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'Landmark' survey reveals foreskin restoration benefits

Men describe circumcision harms, restoration motivations, lack of medical support.

[PALM SPRINGS, CA] – A newly published peer-reviewed survey documents efforts by those subjected to childhood penile circumcision who later employed non-surgical methods to attempt to restore the prepuce (foreskin). The article appears in the *International Journal of Impotence Research* under the title **Foreskin Restorers: Insights into Motivations, Successes, Challenges and Experiences with Medical and Mental Health Professionals** and was dubbed a 'landmark' survey by internationally recognized ethicist Brian Earp.

The research reveals findings from a 2021 online survey that included nearly 1,800 men, transgender women and intersex individuals from across 60 nations, all of whom were subjected to non-therapeutic penile circumcision as a newborn or child. The survey also included men who voluntarily chose to be circumcised as adults.

The respondents reported wide-ranging adverse physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and self-esteem consequences that they attribute to their circumcisions done to the standard of care (i.e., not botched), including lasting pain, trauma and loss of the multi-functional prepuce (foreskin). Many physicians and ethicists regard the foreskin as valuable erogenous tissue, and the anatomical equivalent of the female prepuce (clitoral hood).

According to lead author Tim Hammond, "The penile foreskin represents a larger tissue platform than most people envisage, the removal of which by genital cutting, what we call circumcision, accounts for 1/3 to 1/2 of the penile shaft skin, as well as being the most densely innervated and most dynamically functional part of the penis."

Non-surgical foreskin restoration is a labor intensive and time-consuming process that places gentle, sustained tension on the shaft skin of the penis to grow new tissue, a skin expansion technique used by physicians on other parts of the body. Despite restoration never being truly restorative of nerves destroyed or damaged by circumcision, 87% of respondents said they would recommend restoration to others as a means to increase pleasure, improve self-esteem through regaining bodily integrity, and increase partner intimacy.

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Hammond said that because of the demographics of where male genital cutting is endemic, mainly among Americans, and by those in Jewish and Muslim communities, most respondents were from the US (72.5%), followed by Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, where newborn circumcision was once popular but has since fallen out of favor. US Jewish and Muslim participation in the survey was 4.6% and 3.2% respectively, considerably higher than those groups' presence in US society.

Based on past US circumcision rates, involving 1.2 to 1.5 million newborn circumcisions annually, the authors estimate that 60 to 75 million circumcisions occurred from 1960 to 2010. According to Hammond, "Diverse surveys suggest that 10-15% of non-voluntarily circumcised American males wish that they had not been circumcised, and if even one-tenth of 1% of those experience circumcision distress sufficient to motivate them to regain their bodily integrity, there could be 60,000 to 75,000 active or potential/willing foreskin restorers currently in the US, with the potential of producing an additional 12,000 to 15,000 newborns each year who may come to suffer in some way from their unwanted genital surgery, even if done to the standard of care."

The survey found that most restorers were unable to receive knowledgeable and caring assistance from the medical and mental health community, where they encountered trivialization or dismissal of their concerns. Many respondents attributed this lack of empathy to US professionals being either circumcised males themselves, or female professionals who chose to circumcise their sons, both of whom may be reluctant to recognize the harm that involuntary childhood circumcision can cause to some individuals. Accordingly, circumcision sufferers and foreskin restorers remain largely invisible to those professions and to society at large.

Hammond also noted that 25% of respondents became aware of their circumcision damage before age 12, with 6.5% becoming aware before age 7. He also explained that due to the wide variety of circumcision devices and practices among circumcisers, adverse consequences are highly individualistic, and include impaired glans sensitivity caused by keratinization (skin toughening of the penile head) after removal of the protective foreskin, extensive scarring, tight painful erections, and meatal stenosis (narrowing of the urinary opening). Among sexual issues reported were premature ejaculation, delayed orgasm, and pain during sex, which in turn affected their intimate relationships. Emotional and psychological issues included resentment of parents, betrayal by doctors, lack of choice over an extremely private part of their bodies, anger, and having their genitals and human right to bodily integrity violated. Some even reported suicidal thoughts or attempts.

Hammond cautioned that "Survey results cannot be extrapolated to the entire population of circumcised men in the US or in the world, or even to all circumcision sufferers, as many of the latter group seem resigned to their fate with no awareness about the possibility of foreskin restoration as a means to regain genital integrity."

The survey was co-authored by researchers Lauren Sardi and William Jellison of Quinnipiac University, certified sex therapist Ben Snyder, independent researcher Ryan McAllister, and Cairo physician Mohamed Fahmy, known for his voluminous medical textbooks about the normal and abnormal prepuce and the copious complications of male circumcision.

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