



Preferences for non-surgical and surgical VMMC among adolescents and their parents in Zimbabwe: Findings from a cross-sectional study

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Background

Voluntary medical male circumcision (VMMC) is an essential option in the toolkit of HIV prevention interventions in East and Southern Africa. Zimbabwe's policy supports use of device-based methods such as the Shang Ring (SR) in males aged 15 and above, but WHO guidelines advise these devices can be used in males as young as 10, and there is interest in lowering this age threshold. There is a need to understand potential demand for non-surgical devices in younger adolescents and their parents who must provide consent for the procedure.

Methods

Cross-sectional surveys were conducted in September 2022 in Zimbabwe among uncircumcised adolescents/young men (AYM) aged 13-16 (n=881), circumcised AYM aged 13-20 (n=247), and parents (n=443) of uncircumcised adolescents aged 13-16. Surveys asked each group about perceptions of surgical and device based VMMC, and drivers and barriers for VMMC uptake. Descriptive statistics were used to characterize attitudes in each group.

Results

There was clear preference for SR compared to surgical VMMC; 81%, 68% and 68% among uncircumcised AYM, circumcised AYM and parents respectively reported SR preference. Top perceived benefits of SR were similar across groups: fast procedure time, no stitches, and less pain compared to surgery. For uncircumcised AYM, top drawbacks were having to wear the device for a week and fearing pain of during device placement and removal. For parents, the top drawback was that SR was a newer procedure lacking provider experience as compared to surgery. Among circumcised AYM, a higher percentage reported experiencing pain the day and night of the procedure among those who had surgery (43%, 85/198) compared to SR (22%, 11/49).

Conclusions

The strong preference for Shang Ring indicates that non-surgical VMMC devices could play an important role to increase VMMC demand and uptake for long-term sustainability of Zimbabwe's VMMC programme. From the recount of men who have been circumcised, Shang Ring was also less painful than surgery, which is known to be the primary barrier to uptake of VMMC. Coupling this data on preference with safety data from an ongoing trial of Shang Ring in Zimbabwe will provide important information to guide VMMC programming in Zimbabwe.