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Robert Ogol, a youth counsellor, is one who has snubbed the advice.

He accuses the community's elders of being afraid of change and says young men should be allowed to make their own decision about the practice.

"I got circumcised while I was already married. Since I got circumcised, even my wife can tell you that she is very comfortable," he says.

The government hopes that at least two million men will eventually be circumcised in the province.

At the Lumumba Health Centre in Kisumu, more than 80 medical practitioners have already received training.

"We are teaching young men and older people about circumcision. They usually come for circumcision of their own free will," says Wycliffe Omondi, one of the doctors providing training at the centre.

Candour

Nearly 1,000 men have been circumcised since March and medical workers receive two days of training, he says.

However, the Luo Council of Elders is not convinced that circumcision lowers the risk of infection.

"I don't think it will be a solution to fight the spread of Aids," said Joe Asila, a pastor and Luo elder.

"Other communities practise circumcision, but there is still a high prevalence of HIV/Aids," he said.

Other opponents say that once young men are circumcised, they will stop using preventive measures during sexual intercourse.

Doctors have warned that circumcision only offers 60% protection and that the use of condoms and other measures is still necessary.

At the six-hour circumcision meeting, Mr Odinga did not reveal his circumcision status, but he attempted to calm community fears.

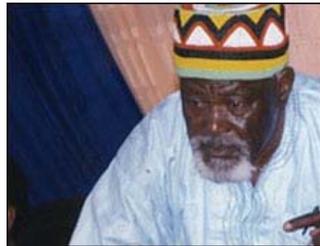
"All there is to circumcision is availing your male organ for the foreskin to be removed, like 'ting' [snip] and it is all over," he said.

Elders have said free circumcisions should not be compulsory or included in the government's policy on HIV/Aids.

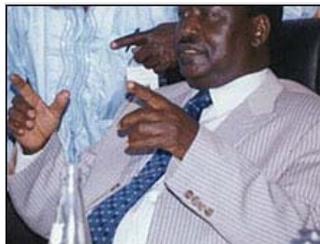
Despite the politicians' candour, it was still not clear whether the elders would endorse it.

But Riaga Ogalo, chairman of the Luo Council of Elders, appeared to have softened his position.

"People must be assured that this is purely a medical cut and does not in any way mean that Luos have changed their cultural values," he said.



Luo elders fear the practice erodes cultural traditions



“ All there is to circumcision is availing your male organ for the foreskin to be removed, like 'ting' [snip] and it is all over ”

Prime Minister Raila Odinga



The politicians were unusually candid at the six-hour circumcision meeting

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