

02 Sept 2011 - Norway's Children's Ombudsman, Reidar Hjermann has proposed that a minimum age of 15 or 16 be set for ritual male circumcision to respect children's best interests and their right to self-determination on religious and health matters.

Under Norwegian law, children are able to make decisions about religion at the age of 15, whilst 16-year-olds can make decisions about their health.

Hjermann says that his proposal has been met with negative reactions from religious leaders who say it is an affront to their freedom of religious expression. "The age limit is effectively a ban for those of us who circumcise our children on the eighth day. Circumcision is an existential question, and therefore the Ombudsman's proposal is dramatic and serious for us," said Ervin Kohn, leader of the Jewish community in Norway.

Yet Hjermann sustains that "[t]his is about parents' right to decide versus children's rights. There is no medical reason to circumcise all male children, and now we have better knowledge as to how infants experience pain," says Hjermann.

On the question of pain experienced by the child, Trond Markestad, a pediatrician and leader of the Norwegian Medical Association ethical council says that "[t]he old tradition doesn't use an anaesthetic. It's argued the infant's nerve system hasn't developed by the time it's performed on the eighth day, so it couldn't feel pain. But this has been shown to be wrong. Infants do feel pain, they just can't express it."

Until 10 years ago, male circumcision was freely available in public hospitals. Yet many doctors opposed the practice on ethical grounds, eventually leading to a full ban in the public health system.

"This is a medically unnecessary procedure, with the threat of complications, and is done to a person who can not give consent," said Markestad in May.

Hjermann says that children should not "be exposed to non-medical interventions. To the extent they should be circumcised, they should have a chance to give their consent, at an age when they reasonably can do so."

Hjermann has also talked with children to get their views on the issue. “We have...had meetings with four circumcised boys from the Middle East and Africa, where three of them believe an age limit is appropriate. At the same time they said that their parents’ generation would be negative to an age limit. They felt that the procedure does not have as much to do with religion, but mostly with culture,” Hjermann said.

Source: [CRIN](#)