



Circumcision from a Medical and Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

Circumcision is a surgical procedure that involves the removal of the foreskin (prepuce) covering the glans penis. This procedure is typically performed to eliminate smegma, which results from the accumulation of fluids in the foreskin area, causing unpleasant odor and increasing the risk of infection. In Islam, circumcision is a religious practice exemplified since the time of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), peace be upon him. This literature review discusses circumcision from both a medical and Islamic perspective. The findings indicate that circumcision is performed based on medical indications such as phimosis, paraphimosis, and balanitis, both as a treatment and as a preventive measure against recurrence. Additionally, circumcision has been linked to a reduced risk of urinary tract infections (UTIs) and HIV transmission. In Islamic terminology, circumcision is referred to as khitan. It is strongly grounded in Islamic jurisprudence and is regarded as a significant practice for Muslim males. Circumcision is effective in reducing the incidence of phimosis, paraphimosis, balanitis, as well as the risks of UTIs and HIV transmission. In Islam, khitan is considered part of human nature (fitrah) and is deemed obligatory (wājib) by some schools of thought, while others regard it as a highly recommended (sunnah muakkadah) practice.

Introduction

Circumcision is a surgical procedure to remove the foreskin (prepuce) that covers the head of the penis. This procedure is performed as an effort to remove smegma that arises from the accumulation of fluid in the foreskin area, causing an unpleasant odor and risk of infection. Circumcision in Islam is an act of worship that has been modeled since the time of Prophet Ibrahim AS (Sholeh, 2018; Warees et al., 2025).

Male circumcision has an important role to play, especially if there is inflammation of the foreskin or the patient is diagnosed with penile cancer (Morris & Krieger, 2017; Ahmed et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2025). In the medical aspect, research conducted by the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention (CDC) in the United States shows that the presence of foreskin can increase the risk of HIV infection, because the foreskin can be a place for fluid accumulation which becomes an entrance for pathogens such as HIV (Madeen et al., 2021; Punjani et al., 2021). Meanwhile, studies related to penile cancer in the United States in 1954 and 1997 also showed that around 95% of penile cancer patients were not circumcised. Circumcision procedures are also considered effective in reducing the likelihood of urinary tract infections (Prasetyo, 2018; Chan et al., 2023; Morris et al., 2022; Deacon & Muir, 2023).

On the other hand, in the Islamic perspective, circumcision is also known as Khitan. The word "Khitan" comes from the word "khatana" which means cutting in Arabic terminology. Khitan in the study of fiqh or Islamic law is associated as part of self-purification and its implementation is considered an act of worship (Sholeh, 2018; Alifuddin et al., 2024; Ghani & Ahmad, 2024).

Circumcision which in Islamic literature is generically referred to as khitan, is perhaps one of the earliest recorded interventions in the history of surgery among human beings. The surgery involves an incomplete or total removal of the foreskin (prepuce) which envelops the glans penis. Medically, circumcision has been shown to be a preventive measure against various forms of pathology related to enlarged smegma (exudate of desquamated epithelial cells and glandular secretions that accumulate under the prepuce) which in turn can lead to unpleasant smell, irritation and infection. Prepuce removal significantly reduces the risk of developing smegma, thus reducing the risks of inflammation, as well as sexually transmitted diseases (Morris et al., 2022)

However, the aspect of preventive health is only a part of the significance of khitan. Islamic *laghwa* is also practiced within the context of the Islamic concept of *fitrah*, the natural inclination toward truth and cleanliness which is both hygienic and a spiritual form of worship. The historical textures point out that at an old age, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham, peace be upon him) was circumcised, and the information is supported by a large number of authentic traditions. The fact that this ritual has been followed without any interruption in Islamic history is evidence to not only its nature as a cultural practice but also as a valid exercise in Islamic theology. To many Muslim communities, khitan acts as a key rite of passage, and at the same time melds religious training, virtue building, and community health education (Munazir, 2024).

Clinically, circumcision becomes an essential intervention when one deals with abnormal cases e.g. phimosis, paraphimosis, a urological emergency, and a swelling around the glans due to poor genital cleanliness in uncircumcised men, balanitis. In addition, evidence based on epidemiology records a correlation between circumcision and the high chances of occurrence of penile cancer and the spread of the HIV virus. Uncircumcised men are also at greater risk of infection with HIV and this has been cited to be due to high density of CD4+ receptors in the inner layer of mucosa of the foreskin that aides entry of the virus (Caputo et al., 2023).

Throughout the world, there has been widespread research on medical advantages of circumcision. Several meta-analyses of thousands of pediatric patients presented with antenatal hydronephrosis have shown major reductions in the incidences of urinary tract infections occurring in circumcised children as compared to uncircumcised children. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) and Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) reports, circumcision medically performed can help in circumcising the female-to-male HIV transmission by up to 60 %, and this is extremely relevant to the health policies in areas where HIV is prevalent (Rennie et al., 2021).

