FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION IN DIFFERENT SAMPLES OF EGYPTIAN FEMALES AND ITS MEDICOLEGAL IMPLICATION

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ABSTRACT

Background: Female genital mutilation (FGM) is primarily widespread in certain high-risk countries, including Egypt. It has been reported that FGM practice continues to exist because it is reinforced by customs, culture, beliefs, social pressure, religion, and the assumption that it increases a girl's chance of marriageability. Objectives: To assess FGM in different places in Egypt regarding its incidence, medicolegal implications, and possible complications. Methods: This is an observational case-control clinical study that was conducted on females recruited consequently from the primary health care center, the Egyptian Ministry of Health, Safe Women Unit, and Gynecological Clinic of Kasr-Alainy University Hospital. The included females were classified into Group 1, the circumcised females (n=256), and Group II, the uncircumcised females (n=250). The participants underwent full history taking and clinical examination. Results: The majority of circumcised females (82%) were circumcised at the age range of 7-14 years. The decision-maker was mostly the mother (61.3%). The circumcision was performed by medical (43%), non-medical (43%), or paramedical (14.1%) persons. There was a statistical significance in the education level and the occupation between the two groups. A statistically significant higher percentage of vaginal dryness, loss of libido, vaginal infection, vaginismus, and dyspareunia was shown in the circumcised females. Conclusion: The decision maker for FGM was mostly the mother. A relatively large proportion of the procedures were performed by medical practitioners. Besides physical harm, psychological harm was encountered in the present study with half of the circumcised females. The educational level seems to be affecting the FGM practice.

KEYWORDS: Female genital mutilation, medicolegal implications, Egypt, complications.

INTRODUCTION

females in Egypt still face some forms of sex-based discrimination, such as female genital mutilation, violence, virginity testing, and child marriage that must be changed from inside our culture (Bassem et al., 2018; Moawad et al.,2021; Zayed et al., 2022)

The female reproductive system consists of

organs concerned with menstruation, intercourse, fertilization, pregnancy, and labour (**Roach & Andreotti, 2017**).

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is defined as the intentional injury of a woman's genital organs for non-medical reasons (**Dilbaz et al.**, **2019**).

Currently, it is estimated that 200 million

women worldwide currently have circumcised. (Klein et al., 2018). Most FGM occurs in about 30 Middle Eastern and African countries, with maximum frequency present in Egypt, Somalia, Guinea, Djibouti, Mali, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Eritrea. (Young et al., 2020).

There is no health benefit from FGM, but it causes severe immediate and longstanding physical, emotional, and sexual damage, including long-lasting pain, repeated urinary and vaginal infections, post-traumatic anxiety, and severe discomfort during sexual relations. (McCauley & Broek, 2019).

Legislation and education programs are important tools to eradicate FGM, but if not accompanied by measures that aim to affect cultural traditions and expectations, it will be ineffective (UNICEF, 2013).

Egyptian efforts against female genital mutilation started early in the last century. FGM was prohibited by a decision of the Minister of Health in 1997, but the practice was not fully prohibited as, in some cases, it was allowed with a doctor's approval. In 2007, Egypt announced that there was a complete ban on female genital mutilation. (Meleigy, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to evaluate female genital mutilation in urban and rural areas in Egypt regarding its medicolegal implications and its possible complications.

SUBJECT AND METHODS

Study design and setting:

This is an observational case-control clinical study. This study was performed at Badr Primary Health Care Center Omar Makram Health Care Unit, the Egyptian Ministry of Health, the Safe Woman Unit, and the Gynecological Clinic of Kasr-Alainy University Hospital.

Study population:

This study included 500 circumcised and uncircumcised female samples which were recruited from Badr Primary Health Care Center and Omar Makram Health Care Unit, the Egyptian Ministry of Health, and the Safe Woman unit and gynaecological clinic of Kasr-Alainy University Hospital. They were classified into two groups: Group 1: circumcised females (n=250) and Group II: uncircumcised females (n=250). All females aged 10-50 years oldand thosewho accepted to be enrolled in the study and signed an informed consent were included, while Females with mental problems and congenital anomalies were excluded.

