Adverse Sexual and Psychological Effects of Male Infant Circumcision

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Summary.

A survey of the female and gay sexual partners of circumcised and genitally intact men revealed that circumcised men experienced significantly reduced sexual sensation along with associated long-lasting negative emotional consequences.

Many circumcised men subjected to involuntary genital cutting as infants or children have expressed strong negative feelings about the violation of bodily integrity that forced circumcision entails and their belief that circumcision has hindered their sexual enjoyment as adults.\(^{(3,4,5,7,8)}\) Loss of body parts, including partial penile amputation, may trigger grief resulting from altered body image or function, anxiety, depression, sexual problems, avoidance of, or obsessive preoccupation with the loss.\(^{(4,5,9)}\) Many men are so unhappy with being circumcised that they have even resorted to either surgical or non-surgical foreskin restoration methods, in order to recover at least some of the sexual sensitivity lost to circumcision, and as a mechanism to promote psychological healing.\(^{(2,6,11)}\)

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Women ($n=35$) and gay men ($n=42$) who had experienced sexual relations with both genitally intact men and men circumcised as infants, completed Sexual Awareness Surveys, each comprising 32 items in a 2-point forced choice response format.\(^{(1)}\) Women ranged from 18 to 69 years ($M = 33, \text{SD} = 10.8$); and gay men from 19 to 71 years ($M = 36.3, \text{SD} = 12.5$). A separate sample of 53 circumcised and 30 genitally intact men aged from 20 to 71 years ($M = 36.2, \text{SD} = 11.8$) was also surveyed.

**Results**

The combined sample ($n=77$) reported that their circumcised sexual partners were unhappy with their circumcision status significantly more often than were their genitally intact sexual partners ($p < .05$). Also, their circumcised partners experienced significant progressive decline in glans sensitivity ($p<.001$), and had to use significantly different techniques when masturbating ($p<.001$). Circumcised partners more often resorted to unsafe sex practices; they were significantly more likely to engage in anal intercourse ($p<.05$), and significantly more reluctant to use condoms due to reduced sexual sensation ($p<.05$). Respondents reported significantly higher mean discontent among their circumcised partners than among their genitally intact partners ($p<.05$).

As compared with genitally intact men, circumcised men reported significantly greater dissatisfaction with their orgasms ($p<.05$), and a wide
range of negative emotions associated with being circumcised ($p<0.05$).

Previous research indicates women enjoy intercourse better with genitally intact men.\(^{(10,11)}\) In view of the present findings based on self-selected participants, the possible negative effects of circumcision on adults’ sexual function and psychological well-being need to be discussed in providing informed consent for circumcision (sexual reduction surgery) of unconsenting male minors.

References


