

Meaning and Value Attributed to Non-Therapeutic Circumcision of Boys among Danish Parents of Jewish Origin: A Sociological-Phenomenological study

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BACKGROUND AND AIM

- Non-therapeutic circumcision of boys has been the subject of a heated public debate in Denmark since around 2010.
- In this debate, the parents' perspective has largely been missing. Until now, very little is known about meaning with and attribution of value to Non-therapeutic circumcision of boys by Danish-Jewish parents.
- In the present study, the aim was to examine social and discursive practices of Non-therapeutic circumcision of boys among Danish-Jewish parents.

METHODOLOGY

- 20 semi-structured interviews with parents about their views and experiences with either choosing or opting out of Non-therapeutic circumcision of boys.
- The empirical knowledge was analyzed with theoretical inspiration from medical sociologist Aaron Antonovsky and Davies and Harré's positioning theory.

FINDINGS

The analysis indicates that Non-Therapeutic Circumcision of Boys may be understood as a cultural act and related to the participants' **process of becoming parents and a family**, actualizing questions of gender, ethnic-cultural identity, origin, family biography, and affiliation to Judaism as well as questions of identity and belonging.

Overall, parents viewed Non-Therapeutic Circumcision of Boys as a **valuable and meaningful continuation of culture and tradition**. As opposed to previous generations, the value was articulated less in religious terms.

As a response to the longstanding and increasingly incriminating debate on the topic, Non-Therapeutic Circumcision of Boys is increasingly articulated in terms of **culture, belonging, identity, and minority rights**.

IMPLICATIONS

This article makes an important contribution to the understanding of the perspective of Danish-Jewish parents. Knowledge on the cultural and religious reasons for Non-Therapeutic Circumcision of Boys is critical to inform the debate and decision about a ban on non-therapeutic circumcision of boys in Denmark. Taking the views of Danish-Jewish parents seriously into account will allow us to understand the complexity of the practice as well as reveal new and different ways of making sense of non-therapeutic circumcision of boys.

"I have always felt that circumcision of my boys was essential. It is still difficult for me to explain. When I think about it, I often think about when as a child I had a great attachment to my grandparents in Israel. My grandfather was Polish Jew, a Jew from Warsaw, who barely avoided the ghetto, but many of his family members died.. The boys and men who tried to escape were identified as Jews as they were asked to pull down their pants".

- Mother of two circumcised boys



"My parents had to hide in their home country and they raised us to be very discreet, to the point where we didn't have any Jewish traditions. Deep down I always knew, of course, that I'm Jewish. Hopefully, there is less oppression of Jews today and of course we would like our children to stand by their religion and identity. Of course, they should not be oppressed. Of course, circumcision must be legal as a part of that.

- Father to two circumcised boys



"My son does not look like my brothers, my father, my uncles or cousins. I did not think that it was important for me, when we had him, but now, it makes him stand out, it feels odd, especially when we are with my family"

- Mother to a boy who is not circumcised