Study measurements:

The study participants were subjected to the following:

Data collection procedures

• The included female, or the caregiver if the female was not an adult, was informed about the study and asked to participate in the survey after providing informed consent.

• An interview-based data collection was performed using a pre-tested, structured questionnaire.

• The questionnaire elicited information on the participant's socioeconomic data, such as age, residence, race, marital state, education, and hygienic practice.

• Circumcised females were questioned about the circumcision as regard (to type, age of circumcision, whether n, done by a medical practitioner or not, under anaesthesia or not (general or local), who takes her (father, mother, brother, or others), physical effect (acute as pain, bleeding, shock, fever, tenderness, infection and chronic consequences as keloid formation, deformity, cyst, anaemia, repeated urinary tract infection, psychological effects, problem with sexuality (loss of libido, vaginal dryness, vaginal infection, or genital discomfort), present local or systemic complaint or complication.

<u>Clinical examination</u>: for circumcised females.

Full general examination: All cases are conscious, generally competent, and ready for examination.

Local examination:

• Before the examination, we take written consent from participants or from parents if they are below 18 years old. Reassurance and explaining the examination steps and their importance to the examined female. Infection control practice was strictly followed by the clinical examiner, including hand washing and putting on gloves (WHO, 2016).

• The examined female was asked to lie on her back with her legs apart and knees bent. A prepubertal examination was performed in the frog-leg position. The examined female was asked to expose the needed area for examination. The female was covered until the examiner was ready for the examination, and then exposure and inspection were performed (Young et al., 2020).

• The external genital examination of the included females included the identification of the prepuce, clitoris, and labia minora and majora (Figure 7). A local clinical examination of the external genitalia was performed to assess the type of circumcision (Abdulcadir et al., 2022).

Statistical analysis

Data were coded and entered using the statistical package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA). Data was summarized using frequency (count) and relative frequency (percentage) for categorical data. For comparing categorical data, a Chi-square (χ^2) test was performed. The exact test was used instead when the expected frequency was less than 5 (**Chan, 2003**). P-values less than 0.05 were considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

The majority of circumcised females (82%) underwent circumcision at the age range of 7-14 years. The decision maker was mostly the mother (61.3%), followed by the father (24.2%), and relatives (14.5%). Mother was the most frequently accompanying person (69.9%), followed by relatives (26.2%) and father (3.9%). The circumcision was performed by medical (43%), non-medical (43%), or paramedical (14.1%) persons. It was done without anaesthesia in 43% of cases, under general anaesthesia in 34.4% of cases, and with local anaesthesia in 22.7% of cases, **as shown in Table 1.**

The majority of circumcised females (203 cases; 79.3%) underwent type 1 circumcision, followed by type 2 (51 cases; 19.9%) and type 3 (2 cases; 0.8%).

Most of the circumcised females (157 cases; 61.3%) had pain after circumcision, while a few of them (20 cases; 7.8%) had bleeding after circumcision; of them, 4 cases (20%) needed blood transfusion. Other complications were abscess formation (36 cases; 14.1%) and urinary tract infection (60 cases; 23.4%), as shown in Table 2

Table (1) shows the distribution of circumcisedfemales according to their circumcision history.

The circumcised females (n=256)

		Ν	%
Age of	7-14	210	82.0%
circumcision	15-20	46	18.0%
The decision	Father	62	24.2%
maker of	Mother	157	61.3%
circumcision	Relatives	37	14.5%
Who	Father	10	3.9%
accompanies	Mother	179	69.9%
her	Relatives	67	26.2%
Who performs	Medical	110	43.0%
this	Paramedical	36	14.1%
circumcision	Not	110	43.0%
	Medical		
if Under	General	88	34.4%
anaesthesia	Local	58	22.7%
	anesthesia		
	Not	110	43.0%

The circumcised females (n=256)					
		Ν	%		
Pain	Yes	157	61.3%		
	No	99	38.7%		
Bleeding	Yes	20	7.8%		
	No	236	92.2%		
if you need a	yes	4	20.0%		
blood		16	80.0%		
transfusion,	No				
Abscess	Yes	36	14.1%		
	No	220	85.9%		
Repeated	Yes	60	23.4%		
UTI	No	196	76.6%		

Table (2): showing the physical complications ofcircumcision.

