

Breast ironing

DEBORAH UDAKIS CONSULTANCY LTD

Breast Flattening or Breast Ironing:

- ▶ **is** the process during which young pubescent girls' breasts are ironed, massaged, flattened and/or pounded down over a period of time (sometimes years) in order for the breasts to disappear or delay the development of the breasts entirely.

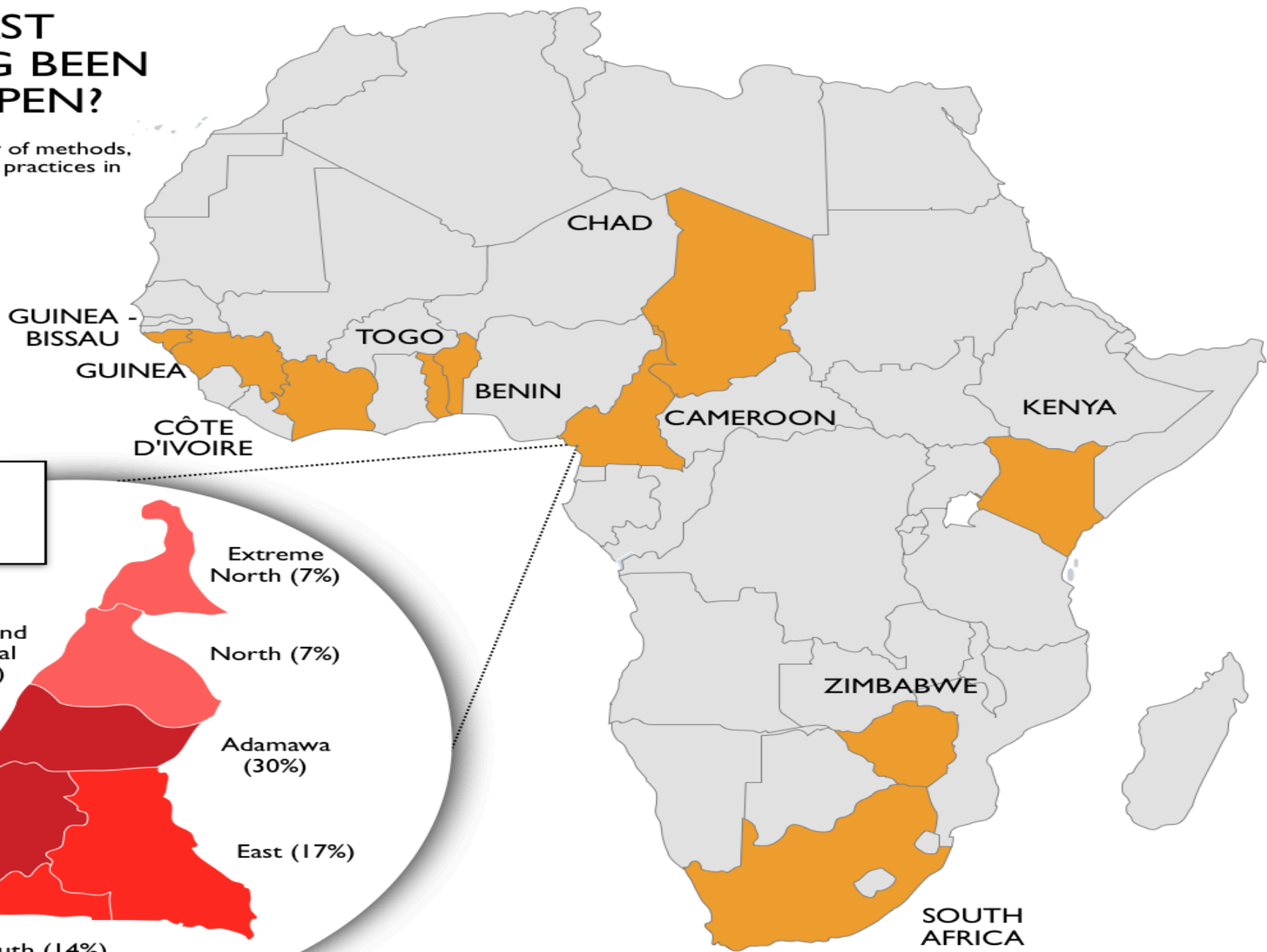


What is it exactly?

