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Why American Parents Circumcise Their Sons: An Integrative Review of Literature

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# Why American Parents Circumcise Their Sons: An Integrative Review of Literature

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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Journal Article</th>
<th>Cost/Availability</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bisson, G.M., Simmons, L. Yark, S. J., Mayer, D., Quinn, T.C. and Rosenfeld, S.L. (2012)</td>
<td>There were systemic issues such as timing that influenced the circumcision decision (p167)</td>
<td>In this study, we found similar to another study, that social reasons were indicative of whether a child was circumcised or not. In both cases of circumcision and uncircumcised boys, the father’s status played a role in the final decision. One study found that the circumcision decision is often made before the health care provider has a discussion with the parents (p96-98).</td>
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**Background**

In male infants circumcision refers to the surgical operation in which the foreskin is removed from the glans penis, clamped down and discarded leaving the head of the penis exposed. The practice of circumcision is older than recorded history but became a western cultural norm rather than just a religious practice in the late Victorian era as an attempt to prevent masturbation. The practice initially became a social norm in the United States as a means of reducing male sexual pleasure and the perceived sin of masturbation corresponding with the cultural morality of the late Victorian era. During the mid-20th century circumcision rates rose steadily as low-risk childbirth began to be shaped after an obstetric model. In the 1970, 80’s and 90’s the American Academy of Pediatrics refuted the procedure stating there was no evidence that circumcision was of medical benefit to the child. Two studies of current recommendations (a) rmative or non-a rmative) procedure is done and therefore, are not basing their decision off evidence that indicates that the health benefits of newborn male circumcision outweigh the risks and that the procedure’s benefits justify access to this procedure for families who choose it (p585).

**Abstract**

Since medical evidence supports both pros and cons of routine neonatal male circumcision, expectant and new parents are left to make the decision to circumcise their sons on their own. There is limited research as to why American parents choose to circumcise their newborn sons. The purpose of this integrative literature review was to identify the reasons behind parental decision making in neonatal male circumcision in the United States. Understanding motivating factors in parental decision making can highlight areas of prenatal education for expectant parents. Parents who choose to have their sons circumcised due to American cultural norms were resolute in their view, whereas parents who left their son’s personal past tended to examine relevant literature and expressed a primary concern with medical benefits rather than cultural adherence. Providers must ensure that parents are making the decision based on knowledge of the benefits and risks of the procedure rather than cultural patterns. Providers should provide education in order to ensure informed consent in obtain.

**Purpose**

Circumcision rates have remained relatively steady in the United States varying slightly from 83% in the 1960s to 77% by 2010 (Morris, 2014). With medical evidence supporting both pros and cons of the procedure, parents are left to make the decision to circumcise their sons. There is limited research as to why American parents choose to circumcise their newborn sons and said research has yet to be synthesized. The purpose of this integrative literature review is to identify the reasons behind parental decision making in neonatal male circumcision. Understanding motivating factors in parental decision making can highlight areas of prenatal education for expectant parents.

**Method**

An integrative literature review was conducted utilizing these online databases: PubMed. The Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health (CINAHL). Complete. ProQuest Nursing & Allied Health Source, and Psychology. The Health Belief Model was used as a framework for this paper.

**Results and Implications**

- The desire for a child’s penis to aesthetically resemble his father was the primary motivating factor in parental decision making.
- The availability of the procedure while the mother was in the hospital was a secondary motivating factor in parental decision making.
- The perceived health benefits of the procedure had little to no influence on parental decision making.

A review of the relevant literature has shown that routine infant circumcision in the United States is perpetuated by cultural norms that are handed down generation to generation. It would seem that the perceived seriousness of the decision is not heavily weighed. The majority of parents do not stop to ask why the procedure is done and therefore, are not basing their decision off of current recommendations (affirmative or non-affirmative) rather they are choosing to do what has always been done. This finding is disconcerting as the 2012 AAP recommendation is based on the potential health benefits of the procedure not the psychological or social aspects of normality. Are parents truly giving informed consent? Or are they merely consenting to the procedure because it is what has always been done? This is of particular concern to the nurse who statistically is the first, and sometimes only, medical professional to ask expectant or new parents about circumcision (Mielke, 2013). Care needs to be given that informed consent is obtained and that parents have weighed the decision with due process.