Half of the circumcised females had sleeping disorders, either frequently (66 cases; 25.8%) or sometimes (62 cases; 24.2%). More than a third of them (95 cases; 37.1%) were avoiding and hating some person. More than one quarter had a lack of self-confidence (73 cases; 28.5%). The feeling of anger was reported by 110 cases, 43%, and the feeling guilty was reported by 95 cases, 37.1%, **as shown in Table 3**

Circumcised females Ν % 66 25.8% Sleeping Frequently (1-3 times disorder weekly) 24.2% Sometimes 62 (1-3 times monthly) 50.0% Not 128 happen Avoiding Yes 95 37.1% and hating 161 62.9% No the person Lack of self-Yes 73 28.5% confidence No 183 71.5% Feeling of Yes 110 43.0% anger No 146 57.0% Feeling of Yes 95 37.1% injustice 161 62.9% No

A statistically significant difference was found between the two groups in the education level (p<0.001); the highest percentage of circumcised females were not educated (131 cases; 51.2%), while the highest percentage of non-circumcised females were educated {secondary (144 cases; 57.6%) and high education (33.2%)}. Both groups differed significantly in occupation (p<0.001), with a high percentage of the circumcised females who were non-working (87.9% vs. 63.6% in uncircumcised). The two groups showed comparable history regarding the menstrual duration (p=0.866), menstrual (p=0.569), and menstrual regularity flow (p=0.718), of non-significant except dysmenorrhea, а statistically significant difference was found between the two groups (p=0.018), with higher percentage of severe dysmenorrhea in the circumcised group (34.8% vs 22.8% in non-circumcised).as showed in Table 4

Table (3) shows the distribution of circumcised					
females according to psychological disturbance.					

	-	Circumcised		Non circumcised		P value
		Ν	%	Ν	%	
Education level	High educated	18	7.0%	83	33.2%	< 0.001
	Educated	107	41.8%	144	57.6%	
	Not educated	131	51.2%	23	9.2%	
Occupation	Work	31	12.1%	91	36.4%	< 0.001
	Not work	225	87.9%	159	63.6%	
Duration (menstrual	2-5	184	71.9%	178	71.2%	0.866
history)	6-10	72	28.1%	72	28.8%	
regularity (menstrual	Regular	190	74.2%	191	76.4%	0.569
history)	Irregular	66	25.8%	59	23.6%	
flow (menstrual history)	Normal	219	85.5%	211	84.4%	0.718
	Heavy	37	14.5%	39	15.6%	
	(changing					
	sanitary pads					
	after less than 2					
	hours (CDC,					
	2022).					
Vaginal dryness	Yes	108	44.3%	40	18.5%	< 0.001
	No	136	55.7%	176	81.5%	
Loss of libido	Yes	171	70.1%	32	14.8%	< 0.001
	No	73	29.9%	184	85.2%	
Vaginal infection	Yes	113	46.3%	55	25.5%	< 0.001
	No	131	53.7%	161	74.5%	
Vaginismus	Yes	92	37.7%	21	9.7%	< 0.001
	No	152	62.3%	195	90.3%	
Dyspareunia	Yes	127	52.0%	48	22.2%	< 0.001
	No	117	48.0%	168	77.8%	
dysmenorrhea (menstrual	Mild	65	25.4%	64	25.6%	0.018
history)	Moderate	67	26.2%	84	33.6%	
	Severe	89	34.8%	57	22.8%	
	Not Found	35	13.7%	45	18.0%	

Table (4): showing comparison between circumcised and non-circumcised females regarding education, menstrual history and sexual history

There was a statistically significant higher percentage of females with vaginal dryness in the circumcised group (44.3% vs non-circumcised with a p-value <0.001. The highest percentage of females in the circumcised group reported a loss of libido (171 cases; 70.1%), while this was reported by only 32 cases, 14.8% of the noncircumcised group (p<0.001). Also, both groups differed significantly in the incidence of vaginal infection (46.3% of the circumcised group vs. 25.5% of the non-circumcised group) with a pvalue <0.001. Similarly, statistically significant higher percentages of females experiencing vaginismus (37.7% vs. circumcised 9.7%, p<0.001) and dyspareunia (52% vs. 22.2%, p<0.001) were found in the circumcised group c compared to the non-circumcised group. as shown in Table5

No statistically significant difference was found between rural and urban females in the circumcised group in the opinion about circumcision (p=0.25), the reason for agreeing (p=0.282), the knowledge about the banning of circumcision (p=0.721), or the source of knowledge (p=0.145).

