

Medical Practitioners' Insights on Safety Challenges and Ethical Considerations in Pediatric Circumcision Practices

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ABSTRACT

Pediatric circumcision is a common medical procedure influenced by cultural, religious, and clinical considerations. However, concerns remain regarding patient safety and ethical issues, particularly because children cannot provide informed consent. This study explores medical practitioners' perspectives on safety challenges and ethical considerations in pediatric circumcision practices. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with practitioners involved in circumcision procedures and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that while pediatric circumcision is generally safe when performed by trained professionals, challenges arise from variations in clinical standards, limited training, and cultural expectations. The study highlights the importance of standardized clinical guidelines, improved training, and stronger ethical awareness to ensure safe and responsible pediatric circumcision practices.

INTRODUCTION

Circumcision in children is one of the most common minor surgical procedures performed in various countries in the world. This practice has long been practiced for a variety of reasons, including medical, cultural, and religious considerations. In many societies, circumcision is not only seen as a medical procedure but also as an important part of social identity and religious traditions. In addition, a number of medical studies show that circumcision can provide certain health benefits, such as lowering the risk of urinary tract infections, sexually transmitted infections, as well as some diseases of the male genital organs (Morris et al., 2021; Zhenjing et al., 2022). Therefore, this practice is still widely practiced in various health care systems, both in formal medical facilities and in community contexts (Bilgili et al., 2024).

From a clinical perspective, the level of circumcision safety in children is greatly influenced by the competence of medical personnel, the use of appropriate surgical techniques, and the application of adequate medical procedure standards. Various studies show that circumcision procedures generally have a relatively low complication rate when performed by trained health workers in medical facilities that meet the standards (Bilgili et al., 2024; Ghasemi et al., 2025). However, patient safety challenges can still arise if procedures are performed without adequate medical training, without the use of proper sterile techniques, or without clear operational procedure standards. These conditions can increase the risk of complications such as bleeding, infection, and post-operative wound healing disorders (MacGibbon et al., 2023).

In addition to the aspect of medical safety, the practice of circumcision in children also raises various ethical considerations. Unlike adult patients, children do not yet have the capacity to give informed consent. Therefore, the decision to perform circumcision is usually made by parents or guardians, which are often influenced by cultural, religious, and social norms (Buckler, 2025). This situation raises an ethical discussion about the balance between respect for the cultural values of society and the protection of children's rights, especially related to bodily integrity and the best interests of the child (Frisch & Earp, 2022). In this context, medical personnel are faced with a professional responsibility to ensure that every medical action is carried out taking into account aspects of clinical safety as well as the principles of medical ethics.

In addition, differences in clinical practices and the level of training of health workers in various health care facilities can also affect the implementation of circumcision procedures in children. Variations in procedure technique, use of anesthesia, and post-operative care standards can affect clinical outcomes and patient safety levels. Therefore, understanding the medical practitioner's perspective on safety challenges and ethical considerations in the practice of child circumcision is important to improve the quality of health services and strengthen the application of evidence-based medical standards (Ghasemi et al., 2025; Morris et al., 2021).

Based on this background, this study aims to explore the views of medical practitioners regarding safety challenges and ethical considerations in the practice of circumcision in children. By understanding the experiences and

perspectives of medical personnel, this research is expected to contribute to the development of safer clinical practice standards and strengthen the application of ethical principles in medical procedures in pediatric patients.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Pediatric Circumcision in Medical Practice

Circumcision is a minor surgical procedure that involves the removal of the preputium or foreskin on the penis and is one of the most common procedures performed on boys in various countries. This practice has a complex background because it is influenced by medical, cultural, religious, and social factors. In the medical context, circumcision is often performed as a preventive measure or therapy for some urological conditions, such as pathological phimosis, balanitis, and urinary tract infections in children (Shen et al., 2023).

The development of modern surgical techniques and the use of safer medical devices have improved the quality and safety of circumcision procedures in children. Recent research shows that circumcision procedures performed by trained healthcare workers in adequate healthcare facilities have a high success rate as well as a relatively low risk of complications (Yegane et al., 2022). However, the practice of circumcision performed outside of formal health facilities is still found in some areas, potentially increasing the risk of medical complications due to a lack of adequate standard clinical procedures.

In addition, circumcision in children is also related to public health policies in several countries. In some health systems, circumcision is considered a preventive intervention against certain diseases, although its medical benefits are still the subject of discussion in the scientific literature. Therefore, it is important for medical practitioners to consider the clinical aspects and the current scientific evidence in the implementation of the procedure (Tait et al., 2021).

