

“Growing recognition” that circumcision of children is wrong, as Danish doctors call for it to end

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The Danish Medical Association has made a "symbolic" [statement](#) calling for an end to male circumcision, arguing that the procedure should only ever be performed with "informed consent".

The Association said that male circumcision involves "pain" and the "risk of complications" and that it was "ethically unacceptable" to perform the operation "without the informed consent of the person undergoing the procedure."

"It is most consistent with the individual's right to self-determination that parents not be allowed to make this decision."

Circumcision should be an "informed personal choice" left to the individual to decide for themselves when they come of age, the Association said.

Though deeply critical of the practice, the Association has stopped short of calling for an outright ban, saying that it would be "difficult to predict the consequences" of a complete prohibition.

Lisa Moller, President of the Medical Association's Ethics Committee, said that the areas "is ethically, culturally and religiously complex, and we worry whether a legal ban might result in unauthorised circumcisions."

Instead, the new policy position says that the "process towards the elimination of circumcision of boys" should be undertaken in dialogue with the religious minorities that practice it.

The statement was welcomed by Doctor Antony Lempert of the National Secular Society's Secular Medical Forum.

"The Danish Medical Association has added its weight to the growing recognition that 'it is wrong to deny an individual the right to choose whether or not they want to be circumcised.' This unequivocal position statement, welcomed by the SMF, recognises that the surgical infliction of parents' religious or cultural beliefs on a normal child's healthy body represents a life-long burden to be borne by the owner of the body.

"It is encouraging that Denmark has joined the growing number of countries willing to challenge harmful religious privilege and practice. The SMF supports the choice not to call for a ban. There is no need to ban an activity that would already be illegal were existing laws against violent assault on vulnerable people implemented.

"The principles of child safeguarding are that children should be protected from serious avoidable harm inflicted on them until such time as they have matured sufficiently to protect themselves and to make their own decisions about what is best for them. That these principles still need to be stated in defence of a child's right to protection from assault is a reflection of the enduring power wielded by adults with religious beliefs.

"The assumption that the child belongs or will later choose to belong to their parents' belief system or culture is increasingly exposed as wishful thinking.

"In the name of tolerance, cultural relativism and widespread misinformation, necessary challenge to traditional practices has been ducked mainly for fear of offending religious adults or communities. But these communities are not homogenous and many within them would welcome support for increased child protection."

Dr Lempert added that in response to campaign work by the Secular Medical Forum, the British Medical Association was considering an update to its position on male circumcision, last revised in 2006.

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