

Sir:

**Re: 'Female genital mutilation: An agonising choice (18 June 2016)**

Your call for a 'new approach' to female genital mutilation (FGM) after three decades of work to end a centuries-old practice takes that very work back 20 years.

Proposing that governments ban the 'worst forms' of FGM in favour of the 'least nasty version' is to deny that FGM, in all its forms, is internationally recognized as a violation of a girl's human rights and her right to physical, mental and psychological integrity—irrespective of the degree of harm caused or indeed the medical qualifications of the person performing it.

FGM plays a central part in the traditional norms of many societies, according to which many girls and women are subjected to several such procedures over the course of their lives. You fail to recognise that the 'symbolic nick' you propose begins a process that puts women and girls at risk of repeated and more severe forms of FGM at a later date. Further, all forms of FGM can entail psychological trauma that is not necessarily linked to the severity of the cut: the breach of a child's trust and her physical integrity can cause trauma in and of itself.

The medicalisation of FGM is a particularly worrying development. FGM has no health benefits whatsoever, yet the involvement of healthcare professionals confers legitimacy on a practice that violates medical ethics.

The fight to end FGM is a long one. Yet notable progress has been made in a diverse range of communities around the world. Critical to this continued if slow progress has been the clear message that all forms of FGM are unacceptable. Simply criminalising certain types of FGM will not change attitudes. But it will confuse a carefully crafted message that aims to achieve fundamental change in communities affected by FGM.

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[www.medinstgenderstudies.org](http://www.medinstgenderstudies.org)

End FGM European Network

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