Patient Safety in Pediatric Surgical Procedures

Patient safety is a fundamental principle in health services, especially in surgical procedures involving pediatric patients. Pediatric patients have higher physiological and psychological susceptibility than adult patients, thus requiring a more careful and standardized clinical approach. In the context of circumcision, patient safety includes the application of appropriate surgical techniques, the safe use of anesthesia, infection prevention, and adequate post-operative supervision (Weiss et al., 2021).

Several studies have shown that complications of circumcision in children can be in the form of bleeding, infection, edema, and wound healing disorders. Although the overall complication rate is relatively low, the risk can increase if the procedure is performed without clear medical standards or by personnel who do not have adequate clinical competence (El Bcheraoui et al., 2022). Therefore, the implementation of evidence-based clinical guidelines and improving the competence of health workers are important factors in maintaining patient safety.

In addition to the technical aspects of medicine, the safety of pediatric patients also has to do with pain management and psychological experience during the procedure. The use of appropriate anesthesia methods and a good

communication approach to parents and patients can help reduce anxiety and improve the quality of medical services (Schoen et al., 2023).

Ethical Considerations in Medical Actions in Children

Medical procedures in pediatric patients often involve more complex ethical considerations than in adult patients. This is due to the limited capacity of the child to give approval for medical procedures independently. In medical practice, decisions related to medical actions on children are generally taken by parents or guardians based on the principle of the best interest of the child (Diekema, 2021).

In the context of child circumcision, ethical debates often arise because this procedure is often performed not only because of medical indications, but also because of cultural and religious factors. Some bioethicists consider that the procedure needs to consider a balance between respect for the cultural values of society and the protection of the child's right to bodily integrity (Earp & Shaw, 2021).

In addition, the basic principles of medical ethics such as beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, and justice are also important foundations in medical decision-making. Health workers are expected to be able to ensure that each procedure performed provides greater benefits than the potential risks and is carried out with the best interests of the patient in mind (Beauchamp & Childress, 2022).

The Role of Medical Practitioners in Ensuring Safe and Ethical Circumcision Practices

Medical practitioners have an important role in ensuring that circumcision procedures in children are carried out safely, professionally, and in accordance with the principles of medical ethics. Healthcare workers are responsible for providing accurate medical information to parents regarding the benefits, risks, and procedures to be performed. Clear and transparent information is essential to support the appropriate decision-making process by the patient's parents or guardians (Schoen et al., 2023).

In addition, medical personnel also have the responsibility to ensure that procedures are performed in accordance with applicable clinical practice standards. This includes the use of safe surgical techniques, the implementation of sterile procedures, and adequate post-operative supervision to prevent medical complications.

In the context of modern health services, improving the competence of medical personnel through continuing education and strengthening clinical practice guidelines is an important step to improve the quality of circumcision services for children. Thus, the role of medical practitioners is not only limited to the implementation of clinical measures, but also includes ethical and professional responsibilities in protecting the safety and well-being of pediatric patients.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory design to deeply understand the views of medical practitioners on safety challenges and ethical considerations in the practice of circumcision in children. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to explore the experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of medical practitioners on their clinical practices in the context of children's health services. Qualitative methods allow researchers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of social and clinical phenomena related to medical decision-making and professional practices of health workers (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

Participants and Sampling Techniques

Participants in this study were medical practitioners who were directly involved in performing circumcision procedures in children, including general practitioners, specialists, and other healthcare professionals with relevant clinical experience. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, which involves the deliberate selection of participants based on specific criteria that are relevant to the objectives of the research.

The inclusion criteria for participants were: (1) medical personnel who had experience performing or assisting in circumcision procedures in children, (2) having a minimum of two years of clinical practice experience, and (3) willingness to participate voluntarily in the study. In qualitative research, the number of participants is generally not predetermined but is determined based on the principle of data saturation, which occurs when the information obtained reaches a point where no new significant themes or insights emerge from additional data collection (Guest et al., 2022).

Data Collection Techniques

The research data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted either in person or through online communication platforms. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they allow researchers to explore participants' experiences and perspectives in greater depth while also providing flexibility to develop follow-up questions during the interview process. The interview guide was developed based on the research objectives and covered several key topics, including medical practitioners' experiences in performing circumcision procedures in children, challenges related to patient safety during the procedures, clinical practice standards applied in the implementation of circumcision, ethical considerations that arise in pediatric circumcision practices, and practitioners' perspectives on the role of medical personnel in ensuring safe and ethical circumcision procedures. Each interview was conducted with the informed consent of the participants, recorded for documentation purposes, and subsequently transcribed verbatim to facilitate systematic data analysis.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis in this study was carried out using thematic analysis. The analysis process begins with reading and understanding the entire interview transcript thoroughly. Next, a coding process is carried out to identify important concepts that emerge from the data. The codes were then grouped into key

themes that reflected participants' experiences and perspectives related to patient safety and ethical considerations in the practice of circumcision in children.

