

THE ORGANISATION PROVIDES HIV PREVENTION SERVICES, INCLUDING SAFE MALE CIRCUMCISION

Anxiety as NGO 'forcibly' circumcises over 100 pupils

ZOMBO
By Benedict Okethweng

Anxiety has engulfed Zombo district after 115 children were 'forcibly' circumcised by a non-governmental organisation operating in the district.

The Infectious Disease Institute (IDI) is alleged to have performed safe male circumcision on pupils of Mvugu and Oturugang Boys primary schools, in Paldha.

On Monday, Mazo Ubia, a resident of Paldha, appeared on a local radio station to air his frustration after his son who is 10 years old, was circumcised.

IDI is a Ugandan not-for-profit organisation, established within Makerere University. It provides care and treatment services to people living with HIV in urban and rural Uganda.

The organisation also provides extensive prevention services, including medical male circumcision and is a national referral centre for HIV.

Ubia accused the organisation of circumcising his son without his consent.

He said for the past two



A man being circumcised at a health facility in Ntungamo. A 2014 report showed that 35% of men had undergone safe circumcision. Safe male circumcision reduces the risk of female-to-male HIV transmission

weeks, the boy has been in pain and that he might not sit the end-of-term two

examinations, as the wound is not healing.

Ubia re-echoed a similar concern to *New Vision* when contacted on Monday.

"The boy is in pain. He has a swollen penis and is not sure he will be able to sit his examinations," he said.

Florence Akello, the headteacher of Oturugang Primary School, said it was true that the children had been circumcised.

Akello said a total of about 75 children have been circumcised at the school in the past two weeks.

According to Akello, the organisation brought forms for children to take to their parents to sign before the circumcision was performed.

She, however, said they have been receiving complaints from some parents on how their children were circumcised without their consent.

"It is true IDI brought forms for pupils to take to their parents, but I think most of them did not take the forms to their parents," she said.

Osman Wathum, the headteacher of Mvugu Upper Primary School, also said 40 pupils from their school have been circumcised.

According to Wathum, pupils are ferried to Goli Health Centre IV in Nebbi district, where the circumcision is carried out from.

"Forty pupils from our schools were circumcised, and

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ Bernard Olar, a human rights activist in Zombo, said safe male circumcision is not a bad practice, but noted that in the case of children, it ought to be done with the consent of their parents.

It was done at Goli Health Centre IV. When we asked them, they (pupils) said they were being picked on their way to school," he said.

Alex Ocuna, the Zombo district education officer, said he had no knowledge about any safe male circumcision activity that is being carried out in schools in the district.

"I am not aware of such a thing in our schools. I will have to cross-check with the district health officer," he said.

Sam Ajoga, the Zombo district health officer, also said he did not know of such a development in the district.

He said much as IDI is offering comprehensive HIV/AIDS services in the district, safe male circumcision is not

WHY TO CARRY OUT SAFE MALE CIRCUMCISION

Dr William Anzo, a safe male circumcision specialist at Oll Health Centre IV in Arua, said safe male circumcision is a scientifically proven biomedical intervention, which substantially reduces the risk of female-to-male transmission of HIV.

The World Health Organisation and the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS also recommend safe male circumcision for countries with a high prevalence of HIV and low prevalence of male circumcision.

According to the Uganda Demographic and Health Survey conducted in 2006, only 25% of adults were circumcised and HIV prevalence among the uncircumcised males was 6.7%, higher than in circumcised males at 4.5%.

By 2014, the 2014 Uganda HIV/AIDS country progress report showed that 35% of adult men had undergone safe medical circumcision.

part of their programme. "They are our partners, but safe male circumcision is not part of the activities they are implementing in Zombo," he said.

The head of the programme at IDI for Nebbi and Zombo Cluster, denied the allegation. He said they had only one incident in which the man disagreed with his wife for consenting to have his son circumcised.

He said even in that incident, they intervened and the matter was resolved amicably.

"It is not true that we are circumcising children without the consent of their parents. We follow the right procedures," he explained.

Bernard Olar, a human rights activist in Zombo, said safe male circumcision is not a bad practice, but noted that in the case of children, it ought to be done with the consent of the parents.

"Safe male circumcision is good and it is something we need to embrace. However, for children, the parents must first consent to it," he said.

In June 2012, the Police in Mbale fired tear gas and deployed heavily to disperse hooligans, forcibly circumcising people on the streets, including non-Bagisu.

In September 2015, parents protested the circumcision of their underage children studying at Oderai Primary School in Soroti district.



A candidate of Imbalu (traditional circumcision) in Mbale district dancing before he is circumcised.

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