

The potential of involving traditional practitioners in the scaling up of male circumcision in the context of HIV prevention in Tanzania

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Abstract

Male circumcision (MC) has been practiced worldwide for religious, cultural, social and medical reasons. Recent studies in Africa have indicated that MC to be highly protective against HIV transmission. However, incorporating MC in HIV/AIDS prevention programme will increase its demand in Tanzania where traditional male circumcision is common and the health care system is weak.

The objective of this study was to determine the challenges and opportunities of involving traditional practitioners in scaling up safe MC in the context of HIV prevention in Tanzania. The study was conducted in Monduli, Bahi and Mkuranga districts of Tanzania. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed. Household survey involved community members from the selected villages. In-depth interviews involved traditional practitioners and key informants at national, district and facility levels.

A total of 601 householders were interviewed. Most (71.4%) household respondents preferred traditional MC as it was part of their culture and tradition. A similar response was obtained from other respondents. It was mostly preferred because it was used as an initiation school, turning of boys to warriors and sense of social cohesion. Only 228 (37.9%) of the respondents were aware of the adverse events associated with MC. The most frequently mentioned adverse effects were severe bleeding (65.0%), delayed wound healing (17.5%) and wound sepsis (8.4%). The risk of acquiring HIV through male circumcision practice was poorly known among community members except medical respondents. Single unsterilized local surgical equipment was used to circumcise several initiates. It was observed that interference with traditional values associated with circumcision to be the main hindrance of linkage between traditional and conventional practitioners. On the other hand it was reported that there was no policy or guidelines on Traditional MC (TMC). Most of respondents supported the efforts to establish and promote formal linkages between traditional and conventional practitioners. In conclusion, under the current HIV pandemic and TMC being prevalent in Tanzania, it is high time for the government to establish a linkage between traditional and conventional practitioners for safe practices in order to minimize HIV transmission.