



Male circumcision is the surgical removal of some or the entire foreskin (prepuce) from the penis. Male circumcision is one of the oldest and most common surgical procedures worldwide, and is undertaken for many reasons: religious, cultural, social and medical.

Male circumcision in Zambia

In Zambia, circumcision is traditionally practiced on a large scale only in North-Western Province, an area with one of the lowest HIV rates in Zambia. Few ethnic groups in Zambia conduct male circumcision as a part of religious and cultural practices. The Luvale and Lunda of Northwestern Province practice traditional universal male circumcision, though there are small groups who also practice adolescent circumcision in other areas of the country. The relatively small Muslim and Jewish communities also practice male circumcision for religious reasons.

Although male circumcision is not a substitute for safe sex, it is a scientifically proven way of preventing HIV infection in men. In Zambia, despite the awareness campaigns, male circumcision rates remain low. The increase in demand for the service could be an indication of high acceptability of the procedure in the population.

Overall, 13 percent of men age 15-49 and 14 percent of men age 30-49 are circumcised. North-Western has the highest percentage of circumcised men (71 percent) and Eastern and Northern have the lowest percentage (3 percent each). Circumcision is higher among men with more than a secondary education (16 percent) than among men with less education.

HIV prevalence increases with wealth quintiles among both circumcised and uncircumcised men. In both groups, the lowest HIV prevalence is observed among those in the lowest wealth quintile (6 and 7 percent, respectively). On the other hand, the highest HIV prevalence is observed among circumcised men in the highest wealth quintile (16 percent) and among uncircumcised men in the fourth wealth quintile (19 percent).

Global Trends

Approximately 30% of males are estimated to be circumcised globally, of whom an estimated two thirds are Muslim. Other common determinants of male circumcision are ethnicity, perceived health and sexual benefits, and the desire to conform to social norms. Neonatal circumcision is common in Israel, the United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, in much of the Middle East, Central Asia and West Africa, but is uncommon in East and Southern Africa, where median age at circumcision arises from boyhood to the late teens or twenties. In several countries, prevalence of non-religious circumcision has undergone rapid increases and decreases, reflecting cultural mixing and changing perceptions of health and sexual benefits.

Advantages

- Lots of men, and their partners, prefer the appearance of their penis after circumcision. It is odour-free, it feels cleaner, and they enjoy better sex. Awareness of a good body image is a very important factor in building self-confidence.
- Balanitis is an unpleasant, often recurring, inflammation of the glans. It is quite common and can be prevented by circumcision.
- Urinary tract infections sometimes occur in babies and can be quite serious. Circumcision in infancy makes it 10 times less likely.
- An article in the British Medical Journal in April 2002 suggested that at least 20% of cancer of the cervix would be avoided if all men were circumcised. Surely that alone makes it worth doing?
- Scientists have suspected that male circumcision might reduce rates of HIV transmission during sex. They observed that circumcised men are less likely to have HIV than uncircumcised men, and HIV is less common among populations that traditionally practise male circumcision than in communities where the procedure is rare. However, for a long time it was unclear to what extent this was an effect of circumcision itself and whether other factors might also play a role.

Disadvantages

- Surgical complications of male circumcision can include excessive bleeding, haematoma formation, sepsis, unsatisfactory cosmetic effect, lacerations of the penile or scrotal skin and injury to the glans.
- Arguments have been put forward that there is no medical reason for circumcision. In addition, as with any surgery, risks are certainly involved in circumcision as well.
- The foreskin of penis protects it and keeps it moist and clean as well. Circumcision will rob it of all these benefits.
- Because of circumcision, a man might face urination difficulty or some other surgical problems. It is widely believed that the tip of the penis toughens up without its protective cover (which is removed in case of circumcision) and the sensitivity might also reduce.
- Sometimes, circumcision may fill a guy with apprehension and he may not be able to enjoy his sex-life, mainly owing to self-consciousness.
- If it is done without anesthesia, the pain of circumcision is unbearable. Also, if the circumcision is not done in infancy, the memory of the pain lasts for a long time and in some extreme cases, may put the child off sex itself.

Government action and interventions

The Zambian government has collaborated with the American government, the World Health Organisation and other stakeholders to develop and implement a male circumcision strategic plan. The objective of the plan is to increase adult circumcision from 10,000 in 2009 to 200,000 in 2013 and 300,000 per year by the end of 2014. The service is being provided in the country through established health facilities, mobile services and through special ceremonies.

To further the response to HIV, male circumcision is one of the important preventive interventions adopted by the Zambian government as part of the comprehensive preventive interventions. Currently there are 5 facilities in Zambia offering the minimum package of male circumcision services. The need is for a minimum of 100 facilities by the end of year one and 300 by the end of year five, to achieve the goal of 50% prevalence of male circumcision by 2020.