



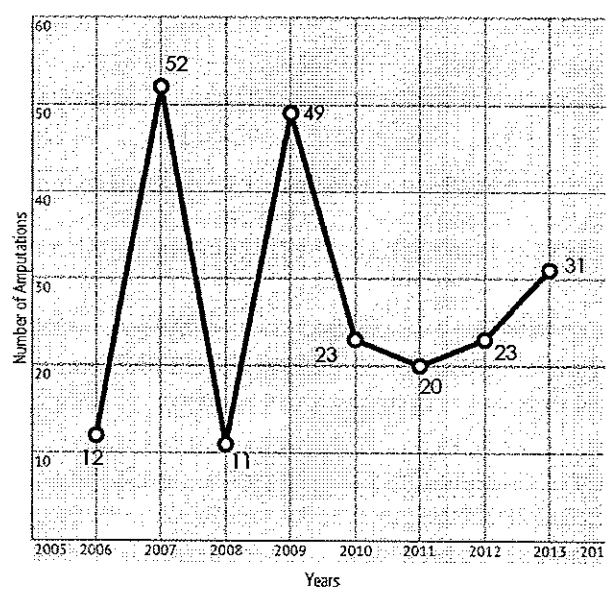
Brief on the Eastern Cape Department of Health's November/December 2013 Summer Initiation Report

4 February 2014

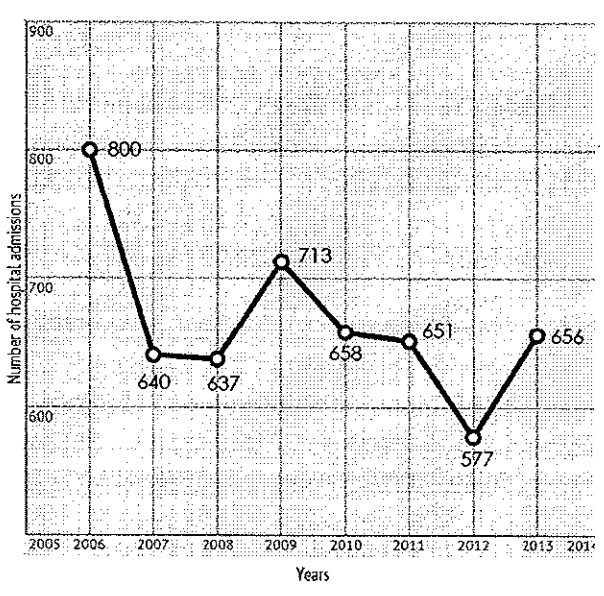
1. Introduction

This paper provides commentary based on the Eastern Cape Department of Health's November/December 2013 Summer Initiation Report presented to the Select Committee on Women Children and Persons with Disabilities on 5 February 2014. The presentation focuses primarily on circumcision conducted at legal and illegal initiation schools in the Eastern Cape.

2. What the numbers tell us

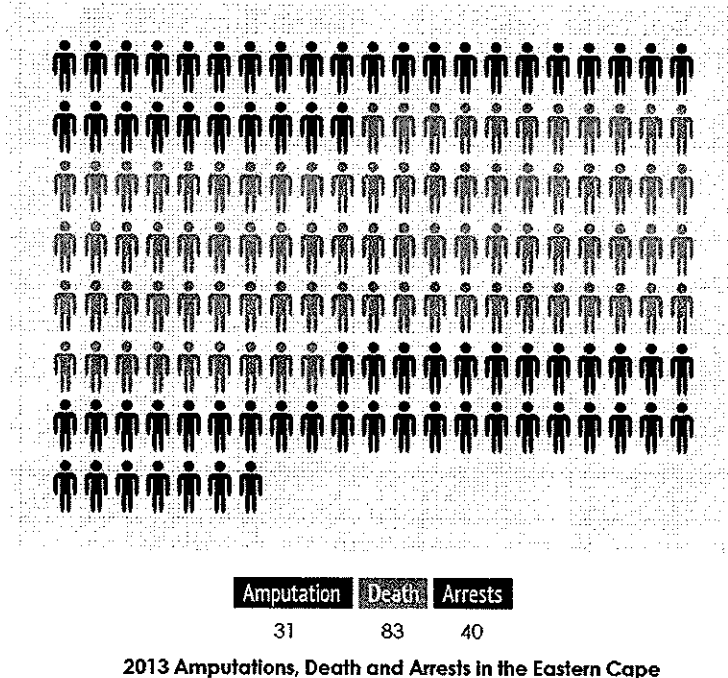


Amputation



Hospital admissions

Despite the graphs displaying a gradual decline in the number of amputations and hospital submissions, in 2013 hospital submissions increased by 12% and penile amputations by 26%. Amputations were at their highest level since 2009.



The illustration above shows that in 2013, **83** children died after undergoing the circumcision process. In the same year, 40 arrests were made. Of these arrests it is unknown whether any convictions were made.

3. Comments and questions for consideration

The following questions and commentary have been derived from the Eastern Cape Department of Health presentation on the November/December 2013 Summer Initiation Report.

- Despite workshops, campaigns and community consultation, 83 boys died as a result of circumcision in 2013. It appears that these interventions are not effective. There may be a need to re-look at strategies to avoid the alarming rate of deaths amongst children undergoing circumcision practices.
- If SAPS and other Departments are aware of the location of illegal initiation schools, why have they not been closed?
- The Eastern Cape Department of Health reported that there is no legislation guiding initiation in the province. However, the Legislature of the Eastern Cape enacted the *Application of Health Standards in Traditional Circumcision Act of 2001* **13 years ago**. This legislation makes clear provisions about ensuring the safety of initiates.



- “No person including the parent or guardian of an initiate may interfere with or obstruct the medical officer in the performance of his or her duties under this Act.”¹ The Eastern Cape Department of Health has noted that some parents were against their children being treated even after a medical assessment concluded that an intervention was necessary.
 - How is this Act being enforced and implemented?
 - Are parents aware that they in contravention of this law should that prohibit medical officers from assisting their children?
 - Why are parents reluctant to accept medical assistance for their children?
- The Department has indicated that in Pondoland, underage boys were being circumcised. Given this knowledge, how many arrests were made in this area?
- What is the high rate of substance abuse amongst initiates attributed to? Are initiates given substances such as alcohol or drugs during the initiation process?
- In 2011, the Select Committee on Women Children and Persons with Disabilities conducted oversight in the Eastern Cape. It was noted that deaths as a result of initiations was a serious issue and there was a need for a strategy to address it.² It has been nearly 3 years since that visit and the Department of Health is still making the same recommendation. Why is it taking so long to draft and implement a strategy that will potentially save the lives of hundreds of boys?
- The Department indicated that over R1 million (R1 127 840) was spent in preparation for the summer season initiations. During this period 28 vehicles were hired. What were the vehicles used for?
- Since 2006 to 2013, there have been 221 amputations. What has happened to the boys who have had their penises amputated? How are they being counseled and assisted to improve their quality of life?

4. References

Department of Health Eastern Cape (2014) November/December 2013 Summer Initiation Report. Eastern Cape Province.

Select Committee on Women Children and Persons with Disabilities (2011) *Report of the Select Committee on Women Children and Persons with Disabilities Oversight Visit to the Eastern Cape and Kwazulu Natal*. Parliament of South Africa: Committee Section.

¹ Section 7 (3) of the Application of Health Standards in Traditional Circumcision Act, 2001.

² Report of the Select Committee on Women Children and Persons with Disabilities Oversight Visit to the Eastern Cape and Kwazulu Natal