

Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society submission of 17 January 2024

PE2052/D: Ban child circumcision unless it is medically necessary with no less invasive solutions available

Introduction

We, the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society, are a faith-based (Shī'a Ithnā 'Asharī) organisation working to meet the needs, and represent the interests, of the Scottish Shia Muslim community, whilst serving the breadth of society in general across the cultural, social, political, and religious spectra. We work to engage with other communities and faiths; strengthening ties in an effort to create a setting for religious and racial harmony, equality, and diversity in the nation.

We write to offer our perspective on the petition proposing a ban on male child circumcision unless medically required. We understand the complexities surrounding this issue and the need for careful consideration in light of both exercising religious freedom and safeguarding the right to self-determination and choice. We bring forward the hope of our community that your committee shall uphold the right of the people to exercise religious and parental autonomy, with the best interests of our children in mind, within the established legal and medical frameworks.

Religious Significance

For over a millennium, male circumcision [ختنة, khatnah] has held deep religious significance in Shia Islam, serving as a symbol of our faith, a cornerstone of our covenant with God, and a marker of religious identity. We acknowledge that this practice, like any deeply ingrained custom, may evoke differing opinions. But to prohibit this practice in totality, we believe, would be deemed an infraction upon our right to live according to our faith precepts.

Medical Considerations

We as Shia Muslims, guided by our faith's ordinances and law, recognise the legitimate and absolute need to protect children from harmful practices, at all costs. Moreover, we recognise that male child

circumcision, when performed by qualified medical professionals in-line with requisite guidelines (as it is in the UK for our communities), is a safe and well-established procedure. Recent medical research suggests health benefits associated with the practice. Jurisprudentially, it is imperative that this procedure be conducted ethically and safely. If the overall safety of the child is compromised in any way, then the injunction, too, is compromised. We are committed to engaging in open dialogue with the medical community and public health authorities to ensure that the safest and most ethical practices are always observed. Worth noting here is the crucial distinction between this practice and other forms of genital mutilation, which inflict permanent, detrimental effects on girls and boys. Shia Islam categorically condemns such damaging mutilation to all humans, and especially children.

Choice and Parental Autonomy

We strongly believe that informed parental consent is paramount to decisions concerning the well-being of children. Just as society trusts parents to make essential decisions regarding their children's safety, education, upbringing, and physical, emotional and mental health, we believe they should also be entrusted with the crucial responsibility of nurturing their children's spiritual development and religious identity in a healthy manner. The practice of responsible circumcision, within established guidelines, falls within this bracket.

Conclusion

Finding a balanced approach to this complex issue requires navigating religious sensitivities, upholding child protection unequivocally, and respecting parental rights. We believe a blanket ban on circumcision is not the answer. Instead, we urge you to accept the alternative solution that allows for circumcision within the framework of existing medical and legal safeguards, and which prioritises the well-being of children while respecting the religious freedoms and cultural traditions of our community, and others'.