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Kenya: Whether a circumcised male of the Luo ethnic group would face repercussions from other members of the group and if so, the nature of the these repercussions and the availability of state protection (June 2005)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Various sources stated that the Luo people of Kenya do not traditionally practice male circumcision (AIDS Care 1 Feb. 2002; NIAID N.d.; Kenyaspace.com N.d.). However, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) estimates that 10 per cent of Luo adult men are circumcised (N.d.). According to the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS), approximately 17 per cent of Luo males between the ages of 15 and 54 are circumcised (Kenya July 1004).

However, a March 2004 *Epidemiology* study stated that circumcision practices differ among denominations as many members of the Luo ethnic group are Christians from African-instituted churches." In a 1 February 2002 study entitled "The Acceptability of Male Circumcision to Reduce HIV Infections in Nyanza Province, Kenya," the authors identified "cultural identification, fear of pain and excessive bleeding and cost" as being some of the primary barriers to acceptance of male circumcision among the Luo (AIDS Care 1 Feb. 2002). However, the results from the same study indicated that "both men and women were eager for promotion of genital hygiene and male circumcision, and they desired availability of circumcision clinical services in the Province's health facilities" (ibid).

In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate on 20 June 2005, a researcher at the universities of Nairobi, Illinois and Manitoba, who is of Kenyan origin (Luo ethnic group), provided the following information.

1. Whether members of the Luo ethnic group practice circumcision:

Answer: Traditionally, the Luo do not practice male or female circumcision. However, about 10% of Luo men are circumcised for medical reasons, personal reasons, or if they are members of a minority religious group that advocates circumcision for male members of their church.

2. Whether a circumcised male of the Luo ethnic group would face repercussions from other members of his group.

Answer: Yes (a little bit) and no (for the most part). Yes, if the family is anti-

circumcision for cultural reasons, but this is dependent on whether the person is still a dependent of the parents/family or not (usually those under the age of 18; 18 is the legal age in Kenya). But mostly No, because those who seek circumcision do so as adults who are no longer under the custody of their parents. If circumcisions were to be done as a cultural rite, then it would be done pre-pubescent, and parental consent/support would be sought. For the Luo, this is not the case.

3. The nature of these repercussions

Answer: Almost none for adults, unless they go to a quack and there are adverse outcomes, then the victim can choose to sue the fake circumciser or the state, if the event becomes public, can throw the "circumciser" in jail. I have never heard of such among the Luo however since circumcisions are either done in health facilities or, for those belonging to the churches where circumcision is required, there is a special person appointed and trained to carry out the surgeries. Among the traditionally circumcising communities, there have been cases of severe adverse outcomes from unqualified people and the state has come in to protect the victims.

4. The availability of state protection for victims.

Answer: No state protection is needed because there are no repercussions for circumcised Luo men. In fact, in our study (described below), we are offering circumcision to consenting men and we are encountering very little cultural resistance, and only among very old men and women.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

AIDS Care. 1 February 2002. Vol. 14, No 1. The Acceptability of Male Circumcision to Reduce HIV Infections in Nyanza Province, Kenya. <<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/carfax/caic/2002/00000014/00000001/art0000>> [Accessed 20 June 2005]

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Kenya. July 2004. Central Bureau of Statistics. Demographic and Health Survey - 2003. Laurence Marum et al. "Gender Violence," Chapter 13. <<http://www.measuredhs.com/pubs/pdf/FR151/13Chapter13.pdf>> [Accessed 1 Feb. 2005]

Kenyaspace. N.d. "Luo." <<http://www.kenyaspace.com/luo.htm>> [Accessed 15 June 2005]

Researcher at the Universities of Nairobi, Illinois and Manitoba. 20 June 2005. Correspondence.

The researcher, holder of a doctorate, stated that she "has done several studies on the topic of male circumcision among the Luo as it relates to HIV infection [and is] fully conversant with the Luo cultures, including their position on circumcision." She is now working on a "collaborative research project under the Universities of Nairobi, Illinois and Manitoba" in which a study is being conducted to "investigate the association between male circumcision and HIV infection among young Luo men in Kisumu, Kenya."

United States. N.d. The U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH). National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID). "Male Circumcision and HIV Rates in Kenya." <<http://clinicaltrials.gov/show/NCT00059371>> [Accessed 20 June 2005]

Additional Sources Consulted

Publications : *Africa Research Bulletin*, *Africa Today*, *Europa World Yearbook*.

Websites, including : BBC News, Minority Rights Groups International, World News Connection.

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