**Title: Demystifying *khafd* in the Dawoodi Bohra community: A commentary on an Indian report**

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**Review Comments**

**Reviewer 1**

The paper brings up some important points. I would like to highlight some issues which the authors may wish to consider to stregthen:

1. The most valuable critique highlighted in this paper is whether medical prohibition of FGM/C would at all help or rather may harm the interests of women in the long run. The authors may want to strengthen this argument further. It appears very valuable for the sub-continent.

2. The aspect of western education influencing the opinion of young girls and young mothers has not been taken to its logical conclusion. It is unclear what the authors want to say.

**Editor Comments**

1. It is an important area which requires wider discussion and open debate. Therefore the manuscript has relevance in general as well to IJME in particular. Welcome submission which is likely to generate more debate and discussion.
2. Title: Two points:
   1. ‘Demystifying’ tends to convey that the research report being commented upon or critiqued has presented materials or arguments without robust substantiation.
   2. ‘Indian report’ is too non-specific.

Please revisit the title of the manuscript.

1. The overall tenor of the manuscript reads a bit ‘defensive’ despite attempting to bring in both sides. One of the central threads of critique of the Indian research report on FGC by authors of the present manuscript is about their being biased against the practice of FGC. Interestingly, the manuscript indicates a bias in favour of FGC practice, at least, that is how the text reads at a number of places possibly without authors’ intention to do so.
2. Some of the paragraphs require revisiting and could be deleted if they don’t contribute to the central argument of the manuscript.
3. The current draft brings forth mostly the religious-cultural aspects of the practice which is helpful and much needed. However, the manuscript will benefit immensely by centre-staging ethics and if possible human rights perspective. This will also address the point ‘3’ above.
4. Authors are welcome to present their own position on the matter at hand. However, the manuscript does not engage with the very idea of FGCs from the point of view of the ethics of the foundations and motivations behind the practice which seems to do with the Bohra identity.
5. Broadly speaking, the argument in the manuscript seems to make an assumption that some forms of FGCs are okay and some are not. The issue at hand is not and ought not to be about the severity of FGC but the very origins of such a practice which are often rooted in religio-cultural fabric of said communities and tend to be discriminatory against certain segment of a community. In this particular context it is about women’s sexuality and the discriminatory practices are against minor girls. Authors mentioned that researchers should have focused on khafd as a matter of maintaining identity of D Bohra community which is a valid observation. However, authors also don’t comment on this important aspect. Authors are suggested to consider reflecting on this aspect robustly. By opting to do so will strengthen the manuscript and will partially address the unintended ‘defensive’ tenor of the manuscript.
6. Authors make reference to the conflicting human rights which is by both those who oppose and support the practice of khafd. Readers would like to know, at least briefly, authors’ views, especially on using HR framework by supporters of khafd and its implications as way of furthering the discourse. This would be a slippery slope since such an approach imply that many of the practices in various communities and ethnic groups which are clearly discriminatory and regressive ought to be supported as a way of respecting HR of protecting religious practices. Obvious examples include: brides are expected to bleed on consummation and the rituals around the same. Failing which girls are ridiculed publicly in the morning in front of men and women from the community and sent back to parents place on the grounds of breach of virginity before marriage, male preference, marriages at young age (child marriages).
7. Critique of the methodology employed by the researcher and other matters: Important aspect to cover in such critical commentaries focused on a particular report. However, it is far too stretched. For example:
   1. P no 3: “also by our informal conversations with the Bohra community in Pakistan.”: Authors may wish to revisit the critique of researchers of the Indian report. They have raised the issue of academic norms to be followed for such discourse. For example, authors of this manuscript mentioned that researchers have certain position on the FGC practice and the report doesn’t offer other side of the argument. If so, falling back on ‘informal conversation’ to critique the said report contradicts authors’ own position on academic norms. Please revisit this and similar other articulations in the manuscript. While critique is welcome, any contradictions arising need to be addressed.
   2. P no 3: “…This indicates that the report …, an essential value for research”. This reads a bit out of sync with contemporary advances in academic discourse across disciplines. Positivist approaches and neutrality are no longer the only legitimate approach to research. As authors would know well, that these are critiqued to further strengthen the significance of qualitative research informed by various philosophical traditions. Even the so called “pure” sciences are not without biases and agenda. Such neutrality is not only difficult to achieve but is almost a myth in such types of qualitative research. In fact, many will treat the researchers’ approach to state their position upfront a strength rather than a weakness. We suggest that authors revisit this argument to align with current academic discourse on “neutrality” in science/research. As well, there is some repetition about this point through the manuscript which needs to be addressed.
   3. P no 3-4: It is mentioned, “…but the composition and … what is being presented. ” . It is not clear what authors’ expectations are on this front. In what terms researchers’ background had to be mentioned in the report in absence of which it is obstructing the rigour of the research report or the analysis carried out? Is it in terms of educational backgrounds, experiences, religious identities or faith they follow or they practice? Maybe but by saying “… ought to have been mentioned.”, authors of this submission are making it sound ‘mandatory/obligatory’ for researchers to do so. There are no such norms either in publication ethics literature or norms relating to qualitative research writing. It seems sufficient that authors presented their position on FGM practice upfront which authors of the manuscript have critiqued in this manuscript. Please clarify, revisit and address it.