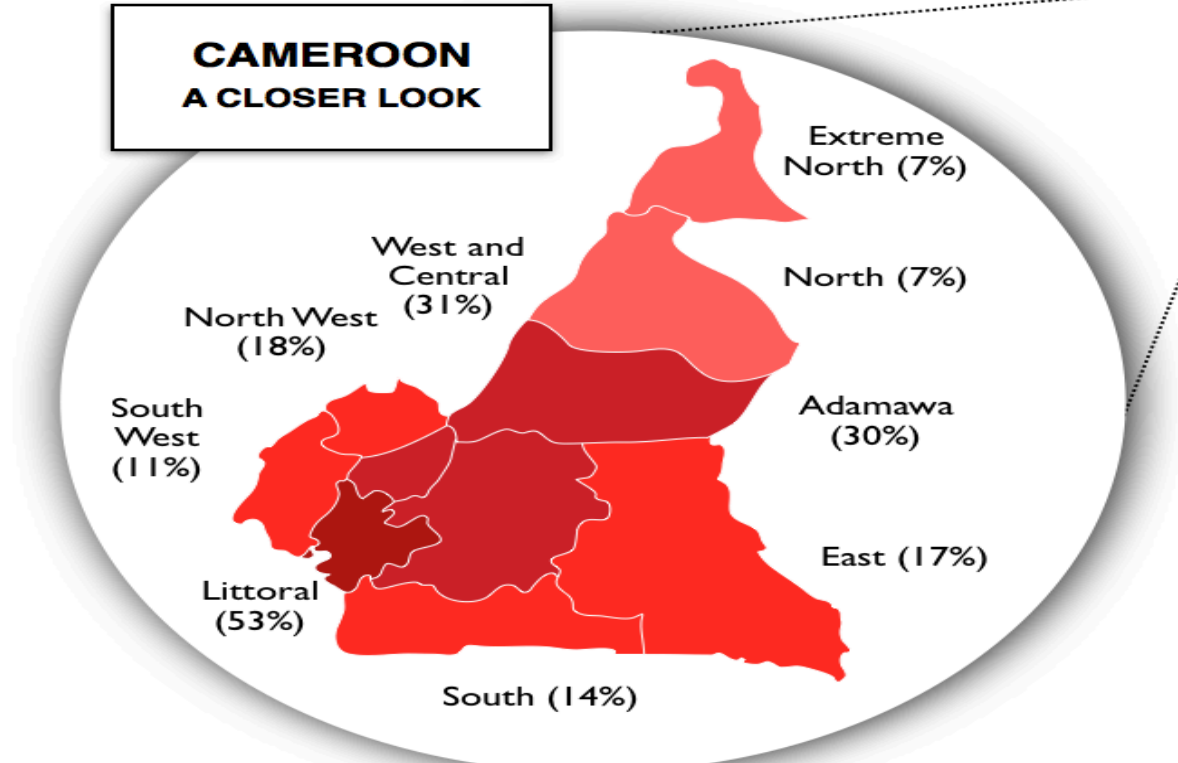
- ▶ In some families, large stones, a hammer or spatula that have been heated over scorching coals can be used to compress the breast tissue. Other families may opt to use an elastic belt or binder to press the breasts so as to prevent them from growing.
- ▶ Breast flattening usually starts with the first signs of puberty, which can be as young as nine years old and is usually carried out by female relatives. It should also be acknowledged that some adolescent girls and boys may choose to bind their breast using constrictive material due to gender transformation or identity, and this may also cause health problems.

WHERE HAS BREAST IRONING/FLATTENING BEEN RECORDED TO HAPPEN?

Source: Understanding Breast "Ironing" A study of methods, motivations and outcomes of breast flattening practices in Cameroon, Tapscott, R, 2012



CAMEROON A CLOSER LOOK



Health Consequences

Abscesses Cysts Itching Tissue damage
Infection Discharge of milk
Dissymmetry of the breast Severe fever.

Even the complete disappearance of one or both breasts.
There may also be an impact on the child's social and psychological well-being.

Why do people practice breast flattening or breast ironing?

- ▶ **Delay puberty**
- ▶ **Prevent pregnancy**
- ▶ **Deter unwanted attention and assault**
- ▶ **To enable girls to continue their education.**



What does The Law say?

- ▶ No specific legal protections
- ▶ A form of physical abuse
- ▶ Child suffering significant harm
- ▶ Follow local safeguarding procedures.



Possible signs a child is at risk

- ▶ Body dysmorphia / embarrassment
- ▶ Mother / female family member have undergone breast ironing
- ▶ Child May talk / disclose possible breast ironing
- ▶ Child not made aware of rights and lacks access to information
- ▶ Elders consider breast flattening culturally appropriate
- ▶ Female children lack integration.



Other signs

- ▶ Show discomfort in chest area
- ▶ Reluctant to be examined by health professional
- ▶ Fearful of others seeing their scars / bandages.





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<http://nationalfgmcentre.org.uk>

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