

Children in the News:
Cameroon girls battle 'breast ironing'

Sa'ah, Randy Joe. "Cameroon girls battle 'breast ironing.'" BBC News on the web. 23 June 2006. 13 April 2007. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5107360.stm>

There has been a recent campaign in Cameroon to stop the practice of breast ironing. Breast ironing happens to young girls during puberty to slow down their breast development. Mothers take their daughters and massage and pound the breasts to prevent growth. They use hot objects such as heated coconut shells or a wooden pestle to try to make the girls breast disappear.

Researchers say that 26% of the girls during puberty (in Cameroon) experience breast ironing. Mothers perform this task with the belief that they are protecting their daughters from males who seek out girls for sex when their breasts grow.

According to Dr. Flavien Ndonko an anthropologist, he says that breast ironing is not effective as birth control and that girls are still getting pregnant. He claims that the best solution to this fear for mothers is to sit down and speak plainly to their daughters about sex and pregnancy.

Thus far no research has been conducted about the effects of breast ironing on the girls; however, Professor Anderson Doh, a cancer surgeon at Cameroon's Gynecological Hospital, states that the pounding on the breasts at young ages will cause damage to the structures in the breast.

Under Cameroonian law, if the victim reports the incidence within a couple of months after it occurred, then the responsible party can go to jail for up to three years. The government is hoping that this campaign will help change these practices and save girls from the trauma and pain of having their breasts ironed.