Overall, the critique of methodology if kept to the point and much crisper will benefit the manuscript. More importantly expectations need to be consistent with the general norms accepted in academic writings. It reads a bit too much stretched.

1. P no 6: “…Ironically, while women seem to be spearheading the activism against FGC in India, many of the voices defending *khafd* are also women’s.” This has been the trend on all issues that relate to women (and beyond) – be it abortion, contraception, adoption, ARTs including UTx, surrogacy. If so, will be helpful to mention specifics or articulate differently by bringing forth similarities with other wide ranging matters as above that there is divide in the women and no one view point shared by all women. Such divides and emergence of multiple perspectives on traditional practices is inevitable and no communities are static. It seems that the point to be made is that communities to allow spaces for emerging discourse, and different points of view. Somewhere in the manuscript it is said that khafd practice is not mandatory. If so, such alternative discourse be welcome. In any case, the point being made is rather unclear. Please consider either deleting these or make a concrete point.
2. “According to one of our interviewees, …”. It is not clear if authors wish to suggest that FGC is being politicized for other gains not to do with women of their concerns about FGC. Please clarify. Else, reformists seeking support from the global community to strengthen their own base and/or for their own position on particular issue in a particular country or community is obvious. Authors say that it is to ‘…undermine larger community…’. It is not clear why reformist are interested to undermine the larger community? Or is it about undermining tradition of khafd? Readers would be interested to know authors’ views about ‘why reformists are against FGC practice and why they would want to ‘…undermine larger community…’.
3. P No 8: “Secondly, the discussion neglects to …consent. Thirdly, FGC is largely criticised as …for male circumcision as for female cutting.”. These two point tend to convey that because comparable practice of male circumcision is practiced in the same manner as FGC is and for the comparable (or even the same) reasons of controlling sexuality, FGC could be justified. If this is the case, it doesn’t hold the ground. As well, researchers have well defined scope of their research. So it appears a bit misplaced to expect them to discuss this matter.
4. P no 9, “…As in India,… living in Western countries.”. The relationship between the earlier segment of this para and the closing line is unclear. Please consider deleting it or please clarify.
5. P no 9, “…critically viewing *khafd* through a human rights framework in order to determine whether medical practitioners can ethically participate in this procedure.”. Please clarify the point. Also, the closing statement of the para, “…Dawoodi Bohra community *also* uses a human rights approach to defend female cutting, basing their arguments on the right to religious and cultural freedom.”. reads rather disconnected as the paragraph doesn’t connect well.
6. P no 9: The para, “…We see a dilemma…” requires revisiting. Seems like there are three different points put together. However, the relationship amongst them is not obvious.
   1. “…some human rights may … FGC among Dawoodi Bohras.”. Please help clarify this point. Do authors mean to say ‘ambiguity’ or divide in the community about FGC in Bohra community? It possibly then help explain the first segment of the point which is conflict between two sets of human rights are due to the divide in the community about legitimacy of FGC practice.
   2. The subsequent sentence, “On the other hand…” doesn’t flow from the opening one and it is hard to decipher the connection between them.
   3. The closing line, ‘Restricting…”, is again not clear. Moreover, bringing in the comparison between cosmetic genital surgery in the western world and medicalization of FGC in Bohra community is unclear and seems misplaced, at least in the manner in which it is articulate in the current draft. Would like to mention that these two matters are almost non-comparable for cosmetic genital surgeries imply adults making choices of their own as opposed to the practice of FGC which is practiced as part of religious obligation amongst minors without they having any understanding about it leave alone their meaningful assent. In the current form, it seems digressing from central arguments of the critique.
7. P no 10/Conclusion: “…large segment of the community appears to be at odds with activist voices.”. Please revisit this statement to ensure for factual correctness in relation to the research report and what has been said in this manuscript by authors in this regards.
8. Overall, conclusion is fairly balanced. However, if authors could respond to review comments, it will better hold the current conclusions. For example, little more in-depth analysis of conflicting human rights, male circumcision, and medicalization of FGC will help not only strengthen the manuscript but will also help to make it more balanced rather than making it sway to other view point than held by researchers’ without sufficiently reasoning out.

**Comments relating to format compliance and other norms:**

1. IJME format compliance (editorial comment): Please follow the IJME referencing format.
2. Box 1 needs to be sourced. It seems it is sourced from the Indian report that is being commented upon.