Table (5) shows a comp	parison between urb	oan and rural o	circumcised female	s in their att	itude towards
circumcision.					

		Urban circumcised		Rural circumcised		Р
		Ν	%	Ν	%	value
Opinion about	Strongly agree	51	40.8%	44	33.6%	0.25
circumcision	Agree	17	13.6%	22	16.8%	
	Neutral	6	4.8%	15	11.5%	
	Refuse	4	3.2%	6	4.6%	
	Strongly refuse	47	37.6%	44	33.6%	
Why agree	Cultural	38	51.4%	38	46.9%	0.282
	Religious	14	18.9%	24	29.6%	
	Sexual	22	29.7%	19	23.5%	
Know about	Yes	103	82.4%	113	86.3%	0.721
the ban on	No	22	17.6%	18	13.7%	
circumcision						
Source of	Family	23	22.3%	24	21.2%	
knowledge of	Friends	2	1.9%	8	7.1%	0.145
the ban	Media	76	73.8%	72	63.7%	
	Literature	0	0.0%	1	0.9%	
	Religious	2	1.9%	8	7.1%	
	speech					

DISCUSSION

In the present study, the majority of circumcised females (82%) underwent circumcision at the age range of 7-14 years, and the remaining underwent circumcision between

15 and 20 years old (18%). The age at circumcision was highly variable among the previous studies that assessed FGM. In Egypt, the reported figures were close to our data since **Tag-Eldin et al. (2008)**, **Zayed & Ali (2012)**, and **Mohammed et al. (2018)** stated the mean ages at the time of FGM/C were 10.1 ± 2.3 , 10.846 ± 1.9 ,

and 11.5 ± 2.3 years, respectively. This indicates that FGM in Egypt is most commonly performed just prepubertal rather than shortly after birth. This was further confirmed by the 2014 Egypt Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS), which stated that the majority of females in Egypt undergo female circumcision between the ages of 9 and 12 (EDHS, 2015).

In our study, the decision maker was mostly the mother (61.3%), followed by father (24.2%), and relatives (14.5%). Mother was the most frequently accompanying person (69.9%), followed by relatives (26.2%) and father (3.9%). The results of this work are reliable with a study in Ethiopia, where the decision-makers for female circumcision were the mothers who play a main role in the practice (**Abathun et al., 2016**).

An earlier study confirmed these findings, where the decision-makers for this practice were the mothers of circumcised females, and a minor percentage said that the decision-makers were their fathers (**Bogale et al.**, **2014**). Also, additional work among Canadian-Somali contributors conveyed that the mothers of the circumcised females were blamable for organizing their FGM (**Jacobson et al.**, **2018**).

According to the current work, the circumcision was performed by medical (43%), non-medical (43%), or paramedical (14.1%) persons. It was done without anaesthesia in 43% of cases, under general anaesthesia in 34.4% of cases, and with local anaesthesia in 22.7% of cases. In another study conducted in Egypt, **Rasheed et al. (2011)** carried out a similar study in Greater Egypt and intended to evaluate the effect of the 2007 criminalization law on the frequency and yearly occurrence of FGM, and it was found that the practice was performed by physicians in their majority of cases,

In total, 88.2% of nurses, 34.3% of junior physicians, and 14.9% of senior physicians accepted the practice. The study by **Molina-Gallego et al. (2021)** found that qualified groups that contributed were mostly done by nurses (58.8%), followed by family doctors (29.6%). Our findings were inconsistent with the study of

Mohammed et al. (2018), who found that this act was done by a physician in only 8.7% of the cases, while 91.3% of them were done by nonmedical persons. This difference may be explained by the difference in the recruited sample, where their study population was only rural residents who are little dependent on the medical professionals for FMG.