Thematic analysis was chosen because this method is effective for identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning that emerge from qualitative data as well as providing a systematic understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Data Validity

To increase the credibility of the research results, several data validation strategies were used in this study. First, the researcher conducts member checking, which is giving participants the opportunity to review the summary of the interview results to ensure that the researcher's interpretation is in accordance with the experience they conveyed. Second, data triangulation was carried out through a comparison of information obtained from various participants to ensure the consistency of research findings.

Research Ethics Considerations

This research is carried out by paying attention to the ethical principles of research in the health sector. Before data collection is carried out, each participant is given complete information about the research objectives, research procedures, and their rights as participants. Participation in this study is voluntary and participants have the right to terminate their involvement at any time without any consequences. All information provided by participants is kept confidential and used only for research purposes. The identities of participants were not included in the research report to protect the privacy and confidentiality of their data.

RESEARCH RESULTS

This study involved 12 medical practitioners consisting of general practitioners, specialists, and health workers who have experience in performing circumcision procedures on children. All participants had between 3 and 15 years of clinical practice experience in pediatric health services and minor surgical procedures. Based on the results of in-depth interviews that have been analyzed using thematic analysis, several main themes were obtained that describe medical practitioners' views on safety challenges and ethical considerations in the practice of circumcision in children. These themes include: safety standards of medical procedures, clinical challenges in the implementation of circumcision, ethical considerations in medical decision-making, and the role of health workers in ensuring safe and ethical practices.

Table 1. Characteristics of Participants

Participant Categories	Quantity (n)	Percentage (%)	Practical Experience
General Practitioner	6	50%	3–10 years
Specialist Doctor	3	25%	7–15 years
Other Health Workers	3	25%	3–8 years
Total	12	100%	3–15 years

Table 2. Main Themes Identified in the Study

Main Themes	Description
Medical procedure safety standards	Practitioners emphasize the importance of the application of sterile techniques, the proper use of medical equipment, as well as clinical supervision during circumcision procedures in children.
Clinical challenges in the implementation of circumcision	Challenges that arise include variations in patients' anatomical conditions, limited medical facilities in some practice settings, and patient and parental anxiety.
Ethical considerations in medical decision-making	Practitioners face ethical dilemmas because children have not been able to give consent to medical procedures independently, so decisions are usually made by parents based on cultural or religious considerations.
The role of health workers in ensuring safe and ethical practices	Medical personnel play a role in providing education to parents, ensuring procedures are carried out according to clinical standards, and maintaining ethical principles in children's health services.

Safety Standards in Pediatric Circumcision Procedures

Most of the participants stated that the circumcision procedure on children is basically a relatively safe medical procedure if performed by competent health workers and follows the applicable medical procedure standards. Practitioners emphasized the importance of the application of sterile techniques, the use of appropriate medical equipment, and adequate clinical supervision during the procedure. This is considered a major factor in minimizing the risk of complications during medical procedures.

One of the participants explained that the application of standard medical procedures greatly determines the success of circumcision in children. As stated by one of the general practitioners who participated in this study:

"Basically, circumcision is a safe procedure if it is carried out by trained medical personnel and uses the correct sterile techniques. The risk of complications is usually very small if the standard medical procedures are followed properly." (P2, General Practitioner)

In addition, some participants also highlighted the importance of using appropriate local anesthesia as well as monitoring the patient's condition during the procedure. This is considered important to minimize pain and improve the comfort of pediatric patients during the procedure. A specialist doctor said that pain management is one of the important aspects of the child circumcision procedure.

"The proper use of local anesthesia is very important because children often feel scared or anxious before the action. With good anesthesia and monitoring during the procedure, we can make the patient more comfortable." (P5, Specialist Doctor)

However, some practitioners revealed that there are still variations in the application of standard procedures in various health care facilities, especially in circumcision practices carried out outside of formal medical facilities. This condition is considered to have the potential to increase the risk of complications if the procedure is not carried out with adequate medical standards. One of the

participants highlighted that the difference in practice standards is still a challenge in maintaining patient safety.

"The problem is that sometimes circumcision procedures are also carried out in places that are not official health facilities. If you don't use sterile tools or do it by an untrained person, the risk of infection or bleeding can increase." (P8, Health Workers)

Overall, medical practitioners consider that the implementation of consistent safety standards, the competence of health workers, and adequate medical facilities are important factors in ensuring that circumcision procedures in children can be performed safely and effectively.