In the disciplinary confines of Islamic jurisprudence, khitan is by far bigger than its health aspect acting as an extra-corporeal sign of obedience to god. However, there exists divided opinion, one school of thought that is Shafi and Hanbali school of thought says, it is obligatory

(wajib), and another being Hanafi and Maliki schools of thought treating circumcision as a recommended Sunna at the highest rank (sunnah mu.akkadah). In spite of this difference, people agree on the fact that circumcision is a vital symbol of the Muslim faith. Other classical reasons of this consensus involve the necessity of the cleanliness of the genitals to be able to perform prayer, as well as the parallels, according to which only changes to the body connected with pain and irreversible modification of the tissues can be permitted due to the necessity of acting in order to fulfill the duty of the primary religious value (Abdulcadir et al., 2024).

Khitan is therefore at a middle point between a medical and a religious imperative and lends the operation a spiritual and physical significance. The current article examines circumcision within an integrative context one that is medically and Islamic by performing a thorough literature review. Its goals entail explaining the indications, advantages, contra-indications, methods, and theology of khitan and thus mediating the discourse between biomedical and religious scholarship of the contemporary situation.

Methods

In the current narrative literature assignment, the systematic approach is implemented which combines the results of medical and Islamic scholarly views on male circumcision. During the review, a rigorous search methodology was used, peer-reviewed medical material was interrogated using Google Scholar, PubMed, and the national center of the biotechnology information (NCBI) and the Islamic jurisprudence was interrogated using the classical Islamic fiqh texts, sanctioned collection of the hadith and up to date scholarly works to discuss the theological, sequential and cultural aspects of the practice.

Keywords that were used in the medical analysis were both clinical and epidemiological in nature including male circumcision, medical benefits of circumcision, phimosis, paraphimosis, balanitis, urinary tract infection, and HIV prevention. At the same time, Islamic literature searches used the following terms: khitan, Islamic jurisprudence on circumcision, Islamic law and purification. Medical elements of the studies encompassed studies published in the peer-reviewed journals, on original research studies or systematic review, and focused on indications, benefits, risks or technical technique of circumcision. Islamic references were only incorporated in cases where these referred to reliable primary sources (Qur'an, hadith or classical juristic opinions) and where analytical rigor associated with the aims of the review was evident.

The synthesized results indicate an in-depth picture on circumcision within a medical and Islamic context. In medical terms, there have been indications that circumcision helps to prevent the occurrence of urinary tract infections, balanitis, phimosis, and paraphimosis as well as extending partial protection against the transmission of the HIV virus. Within the Islamic application, both the Quranic and hadith authorities have testimonies of Prophetic promotion of the custom, and in the mainstream juristic literature, it is confessed that there is nothing wrong with the practice as part of the ritual purification.

The literature review has provided two major areas of themes as follows; 1) medical context of circumcision which covered clinical indications, health care prevention, methods of the procedure and contraindications; 2) Islamic circumcision theme which examined historical context of circumcision, legal guidelines in the various schools of the Islamic thought, and any spiritual or moral values. The findings of each of the areas or domains were then analyzed as narratives to find out areas of convergence and divergence so that integration of ideas of interest to the scientific and religious perspectives could be undertaken.

Result and Discussion

Circumcision

Circumcision, also known as circumcision or khitan, is a surgical procedure performed to remove part or all of the foreskin (prepuce). Circumcision can be considered as one of the oldest surgical procedures recorded in human history. The practice is influenced by religious and cultural reasons as well as medical considerations (Abdulwahab-Ahmed & Mungadi, 2013).

In a medical context, circumcision has been widely researched and shown to provide many health benefits such as reducing the incidence of phimosis (narrowing of the foreskin so that the foreskin cannot be pulled back to expose the head of the penis). In the United Kingdom between 1997 and 2003, approximately 90% of circumcisions were performed for medical indications caused by phimosis. Other medical reasons include paraphimosis (the foreskin cannot be pulled back to its original position), and balanitis (inflammation of the head of the penis) (Köhn & Schuppe, 2022; Spilotros & Ambruoso, 2022; Spilotros, 2023). According to WHO, circumcised men have a much lower risk of being infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) (WHO & UNAIDS, 2007).

