

Infant circumcision may lead to social challenges as an adult

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Undergoing [circumcision](#) as an infant has delayed psychological

complications. This is shown by an international study led by researchers from Aarhus University.

Researchers have long disagreed about the health implications—also for [mental health](#)—of small boys being circumcised. A study now shows that infant circumcision, which is the case for a third of the world's male population, has consequences in adulthood. Alessandro Miani and Michael Winterdahl from Aarhus University and Aarhus University Hospital have coordinated the study.

"We wanted to challenge the assumption that there are no delayed consequences of infant circumcision apart from the purely physical because of the absence of foreskin," says Michael Winterdahl about the background for the study.

Emotionally stability

The researchers recruited 408 American men who had been circumcised within the first month of their lives and 211 American men who had not been circumcised. All participants completed six questionnaires focusing on the ability to bond with others and the handling of stress.

"The study showed that men who had undergone circumcision as an infant found it more difficult to bond with e.g. their partner and were more emotionally unstable, while the study did not find differences in empathy or trust. Infant circumcision was also associated with stronger sexual drive as well as a lower stress threshold," says Michael Winterdahl.

He elaborates: "We know from previous studies that the combination of attachment to a partner and [emotional stability](#) is important in order to be able to maintain a healthy relationship, and thus [family structure](#), and a lack of such, may lead to frustration and possibly less restricted sexual

behavior."

Stressed infant

The results have been published in the journal *Heliyon*.

According to the researcher, the study links the state of stress that [infant circumcision](#) triggers in the infant, with the altered behavior which is first revealed as an adult.

"Our findings are especially interesting for coming parents who want to make an informed choice about circumcision on behalf of their child, but are also directed at anyone who wishes to see more light shed on a very taboo topic that often drowns in an emotional discussion," says Michael Winterdahl.

He stresses that the study does not, as such, point to any pathological changes among circumcised men.

"Our study says something about differences at population level, not about individuals. It's important to remember that as individuals, we vary enormously in virtually all parameters—also in how we bond with our partner, for example," he says.

More information: Alessandro Miani et al. Neonatal male circumcision is associated with altered adult socio-affective processing, *Heliyon* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e05566](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e05566)

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