Clinical Challenges in the Implementation of Children's Circumcision

The second theme that emerged from the results of the study was the existence of various clinical challenges faced by medical practitioners in the implementation of circumcision procedures in children. One of the main challenges often mentioned by participants is differences in the patient's anatomical condition, such as phimosis or certain anatomical abnormalities that can complicate the process of action. These conditions often require higher clinical skills and adjustments to procedural techniques in order for the procedure to be performed safely.

One of the participants explained that the diverse anatomical conditions of patients can affect the level of difficulty during the procedure.

"Each pediatric patient has a different condition. For example, in cases of severe phimosis, the circumcision procedure can be more difficult and requires special techniques to avoid complications." (P3, General Practitioner)

In addition to the patient's medical condition, some participants also said that the limitation of medical facilities in several practice places can be an obstacle in the implementation of optimal procedure standards. Inadequate facilities, such as limited medical equipment or non-standard procedure rooms, can affect the quality of health services provided to patients. A participant who works in first-level health services said that different facility conditions can affect the implementation of medical procedures.

"In some practice places, the facilities available are not always complete. This sometimes makes us have to adapt the procedure to the existing conditions, even though we still try to follow medical standards." (P6, Health Workers)

In addition to technical factors and medical facilities, the psychological aspect of the patient is also a challenge in the implementation of circumcision in children. Some participants revealed that anxiety experienced by children's patients and parents can affect the smooth running of medical procedures. Children often feel scared before action is taken, so it requires a good communication approach from health workers. One of the specialists explained the importance of the right communication approach in handling pediatric patients.

"Children usually feel scared before action is taken. Therefore, we need to provide a more communicative approach so that children feel calmer and parents also feel confident in the procedures that will be carried out." (P9, Specialist Doctor).

Practitioners emphasized that clinical skills, experience, and good communication skills with patients' parents are important factors in dealing with these challenges. With a combination of technical competence and an effective communication approach, healthcare professionals can ensure that circumcision procedures in children remain safe and professional despite facing various clinical challenges in the field.

Ethical Considerations in the Practice of Child Circumcision

The results of the study also show that ethical considerations are an important aspect that medical practitioners pay attention to in the practice of circumcision in children. The participants realized that the child as a patient did not have the ability to give independent consent to the medical actions taken. Therefore, the decision to perform circumcision is generally taken by the patient's parents or guardians. In this situation, medical practitioners consider that their role is very important in providing clear information about the benefits, risks, and procedures of action to the elderly.

Some participants also stated that they must be able to balance respecting the cultural or religious values of the community with professional responsibility to ensure that procedures are performed safely and in accordance with the principles of medical ethics.

The Role of Medical Practitioners in Ensuring Safe and Ethical Practices

The final theme that emerged in this study was the important role of medical practitioners in ensuring safe and ethical circumcision practices. The participants stated that healthcare workers have a professional responsibility to ensure that each procedure is performed to the right clinical standards.

In addition to technical skills, practitioners also emphasize the importance of effective communication with patients' parents. A clear explanation of procedures, risks, and post-operative care is considered essential to increase the trust of patients and their families in healthcare.

Some participants also highlighted the need to improve training and continuing education for health workers in the field of minor surgical procedures in children. This is considered important to improve the quality of medical services and minimize the risk of complications.

Overall, the results of the study show that medical practitioners view the practice of circumcision in children as a relatively safe procedure if carried out in accordance with applicable medical standards. However, challenges related to patient safety, variations in clinical practice, and ethical considerations remain important aspects that need to be considered in the implementation of the procedure.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that medical practitioners view circumcision procedures in children as a relatively safe medical procedure if carried out by competent health workers and in accordance with applicable medical procedure standards. These findings are in line with research showing that circumcision in children has a low complication rate when performed by

trained medical personnel in healthcare facilities that meet clinical standards (Morris et al., 2022). The application of sterile techniques, the use of appropriate medical equipment, and monitoring of the patient's condition during the procedure are important factors in maintaining patient safety during minor surgeries in children.

In addition, this study also confirms the importance of pain management through the use of appropriate local anesthesia during circumcision procedures. Effective pain management not only aims to reduce pain, but also plays a role in reducing the anxiety of pediatric patients during medical procedures. Previous research has shown that proper anesthesia approaches and good patient monitoring can improve patient comfort as well as improve a child's medical experience during minor surgical procedures (Brady-Fryer et al., 2021). Thus, the implementation of effective pain management is one of the important aspects in improving the quality of health services for pediatric patients.

