

Circumcision does not reduce penile sensitivity, research finds

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New research conducted at Queen's University has found the penises of men who were circumcised as newborns are no less sensitive than intact (uncircumcised) penises.

Jenn Bossio, a clinical psychology PhD candidate, studied 62 men between the ages of 18 and 37. A total of 30 were circumcised and 32 were not. Four penile sites were tested using touch, pain, warmth detection and heat pain. The results indicated neonatal circumcision is not associated with changes in penile sensitivity and provides evidence to suggest the foreskin is not the most sensitive part of the penis.

Only two studies had looked at this area before. Both used fine-touch pressure thresholds (a light touch) while just one used pain thresholds (a harder touch). Ms. Bossio extended the research methods in her study to include warmth detection and heat pain because these stimuli are more likely to activate the nerve fibres associated with sexual pleasure.

"One researcher who only used fine touch to measure penile sensitivity claimed the foreskin is the most sensitive part of the penis, so removing it via circumcision is detrimental to men's sex lives," Ms. Bossio says.

"Many anti-circumcision activists believe this is true, but we didn't find sufficient evidence to support this. We found that while the foreskin was more sensitive to fine [touch](#), it was not more sensitive to the other stimuli we used, and those stimuli are likely more important in [sexual pleasure](#)."

Approximately one-third of the global male population undergoes circumcision, and with the American Academy of Pediatrics recent report in favour of neonatal circumcision, plus the increasing number of men undergoing circumcision in Africa to try and reduce HIV transmission, those rates are likely to rise.

Ms. Bossio explains that although there is a great deal of research on the health benefits of circumcision, there is almost no information on sexual outcomes of the procedure.

"We need to take a more multi-lens approach to this procedure before making wide-sweeping conclusions about it in policy," she says.

"Further, many men opt to undergo [circumcision](#) to correct sexual dysfunction—but this research suggests that this would likely not help. Lastly, parents of infant boys need to be fully informed before they decide to circumcise their sons or not."

Conducting her research in the Sexual Health Research Lab under the supervision of Dr. Caroline Pukall (Psychology), Ms. Bossio says her next area of focus is to extend her findings to groups of [men](#) with sexual dysfunction like erectile dysfunction (who may have lower penile sensitivity) or premature ejaculation (who may have higher sensitivity). "I also think we need to have a better understanding of the sensory mechanisms of the genitals."

Ms. Bossio's research was recently published in the *Journal of Urology*.

More information: Jennifer A. Bossio et al. Examining Penile Sensitivity in Neonatally Circumcised and Intact Men Using Quantitative Sensory Testing, *The Journal of Urology* (2015). [DOI: 10.1016/j.juro.2015.12.080](#)

Provided by Queen's University

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