

IS ROUTINE CIRCUMCISION ADVISABLE?

BY

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THE examination of large numbers of soldiers, most of them National Service men, provided a good opportunity to note the condition of the prepuce. The following table indicates the types of prepuce in 1,095 cases.

N	C	P	P+
416 38 per cent.	377 34 per cent.	217 20 per cent.	85 8 per cent.

N=Normal, i.e., the prepuce did not completely hide the glans penis.

C=Circumcised.

P=Long prepuce covering the glans penis but retractable.

P+=Long prepuce which could not be retracted or only with difficulty ; in several cases the aperture in the prepuce was hardly more than pin-hole.

From the above figures it appears that 20 per cent. of these soldiers would have benefited from circumcision and 8 per cent. needed it ; if the 377 circumcised men are excluded, the respective percentages would be 35 and 14. In most of those with long prepuces there was a large collection of smegma, and this suggests that more thorough teaching of personal hygiene is needed at centres where recruits are trained. The ignorance of these young soldiers is remarkable ; many of them expressed surprise at the condition revealed when they retracted their foreskins ; some of them had apparently never done so in their lives.

The foregoing is not meant to be a plea for the circumcision of every male baby ; opinion seems generally against it, partly because it is impossible to decide at a very early age whether it is necessary. It is fairly generally agreed, however, that the circumcised are less liable to contract venereal disease than the uncircumcised and most young men are more liable to exposure in service than in civilian life ; moreover the glans penis should be washed as often as the rest of the body. It does seem that all young National Service men should receive adequate instruction in personal hygiene when they first join, and those with foreskins which cannot be retracted should be advised to be circumcised.