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Appraisal of adult genitalia after hypospadias repair: Do laypersons mind the difference?

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Summary

Introduction

Men with corrected hypospadias often suffer from sexual inhibition and fear of being ridiculed by others because of their penile appearance. However, no investigation has thus far been made of the perception of hypospadias-affected surgically repaired genitals by laypersons unacquainted with hypospadias. Therefore, the aim of this study was to find out whether laypersons notice a difference between genitals of men with corrected hypospadias in comparison with circumcised genitals. Furthermore, the most relevant predictors of laypersons' perception of hypospadias-affected genitals were examined.

Study design

A cross-sectional study was performed in which a questionnaire with 10 standardized photographs of non-erect hypospadias-affected genitals and 10 circumcised genitals was presented to laypersons unacquainted with hypospadias to measure how they rated these genitals. Laypersons were 105 women and 70 men of three different age groups (age ranges 16–20, 25–30, and 40–45 years). Furthermore, laypersons were asked about demographic characteristics, their sexuality and their genital self-perception.

Results

The results showed that genitals with distal forms of hypospadias were rated similarly to circumcised genitals. In contrast, genitals with more proximal types were perceived as significantly less positive than circumcised genitals. However, the effect size

was small. Higher age, being in an intimate relationship, higher socio-economic status, and a higher sexual interest predicted a better layperson's perception of hypospadias-affected genitals.

Discussion

These findings do not support the fear of some men with corrected hypospadias of being ridiculed by others because of their penile appearance. The results indicate that laypersons do not notice a difference between corrected distal types of hypospadias (which represent the majority of hypospadias) and circumcised genitals. Although the findings showed that laypersons perceive more proximal forms of hypospadias less positively than circumcised genitals, the difference does not appear to be clinically relevant as the effect size was small. A major strength of this study is its comprehensive study design. However, the low response rate of hypospadias patients and control individuals for photo documentation and of laypersons who rated these photosets is a limitation of the study. Therefore, generalization from the results must be made carefully.

Conclusions

The results are relevant for patient counseling. Knowing that the penile appearance would not trouble laypersons may prevent the development of a negative genital self-perception and feelings of shame. The findings also suggest that hypospadias-affected genitals seem to be rated more positively when laypersons know more about the "normal" variation of penile appearance (e.g. with increasing sexual experience at a higher age).

Introduction

Although much research on hypospadias has been published over the last 10 years, few studies have addressed the perception of hypospadias-affected surgically repaired genitals by the patients themselves or by others.

However, these studies have clearly shown that men with corrected hypospadias (particularly those with a proximal hypospadias) are more dissatisfied with their genital appearance than control individuals [1–5]. In addition, men with corrected hypospadias are more often inhibited in seeking sexual contact [2,3,6] or are afraid of being ridiculed by others because of their penile appearance [3].

As modern hypospadias repair aims at an anatomical reconstruction and usually achieves a good cosmetic result, it is likely that laypersons unacquainted with hypospadias do not notice the malformation after repair and that patients' inhibitions due to their penile appearance may be unfounded. Thus far, no investigation has assessed whether laypersons actually notice the malformation after hypospadias repair. The perception of hypospadias-affected genitals has been investigated only among medical personnel, parents, and intimately involved persons [7,8]. Therefore, our study focused on how laypersons perceive hypospadias-affected surgically repaired genitals compared with non-affected, circumcised genitals. Furthermore, the most relevant predictors of laypersons' perception of hypospadias-affected genitals were identified.

Material and methods

A cross-sectional study was performed in which a questionnaire with standardized photographs of non-erect hypospadias-affected surgically repaired genitals and circumcised genitals was presented to laypersons unacquainted with hypospadias to measure how they rated these genitals.

Subjects—laypersons asked to rate hypospadias-affected genitals

Subjects were women and men without previous knowledge about hypospadias who had no affiliation to the hospital or to any of the patients. They were recruited to three different age groups (age ranges 16–20, 25–30, and 40–45 years); it was assumed that these correlate with different degrees of sexual experience.

The youngest age group (16–20 years) was recruited at schools of two different educational levels. Twenty-five of 305 young men (8.20%) and 33 of 136 young women (24.26%) agreed to participate.

Furthermore, two randomly selected population samples of men and women (25–30 years or 40–45 years old) were ordered from a local database agency. Of 800 women and 800 men contacted, 25 women (3.13%) and 38 men (4.75%) were untraceable. Of the remainder, 41 men (5.38%) and 66 women (8.25%), as well as six women and four men who

were partners or friends of those invited, agreed to participate.

Measures

Development of photosets for laypersons

Men with hypospadias-affected surgically repaired genitals and men with circumcised genitals who were operated on in their childhood were asked permission to take photographs of their genitals. An information letter about the study was sent with a consent form to a random sample of 218 men with treated hypospadias with a current age older than 18 years who had been treated for hypospadias at the University Children's Hospital. Nineteen out of these 218 (8.72%) men with treated hypospadias agreed to participate. Circumcised men were chosen as control individuals because they have a similar penile appearance to men with corrected hypospadias. A randomly selected group of circumcised men ($n = 328$) who were older than 18 years were eligible as control individuals. Twelve of these circumcised men (3.66%) and six other circumcised men agreed to participate. Photosets with four standard views of the non-erect penis were made by a medical photographer (Appendix 1).

A standardized questionnaire was developed to assess laypersons' perception of those photosets. Twenty photosets were selected in order to keep the survey in a tolerable length. Ten of these photosets showed circumcised genitals and were each matched with a photo of a hypospadias-affected genital. Photosets were paired according to the attributes of penile size, age, and body weight. Scars and configuration of the meatus (all were glanular) were considered as representative to the cohort by urologists among the authors. Because our pictures showed the non-erect penis, persistent curvatures were not visible. The survey was piloted to ensure that there was no confusion with the terminology of the questionnaire and to see whether the survey was feasible.

Table 1 shows the demographic and medical characteristics of the hypospadias patients and the circumcised control individuals selected for photosets.

Laypersons' perception of photosets

Laypersons were informed that every photoset showed a surgically repaired penile malformation. In fact, every questionnaire included 10 photosets of non-erect hypospadias-affected genitals and 10 photosets of circumcised, "normal" genitals in a random order. One half of the participants ($n = 91$) received photosets in reversed order.

The term "laypersons' genital perception" describes laypersons' satisfaction with different aspects of a photographed penis. Laypersons' genital perception of each photoset was rated with seven items that evaluate satisfaction with different aspects of a penis on a four-point scale: very unsatisfactory (1), unsatisfactory (2), satisfactory (3), very satisfactory (4). Items were penile length, penile girth, position and shape of the meatus, shape of the glans, appearance of the scrotum, shape of penile skin, and appearance of pubic hair. They are based either on the

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