view of the Shaafa’is and Hanbalis, and is the view favoured by al-Qaadi Abu Bakr ibn al-‘Arabi among the Maalikis (may Allaah have mercy on them all).

Al-Nawawi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said in al-Majmoo’ (1/367): Circumcision is obligatory for both men and women in our view. This is the view of many of the salaf, as was narrated by al-Khattaabi. Among those who regarded it as obligatory is Ahmad… it is the correct view that is well known and was stated by al-Shaafa’i (may Allaah have mercy on him), and the majority stated definitively that it is obligatory for both men and women. end quote.

See Fath al-Baari, 10/340; Kishshaaf al-Qinaa’, 1/80

2 – That circumcision is Sunnah for both males and females. This is the view of the Hanafis and Maalikis, and was narrated in one report from Ahmad. Ibn ‘Aabideen al-Hanafi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said in his Haashiyah (6/751): In Kitaab al-Tahaarah of al-Siraaj al-Wahhaaj it says: Know that circumcision is Sunnah in our view – i.e., according to the Hanafis – for men and for women. end quote.

See: Mawaahib al-Jaleel, 3/259

3 – That circumcision is obligatory for men and is good and mustahabb for women. This is the third view of Imam Ahmad, and it is the view of some Maalikis such as Sahnoon. This view was also favoured by al-Muwaffaq ibn Qudaamah in al-Mughni.

See: al-Tamheed, 21/60; al-Mughni, 1/63

It says in Fataawa al-Lajnah al-Daa'imah (5/223):

Circumcision is one of the Sunnahs of the fitrah, and it is for both males and females, except that is it obligatory for males and Sunnah and good in the case of women. End quote

Thus it is clear that the fuqaha' of Islam are agreed that circumcision is prescribed for both males and females, and in fact the majority of them are of the view that it is obligatory for both. No one said that it is not prescribed or that it is makrooh or haraam.

Secondly:

With regard to the criticism of circumcision by some doctors, and their claim that it is harmful both physically and psychologically,

This criticism of theirs is not valid. It is sufficient for us Muslims that something be proven to be from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), then we will follow it, and we are certain that it is beneficial and not harmful. If it were harmful, Allaah and His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) would not have prescribed it for us.

In the answer to question no. 45528 we have mentioned some of the medical benefits of circumcision for women, quoting from some doctors.

Thirdly:

We would add here the fatwas of some modern scholars who have responded to this war that has been launched against female circumcision on the grounds that it is harmful to health.

Shaykh Jaad al-Haqq 'Ali Jaad al-Haqq, the former Shaykh of al-Azhar, said:

Hence the fuqaha' of all madhhabs are agreed that circumcision for both men and woman is part of the fitrah of Islam and one of the symbols of the faith, and it is something praiseworthy. There is no report from any of the Muslim fuqaha', according to what we have studied in their books that are available to us, to say that circumcision is forbidden for men or women, or that it is not permissible, or that it is harmful for females, if it is done in the manner that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) taught to Umm Habeebah in the report quoted above.

Then he said:

From the above it is clear that the circumcision of girls – which is the topic under discussion here – is part of the fitrah of Islam, and the way it is to be done is the method that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) explained. It is not right to abandon his teachings for the view of anyone else, even if that is a doctor, because medicine is knowledge and knowledge is always developing and changing. End quote.

In the fatwa of Shaykh 'Atiyah Saqar – the former heard of the Fatwa Committee in al-Azhar – it says:

The calls which urge the banning of female circumcision are call that go against Islam, because there is no clear text in the Qur'aan or Sunnah and there is no opinion of the fuqaha' that says that female circumcision is haraam. Female circumcision is either obligatory or recommended. Even though there is a fiqhi principle which says that the decree of a ruler may put an end to a dispute regarding controversial matters, the decree of the ruler in this case cannot be but either of two things: that it is either obligatory or recommended, and it is not correct to issue a decree banning it, so as not to go against sharee'ah which is the principal source of legislation in our land, whose constitution states that Islam is the official religion of the country. It is permissible to issue some legislation that provides guidelines for performing this procedure (female circumcision) in the proper manner in such a way that does not contradict the rulings of sharee'ah.

The words of the doctors and others are not definitive. Scientific discoveries are still opening doors every day which change our old perceptions. End quote.

In the fatwa of Dar al-Ifta' al-Misriyyah (6/1986) it says:

Thus it is clear that female circumcision is prescribed in Islam, and that it is one of the Sunnahs of the fitrah and it has a good effect of moderating the individual's behaviour. As for the opinions of doctors who say that female circumcision is harmful, these are individual opinions which are not derived from any agreed scientific basis, and they do not form an established scientific opinion. They acknowledge that the rates of cancer among circumcised men are lower than among those who are not circumcised, and some of these doctors clearly recommend that circumcision should be done by doctors and not these ignorant women, so that the operation will be safe and there will be no negative consequences. However, medical theories about disease and the way to treat it are not fixed, rather they change with time and with ongoing research. So it is not correct to rely on them when criticizing circumcision which the Wise and All-Knowing Lawgiver has decreed in His wisdom for mankind. Experience has taught us that the wisdom behind some rulings and Sunnahs may be hidden from us. May Allaah help us all to follow the right path. End quote.