In the present study, the majority of circumcised females (79.3%) underwent type 1 circumcision (clitoris or the clitoral hood is cut off), followed by type 2 (clitoris and inner lips are cut off) (19.9%), and type 3 (flesh removed) (0.8%). In agreement with our findings, type 1 and 2 were found to be the most prevalent FMG in the studies of **Suleiman et al.** (2021) and **Adigüzel et al.** (2019), while Gudu & Abdulahi (2017) and Kaur et al. (2021) found that type 3 was the most prevalent type. This variation seems to be a matter of cultural changes.

In the current study, most of the circumcised females (61.3%) had pain after circumcision, while a few of them (20 patients; 7.8%) had bleeding. Of them, 4 cases (20%) needed blood transfusion. Other complications were urinary tract infection (23.4%) and abscess formation (14.1%). In accordance with our study, prior studies have recommended that FGM contributes considerably to the disease of girls; most of them tend not to be cured in hospital sets (Bjälkander et al., 2012). In addition, it has been reported that the eight main categories of instant medical harm were haemorrhage, shock, genital tissue oedema, fever, infections, and difficulties with urination and healing of wounds (Berg et al., 2014). Our results match moreover to the results of Ethiopian work by Yirga et al. (2012) that FGM consequences involved discomfort, blood loss, and infection.

Psychological harms were also encountered in the present study, with half of the circumcised females having sleeping disorders, either frequently or sometimes. Sleeping disorders were encountered frequently in 25.8% and sometimes in 24.2% of the participants. More than a third of them (37.1%) were avoiding and hating some person. More than one quarter (28.5%) had a lack of self-confidence. Feeling of anger was reported by 43%, and feeling guilty was reported by 37.1% of cases.

In agreement with our findings, Andro et al. (2014) and Knipscheer et al. (2015) stated that FGM is associated with a variety of longstanding health and emotional problems. Obaid et al. (2019) reported that the emotional problems of FGM include (PTSD), nervousness, panic disorders, depression, inhibition of feeling, and occasionally suicide attempts. Our results also come in agreement with those of Kizilhan (2011), who found a greater prevalence of depression disorder (33.6%) and anxiety disorder (45.6%) in Kurdish women in northern Iraq who had undertaken FGM compared with a non-FGM group. Chibber et al. (2011) found that the highest prevalence of emotional troubles among FGM women were affective disorders, including anxiety and depression (58%). Also, Vloeberghs et al. (2012) established that 33% of FGM females from five African nations met the standards for anxiety disorders, and 16% had PTSD.

The present work revealed a statistically significant difference in the education level, with the highest percentage of circumcised females not educated, while the highest percentage of noncircumcised females being educated. Both groups differed significantly in the occupation, with more non-working females than circumcised females. This comes reliable with the outcomes of several studies that showed significant differences in the educational level and the occupational status between the women and those who didn't undertake FGM. Anderson et al. (2012), Raheem et al. (2018), and Ismail et al. (2017) stated the negative relation between the educational level and the performance of FGM. Mothers and fathers with low education and occupational status have circumcised their daughters usually.

Concerning menstrual and sexual history, a statistically significant higher percentage of severe dysmenorrhea, vaginal dryness, loss of libido, vaginal infection, vaginismus, and dyspareunia. This may be attributed to the cutting-related psychological impact, including disgrace among women and incapacity to express their feelings about sexual life easily. In line with our findings, **Raheem et al. (2018)** study reported that disfigurement had bad effects on women's sexual function. Also, **Ibrahim et al.** (2012), **Bjälkander et al. (2013)**, **Mahmoud** (2016), **Buggio et al. (2019)**, and **Obaid et al.** (2019) showed the undesirable effect of disfigurement on pair sexual function, emotional condition and social life.

CONCLUSION

The present work demonstrated that females' awareness, attitude, and station are affecting the females' intent to make FGM practice on offspring. Also, the educational level seems to be affecting the FGM practice. The majority of circumcised females underwent circumcision in the range of 7-14 years. The decision maker for FGM was mostly the mother, and the most common type of circumcision was type 1 (clitoris or clitoral hood is cut off). A relatively large proportion of the practice was performed by doctors without anaesthesia. There physical, menstrual, are sexual. and psychological harm were also encountered in the present study in a high percentage of circumcised females.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

• More efforts should be directed to improve the health education level of all family members about circumcision and its physical, psychological, and sexual complications through schools, media, mosques, and churches.

