



INTACT KENYA

Project in Kenya

Activity report:

MIGORI CIRCUMCISION ON AIR

SIAYA DEBATES CIRCUMCISION

MIGORI CIRCUMCISION ON AIR

Job Kajwang and I arrived in Migori town early enough in the evening of Thursday 2nd August, 2018 for our live radio show which was scheduled to be aired on Radio Milambo from 9:30pm till midnight.

Migori County has a population of 917,170 (census 2009). According to the 2018 HIV estimates the County registered 2,814 new HIV infections, this translates to 0.3% of the population. The Kenya Demographic Health Survey (KDHS,2014) shows that 60% of women and 52% of men in Migori County who had reported two or more sexual partners did not use condom during their last sexual intercourse, putting themselves at higher probability of acquiring new HIV infection per sexual contact. About 73% of men in this County had already been circumcised by the year 2014(KDHS



2014). The County consists of the traditionally non-circumcising Luos and Kurias. The Kuria and the Luo sub-tribe of Suna have been practising cultural circumcision as an initiation stage for childhood - adulthood progression and for religious reasons.

Before the radio station's phone numbers were opened, there had been about 75 attempted calls from impatient listeners. This happened in the first hour when we were exhaustively giving the facts and figures why the massive pushing of circumcision in the county should be rejected by all and sundry.

Robert S. Van Howe wrote about how the African circumcision "solution" will increase HIV infections citing lack of scientific evidence, lack of biologic plausibility, lack of consistent epidemiological evidence. By conclusion Robert says that on a general population level, circumcision has no association with risk of HIV infection.

While live-on-air, we courageously and confidently spelt out the realistic solutions to HIV in Migori County to our listeners that fateful night. We emphasised consistent and correct condom use. Condoms have been proven to provide the most effective way of preventing STIs at approximately 95%. Circumcision of healthy babies, teenage boys and adult men is not a priority in a county like Migori where children from poor backgrounds drop out of school due to lack of financial resources and basic needs. There is little or no safe water for human consumption. Sometimes the water is not readily available or expensive to acquire. There is poor transport and communication networks. Circumcision philanthropists should be informed to redirect their funds to more meaningful life-changing beneficial projects in the County like building modern schools well furnished and stocked with updated books, hospitals, better transport and communication networks, relaying water to or closer to homes and social amenities, construction of irrigation channels and sponsoring needy but bright kids in institutions of higher learning.

Finally, we mentioned other basic prevention strategies for sexually transmitted infections. Abstinence and being faithful beside condom use, PrEP initiative, HIV education and awareness, delaying sexual debut and safe sex messages.

Regret stories, forced circumcisions, botched Circumcisions and subjecting newborn babies to this medically -unnecessary inhumane practice have been reported ever since this VMMC programme was rolled out more than ten years ago. A local daily newspaper, The Standard, reported in 2013 that

HIV/AIDS was sky rocketing in Nyanza, a region now considered as the "hotbed of AIDS" despite the promise that VMMC would avert the disease whose prevalence is highest in the counties of Nairobi, Homa Bay, Siaya, Kisumu and Migori .

We usually read malice and suspicion whenever we see circumcision consent forms issued to school kids by the NGOs implementing the massive circumcision. The consent forms majorly aim at seeking the signature of the parent but lack some vital information like the name of the doctor, name of hospital /clinic and in most cases does not specifically name the surgery which is being consented to.

Our radio host, Maurice, eventually opened the phone lines, allowing listeners to make calls. One caller asked what could be the difference between traditional circumcision carried out in the bush with a knife and that which is done in a medical facility, hospital or clinic using sterilised equipment. Another person requested us to ascertain the allegation he had been told that traditional circumcision provided less percentage of risk protection against STIs (he mentioned 50% or less) than the hospital circumcision which he was told provides higher protection against risk of STIs (60%).

There were a bunch of other listeners who asked why there is usually no follow up after children have been circumcised. Another question was on how different circumcision affects sexuality either positively or negatively when done at birth and in adulthood. Some listeners bitterly wanted to know where foreskins cut from the tip of their son's penises are taken to, while a few others questioned the possibility of reversing circumcision harm for those who regret having been duped into it.