Indications and Medical Benefits of Circumcision

Circumcision in practice is performed for various medical conditions including phimosis, paraphimosis and balanitis (Malone & Steinbrecher, 2007; Czajkowski et al., 2021; Nanjannavar & Vijaykumar, 2022). Phimosis is the term used when the foreskin or prepuce is difficult or irresistible to retract. The term phimosis itself comes from the Greek language, which translates literally as "muzzling" which can mean a snout or funnel-shaped narrowing. The irrevocable attachment of the foreskin or prepuce was widely noted around the mid-twentieth century, starting with Gairdner in 1949 and Oster in 1968. In their studies, phimosis occurred in 8% of 6- to 7-year-olds, 6% of 10- to 11-year-olds, and 1% of 16- to 17-year-old boys. Prepuce adhesions were much more common throughout childhood and adolescence, but by the age of 17, only 3% had persistent adhesions. Circumcision alone is the preferred treatment for phimosis (McPhee et al., 2025).

Circumcision is also indicated in cases of paraphimosis. Paraphimosis itself is a urologic emergency that occurs in uncircumcised or uncircumcised men in the form of a condition of the foreskin (prepuce) trapped behind the glans penis that can cause vascular disorders in the form of distal vein swelling, edema, or even necrosis. Circumcision is highly recommended in all patients who have experienced paraphimosis due to the risk of recurrence (Bragg et al., 2025; Maulana & Akbar, 2022; Salhadine et al., 2022). In addition to paraphimosis, another indication may also be balanitis. Balanitis is an inflammation of the head of the penis that is commonly caused by poor personal hygiene in uncircumcised men and a buildup of smegma under the foreskin. This condition can lead to Candida infection (Wray et al., 2025).

The medical benefits of circumcision have also been proven through various scientific studies. In the journal Irfan Wahyudi, et al. (2023), this article contains information about the relationship between circumcision and the incidence of urinary tract infection (UTI) in children with antenatal hydronephrosis. A total of 21 studies involving 8,968 patients with ANH were included in this meta-analysis. The results obtained showed that the incidence of UTI in the uncircumcised group reached 18.1% while the circumcised group was lower at 4.9%. Based on these findings, the meta-analysis suggests that circumcision is associated with a reduced incidence of UTI in children with ANH, and this benefit is consistent regardless of the underlying cause of hydronephrosis (Wahyudi et al., 2023).

In addition, circumcision may also reduce susceptibility to HIV. In "How Does Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision Reduce HIV Risk? 2022" journal by Jessica L Prodger, et al.

(2022), VMMC or voluntary medical male circumcision is a surgical procedure that can reduce the risk of HIV transmission by almost two-thirds. HIV transmission in the uncircumcised penis generally occurs in the inner tissue of the foreskin. This is due to increased levels of inflammatory cytokines in the subpreputial space and increased density of HIV-susceptible CD4⁺ T cell tissue. Inflammation can be triggered by sexually transmitted infections, but is more commonly caused by certain anaerobic components in the penile microbiome. Circumcision provides protection by removing vulnerable inner foreskin tissue, as well as helping to establish a more stable and less inflammatory penile microbiome (Prodger et al., 2022; Rempel, 2021).

This is also supported by the World Health Organization (2007) report, which states that circumcision is effective in reducing female-to-male sexual transmission of HIV. Three randomized controlled trials proved that male circumcision performed by trained medical personnel is safe and can reduce the risk of HIV transmission by about 60% (WHO, 2007).

Contraindications to Circumcision

An absolute contraindication to circumcision is hypospadias. Hypospadias is an anatomical disorder where the external urethral meatus is in an abnormal position. This malposition is along the ventral penis to the perineum. In this condition, circumcision should be delayed or not performed as the prepuce is needed for reconstruction. Relative contraindications include the medical condition of hemophilia. Patients with hemophilia who are to be circumcised should be performed under appropriate conditions at a hemophilia center because although bleeding is not frequent, the impact can be serious (Bawazir & Alharbi, 2021; Donaire & Mendez, 2025; Cho et al., 2022).

Circumcision Technique

Dorsal slit or dorsumcision is a procedure often used in various circumcision techniques and is sometimes performed independently, especially in acute inflammatory conditions. It prevents phimosis and paraphimosis. This technique has several advantages, including that the mucosal skin can be well organized, there is no excessive cutting of the mucosa, the risk of injuring the glans penis and damaging the frenulum prepuce is lower, bleeding can be controlled easily, because the cutting is done gradually, making it safer (Abdulwahab-Ahmed & Mungadi, 2013; Ultsany et al., 2024).

In this method, the foreskin is freed from adhesion to the head of the penis. With the help of a clamp that is clamped and positioned at 11 o'clock and 1 o'clock, after which cuts are made at the 12 o'clock position on both layers of the foreskin to a few millimeters from the corona of the head of the penis. The result is cosmetically better, and the risk of bleeding complications is minimized (Abdulwahab-Ahmed & Mungadi, 2013; Ultsany et al., 2024).