The findings of this study also reveal various clinical challenges in the implementation of circumcision procedures in children, especially related to variations in the patient's anatomical conditions, such as phimosis or certain anatomical abnormalities. Variations in medical conditions can increase the complexity of procedures and require higher clinical skills from medical personnel. Research in the field of pediatric urology shows that conditions such as pathological phimosis or preputium adhesion can affect the difficulty level of circumcision procedures and require different surgical approaches (Kigozi et al., 2021). Therefore, the clinical competence and experience of medical practitioners are important factors in ensuring that procedures are performed safely and effectively.

In addition to clinical factors, this study also found that limited medical facilities in some places of practice can affect the optimal implementation of circumcision procedures. The availability of medical equipment, adequate treatment rooms, and a good sterilization system are important components in maintaining patient safety standards. Previous research has shown that circumcision procedures performed in healthcare facilities with good clinical standards have a much lower risk of complications compared to procedures performed in non-medical settings (WHO, 2021). This emphasizes the importance of strengthening regulations and standards of clinical practice in the implementation of circumcision procedures in children.

In addition to the clinical safety aspect, the results of this study also highlight the importance of ethical considerations in the practice of circumcision in children. Because the child does not yet have the capacity to give consent to medical procedures independently, decisions regarding circumcision procedures are generally made by the patient's parents or guardians. This situation raises an ethical discussion about the balance between respect for the cultural and religious values of the community with the principle of the best interests of the child. In the bioethical literature, medical decisions in pediatric patients must consider the principle of the best interest of the child, which is to ensure that the medical measures performed provide the greatest benefits to the patient's well-being (Diekema, 2021).

In addition, this study also shows that medical practitioners have an important role in providing education to parents about the benefits, risks, and procedures of circumcision procedures. Effective communication between healthcare workers and patients' families can help parents understand medical procedures more comprehensively and make more informed decisions. Previous research has shown that clear and transparent communication between doctors and patients' parents can increase trust in healthcare services as well as support more ethical and responsible medical decision-making (Lantos & Meadow, 2022).

The findings of this study also confirm that improving the competence of health workers through training and continuing education is an important factor in improving the quality of circumcision services for children. Clinical training programs that focus on minor surgical procedures, pain management in pediatric patients, and an understanding of the principles of medical ethics can assist healthcare professionals in dealing with the various challenges that arise in clinical practice. Recent studies show that continuous training for healthcare workers contributes significantly to improving patient safety and quality of medical services (Bates et al., 2023).

Overall, the results of this study show that the practice of circumcision in children can be carried out safely if supported by the competence of medical personnel, the application of appropriate clinical procedure standards, and mature ethical considerations in medical decision-making. However, variations in clinical practice, limited health facilities, and cultural and social factors remain challenges that need to be considered in the implementation of the procedure. Therefore, strengthening clinical practice standards, improving the competence of health workers, and educating the public are important steps in improving the safety and quality of circumcision services for children.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

This study explores medical practitioners' views on safety challenges and ethical considerations in the practice of circumcision in children. The results of the study show that circumcision in children is generally seen as a relatively safe medical procedure if it is carried out by competent health workers and follows the applicable clinical procedure standards. The application of sterile techniques, the use of appropriate medical equipment, and adequate clinical supervision are important factors in maintaining patient safety during the procedure.

However, the study also identified several challenges in the practice of circumcision in children, including variations in patients' anatomical conditions, limited medical facilities in some practice settings, and anxiety of pediatric patients and parents that can affect the smooth running of the procedure. In addition to the clinical aspect, ethical considerations are also an important concern because children do not yet have the ability to give consent to medical actions independently. Therefore, medical personnel have an important role in providing clear information to parents about the benefits, risks, and procedures for action to be taken.

Based on these findings, improving clinical practice standards, strengthening the competence of health workers through continuous training, and

providing adequate medical facilities are important steps to improve patient safety in child circumcision procedures. In addition, effective communication between healthcare workers and patients' parents needs to be continuously improved to support more informed and responsible medical decision-making. Further research is recommended to involve a wider number of participants and consider the perspective of the patient's parents or family in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the practice of circumcision in children.

FURTHER STUDY

Further research is recommended to involve a larger number of participants from various health care facilities to obtain a more comprehensive picture of circumcision practices in children. In addition, future research may consider the perspective of the patient's parents or guardians to understand the decision-making process regarding circumcision procedures from a family perspective. The mixed methods approach can also be used to combine qualitative and quantitative analysis to produce a deeper understanding of clinical safety aspects, patient experience, and ethical considerations in the practice of child circumcision.

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