
Un/Cut: The Ethics of Routine Infant Male Circumcision

Gal Kober*¹

¹Bridgewater State University – Bridgewater, MA 02325, United States

Abstract

Routine circumcision is performed in a medical setting on a majority of newborn males in the US. This paper assesses the history of the procedure and the rationales given for this practice, and evaluates its potential benefits and drawbacks. Despite the common belief that the procedure is medically beneficial, routine infant circumcision is not endorsed by a single medical association worldwide, and its health benefits are considered marginal. While findings regarding the prophylactic effect of circumcision in the reduction of HIV transmission have been widely circulated, they remain controversial, especially in regard to their validity in countries with low HIV prevalence, and when performed on infants rather than on adults. I argue that in the absence of sufficient clinical motivation to justify infant circumcision as a public health measure, and given the risks and harms involved, the parental choice to circumcise an infant cannot be regarded as a choice between two ethically equivalent options, as it is commonly presented. Further, I argue that in the absence of clinical justification, infant male circumcision violates the infant's autonomy, and medical personnel should thus be barred from performing it.

*Speaker