Circumcision in Islamic Perspective

Circumcision or circumcision in Islamic terms is also known as khitan. According to Titik Kuntari (2023), in her book "Khitan: Understanding Islamic Truth through Modern Medical Science", Khitan comes from the word Khatana-yakhtunu-khatan which means to cut. In Arabic, the term khitan refers to the process of cutting the male or female genitalia. In addition, khitan is also used to refer to the remaining skin after the cutting process (Kuntari, 2023).

Sari, et al. (2024), concluded that circumcision in Islamic law has a solid basis and its implementation is considered important for Muslim men. Ibn Qudamah, a great scholar of the Hanbali school, argued that male circumcision is obligatory. He also presented the evidence on which this opinion is based: 1) Abu Hurairah reported that the Prophet Ibrahim performed circumcision when he was 80 years old, using an axe (H.R. Bukhari). This shows the strong demand for circumcision; 2) If the skin at the tip of the penis is exposed to impurity when urinating and is not circumcised, then it is the same as someone who carries impurity on his

body, which makes his prayer invalid. Since prayer is an obligatory act of worship, everything that is a requirement for the validity of prayer is also obligatory. Therefore, circumcision is also considered obligatory; 3) Hadith narrated by Abu Dawud and Ahmad, the Prophet said to Kulaib: "Remove the hair of disbelief and circumcise"; 4) The permissibility of uncovering the 'awrah during khitan indicates that khitan is obligatory. Whereas in Islam uncovering the 'awrah is forbidden, and something is not allowed unless it has a strong ruling; 5) Cutting off parts of the body that cannot grow back and are accompanied by pain is only possible for obligatory matters, such as the ruling on cutting off the hands of thieves; 6) Circumcision is an Islamic tradition that has existed since the time of the Prophet Muhammad until now, and no one has abandoned it. Therefore, there is no reason to state that circumcision is not obligatory (Sari et al., 2024).

In the journal Riski Hariyadi et al. (2022), it is further discussed about the opinions of scholars from various madhhabs regarding the law of circumcision. Some say it is obligatory and others say it is sunnah. According to the Hanafi school, followers of Imam Abu Hanifah, male circumcision is sunnah because it is considered part of the syi'ar of Islam like the adhan. If a group of Egyptians decided not to circumcise their men, they would be considered to be destroying the shura of Islam and could be punished. Meanwhile, scholars from the Maliki school of thought also state that male circumcision is a sunnah practice. According to Imam Malik in al-Muntaqa' Syarh al-Muwattha', Ibn 'Abd al Barr in al-Kafi, and Shaykh 'Alaisy in Manh al-Jalil, this opinion has a strong foundation in the school of Imam Malik. Ibn Habib narrated from Imam Malik that a person who is not circumcised without a reason or cause, then he does not have the right to be an imam in prayer and his testimony is not accepted (Hariyadi et al., 2022).

In the Shafi'i school of thought, the majority of jurists who follow the school of Imam Shafi'i are of the view that circumcision is obligatory for men. Imam an-Nawawi said, "This is a valid and well-known opinion that was established by Imam Shafi'i, and it has also been agreed upon by the majority of scholars." On the other hand, scholars who follow the Hanbali school of thought also believe that circumcision is obligatory for men. This opinion is narrated by al-Buhuti in his book Kasysyaf al-Qanna' and Syarh Muntaha al-Iradat, and by Ibn Qudamah in his book al-Mughni (Hariyadi et al., 2022).

Research by Rahimi (2021), states that circumcision is a sharia originating from the Prophet Ibrahim AS, which was continued by the Prophet Muhammad SAW and his people. This is in accordance with the hadith from Abu Hurairah, the Prophet Muhammad SAW said: that the prophet Ibrahim performed circumcision when he was 80 years old, using an ax (H.R. Bukhari). Islam recommends circumcision as one of the commands of Allah SWT, as well as a condition for performing prayer. Circumcision has also become part of the tradition of Muslims, even many other religions also carry out circumcision. In addition, circumcision also contains various educational values that can be applied in learning for children. These values include faith education, health education, worship education, and sexual education (Rahimi, 2021).

Conclusion

Circumcision is a surgical procedure performed to remove part or all of the foreskin (prepuce). This procedure can reduce the incidence of phimosis, paraffimosis and balanitis. In addition, circumcision can also lower the risk of urinary tract infections and reduce the chance of HIV transmission. Contraindications to circumcision include hypospadias and medical conditions such as hemophilia. Circumcision techniques such as dorsumcision is a frequently used method with minimal complications. Circumcision in Islam is called khitan and is considered part of human nature. Some scholars are of the opinion that circumcision is obligatory, while others are of the opinion that circumcision is a highly recommended sunnah. Circumcision contains various educational values such as faith, health, worship, and sexual education.

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