One outstanding call came from a 75 year old Bishop Collins. The Bishop himself lived several years ago when female circumcision was an unquestionable norm in the African traditional set-up. He saw it gradually slip from the hands of the superstitious elders into legal prohibition. In his youthful days, the Bishop had his 6 lower teeth removed to fulfill the Luo cultural practice of initiation from childhood to adulthood. He saw this practice too go into oblivion. He aired his sentiments saying that several premature HIV deaths have been thwarted by the introduction of ARVs and PrEp. However, we were shocked to hear him say that male circumcision should be done to children because he believes it is one of the ways that can be used to contain the HIV epidemic.

A handful of callers just wanted to know why we have publically come out to demonise the circumcision atrocity when it is already too late to save their sons who are already victims of the irreversible circumcision damage. Some listeners just wanted to know the physical location of our offices and contacts.

By the time our show ended at midnight, we were extremely exhausted and thirsty.

SIAYA DEBATES CIRCUMCISION

Radio Pacho is found in Siaya town broadcasting wide enough to crisscross three or four other neighbouring counties through the frequency of 88.3 fm. That is where the radio presenter Bande Edward hosted Job Kajwang and I on the eve of Friday 17th August, 2018 from 9:20pm to a few minutes before midnight. We boldly conflated mind-boggling circumcision information based on past

and recent scientific research findings to the listeners who were lucky to have tuned in during our show.



The latest 2018 HIV estimates, says that Siaya County recorded 4,093 new HIV infections putting it among the five counties which have the highest number of deaths arising from HIV-related illnesses. In 2013, the HIV prevalence rate in Siaya County was 23.7% , while in 2015 the prevalence rate rose to 24.8% rendering null and void the much hyped 60% risk reduction rate by the circumcision proponents. Human Papillomavirus (HPV), the virus that causes cervical cancer has unfounded association majorly within the population of intact men as claimed in the circumcision literature. Proven scientific research has revealed that cervical cancer is found in both circumcised and intact communities. It is prevented by vaccines and the chances of getting HPV can be lowered by condoms, not circumcision. However, wives of intact men have been used as baits through the scare tactic to convince their husbands to go for circumcision with the false claim that they are at greater risk of cervical cancer infection.

During the second hour of our radio show when phone and sms numbers were opened by our host, Bande Edward, calls trickled in from different people living within Siaya County and those neighbouring it. Some listeners sought help on how they could reverse the regrettable loss of their valuable foreskins, others applauded our work of informing the misinformed while some accused us of misinforming the informed. There was a listener who called saying that the foreskin stores dirt, is weak and easily gets injured by friction during sexual intercourse. Another caller who, apparently, was a Christian evangelist, did not understand why people cut the foreskin which has been created by God, besides saying that the ongoing mass male circumcision goes contrary to the teachings of Christianity. He commended Job for reading the biblical verses earlier in the programme on why physical circumcision is not a religious necessity in the life of a true Christian. One married man narrated how his circumcision was occasioned by a wound that had formed under the foreskin, boasting of improved sexual prowess and longer duration before ejaculation during copulation after circumcision. One call came from someone who erroneously believed that circumcision protects (he did not specify whether men , women or both) against cancer, and not HIV.

Towards midnight two callers, each sadly gave a testimony of how circumcision had crippled their sex lives. One was a school student in 2012 when he decided to go for the cut. The consequence was drastic loss in sensitivity. He wished he had not gone for the cut. The second one also went for circumcision in the same year. Spots developed on his exposed glans leading to erectile dysfunction. He cannot forget one night when his penis failed to have an erection after several attempts with his girlfriend who had come visiting, when the erection emerged at around 4am it was unfortunately short-lived.

There was a caller who said that condom use interferes with sex, some men and women are allergic to latex and that condom has a possibility of bursting while circumcision does not burst (something like a circumcised penis does not burst). A 30 year old man said that he does not like circumcision at all. He has lived all those years with his foreskin without any problem. Another caller from within Siaya town thought that circumcision is of no help, however, his inquiry was on who has the highest chance of getting an STI between a circumcised and an intact man during heterosexual intercourse.

Due to restraint of time and human ability , we could not receive all the calls, and neither could we respond to all the messages. And that is the summary of what transpired from our live on-air-radio talk show in Siaya town.

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Sent from Yahoo Mail on Android