• Need approach to area of high prevalence of the act with an emphasis on mothers, health care providers, religious authorities, and legislative institutions.

• It's significant to train medical field persons on how to raise awareness about the complications of FGM and inform them of the recent issuing of a law. • Safeguarding gender justice and fairness through taking real steps to empower females and refining their situation and position by making sure that quality education is done to improve their decision-making ability and will be an effective method towards the eradication of the FGM practice.

• It is critical to inform people of the recent issuing of a law that forbids and criminalizes the FGM practice to turn potential into real modifications in attitudes and behaviours.

Data availability statement: The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Conflicts of interest: The authors have declared that they have no competing interests.

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الملخص العربي

تشويه الأعضاء التناسلية الأنثوية في عينات مختلفة من الإناث المصريات ودلالاته الطبية والقانونية

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ختان الإناث منتشر بشكل كبير في بعض البلدان ومنها مصر ، ويرتبط معدله بشكل كبير بالوضع الاجتماعي والثقافي والتعليمي للمجتمع.

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تقييم ختان الإناث في أماكن مختلفة في مصر من حيث مدى حدوثه وآثاره الطبية القانونية ومضاعفاته.

هذه الدراسة قائمة على الاستبيان عن حالات الختان وأجريت على 500 مشاركة تم اختيار هن من مركز بدر للرعاية الصحية الأولية ووحدة عمر مكرم الصحية ، وزارة الصحة المصرية ، وحدة المرأة الأمنة وعيادة أمراض النساء بمستشفى القصر العيني الجامعي. . تم تصنيف الإناث المشمولات علي المجموعات التالية: المجموعة 1؛ الإناث المختونات (ن = 256) اللائي كن 125 (24.7٪) من الحضر و 131 (25.9٪) ، والمجموعة الثانية ؛ الإناث غير المختونات (ن = 250) اللائي كن 125 (24.7٪) من الحضر و 215 (24.7٪) من الريف. وفقًا للتوزيع الجغرافي إلى أننا أدرجنا الحالات المشاركة في الدراسة من المراكز الريفية والحضرية.

في هذه الدراسة ، خضعت غالبية الإناث المختونات بنسبة 82٪ للختان في الفئة العمرية 7-14 سنة ، والباقي خضعن للختان بين 15 و 20 سنة بنسبة18٪. وكان متخذ القرار بالختان هي الأم بنسبة 61.3٪ ، يليها الأب بنسبة24.2٪ ، والأقارب بنسبة 14.5٪. وايضا كانت الأم هي الأكثر مرافقة للبنت اثناء الختان بنسبة69.9٪ ، يليها الأقارب بنسبة 26.2٪ ، والأب بنسبة 3.9٪.

طبقا للبحث ، تم إجراء الختان من قبل اطباء بنسبة 43٪ ، أشخاص غير ممارسين صحيين بنسبة 43٪ ، أو تمريض بنسبة 14.1٪. تم إجراء العملية بدون تخدير على الإطلاق في 43٪ من الحالات ، وتحت التخدير العام بنسبة 34.4٪ من الحالات ، والتخدير الموضعي في 22.7٪ من الحالات.

أظهرت الدراسة أن هناك فروق في الدلالات الإحصائية من ناحية المستوى التعليمي ، حيث أن أعلى نسبة من الإناث المختونات غير متعلمات ، بينما أن أعلى نسبة للإناث غير المختونات في التعليم. اختلفت المجموعتان بشكل كبير في المهنة أيضًا ، حيث ارتفعت نسبة الإناث غير العاملات في الإناث المختونات.

فيما يتعلق بالحيض والمضاعفات الجنسية ، اتضح من الدراسة ان الختان له مضاعفات ومنها عسر الطمث الشديد ، وجفاف المهبل ، وفقدان الرغبة الجنسية ، والعدوى المهبلية ، والتشنج المهبلي ، وعسر الجماع.