

Perception on Circumcision Rites and Schooling in Bungoma County, Kenya

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Abstract

Kenya has reaffirmed its commitment to enabling majority of its citizen's access education by introducing free and compulsory primary education (FPE). In Bungoma County, the primary school age population (6-13) is 245,000 (boys 48% and girls 52%) out of which the school enrolment is 97%. However, the dropout for boys is 57.5% and 53% for girls by Standard Eight. This negates the efforts and finances pumped in by the government to enable majority of its citizen's access education. Bungoma County is considered conservative in cultural aspects especially circumcision rites, which is a way of preparing boys for adult life. The circumcision rites take place in between the school terms and tend to be disruptive to the education of the adolescent boys and girls. The rites also place a heavy economic burden on the parents and the community through diversion of financial and other resources to these celebrations. However, little research has been done on community perception regarding this rite. The study specifically assessed the perception of Bukusu community on circumcision rites and schooling. The study adopted a descriptive design. The target population included primary pupils, teachers, village leaders and key cultural informants from the County. A total of 591 respondents were selected from these categories to participate in the study. Interview schedules, focused group discussions and questionnaires were used to collect data that were analysed both descriptively and inferentially. Findings indicated that the community's general perception towards traditional circumcision was divided and on the other hand the community had a positive attitude towards modern schooling. Traditional circumcision rites were important in preparing young boys for adulthood. Similarly, modern schooling was also very important in preparing young boys for adulthood backed with a formal curriculum. These two were found to be in competition and the young boys were torn in between which was affecting both girls and boys. From the findings it is recommended that there should be a deliberate move to educate the Bukusu community to embrace the modern method of circumcision and the formal school curriculum in Kenya should be enriched to include the positive traditional African virtues that are found in the diverse communities in an effort to ensuring that the learners are globally competitive but also relevant in their various communities of origin.

Key words: Kenya, Bungoma County, Circumcision rites, Modern Schooling

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Introduction

Bungoma County is one of the 47 counties of Kenya, brought about by the promulgation of the Constitution of Kenya (2010). The county is inhabited largely by three major communities namely: the Bukusu, the Tachoni and the Sabaot with other smaller communities like the Batura Kalenjin and the Iteso. The three major communities practice circumcision as a rite of passage to adulthood among the boys. The Bukusu circumcision season normally comes with a bang, taking place after every two years, during the month of August but tending to divert attention of the society as well as capturing the headlines of most media houses. The Bukusu community also takes children to school as preparation for adulthood.

Statement of the Problem

Kenya has reaffirmed its commitment to enabling majority of its citizens access education by introducing free and compulsory primary education (FPE) and subsidized secondary education (free day secondary education - FDSE). In Bungoma County, the primary school age population (6-13) is 245,000 of which the school enrolment is 97% which is encouraging. However, the dropout for boys is 57.5% and 53% for girls by Standard Eight. The enrolment at secondary school is 29% for boys and 26.5% for girls with a further drop out rate at 26.5% and 30% respectively for girls (Onyango, 2013) negating the efforts and finances pumped in by the Government of Kenya to enable majority of its citizens access education.

Bungoma County is considered conservative in cultural aspects of circumcision. Circumcision of boys takes place every two years. The circumcision rites are disruptive to the education of boys and pose great pregnancy risks to adolescent girls. The rites also place a heavy economic burden on the community by diverting resources. However, little research has been done on how schooling can go on without interference but at the same time not to loose on the benefits of cultural ceremonies in case there are. This study was to shed light into how to integrate circumcision rites and schooling in primary schools of Bungoma County.

Significance of the Study

Kenya, like any other country, strives to create school systems where its citizens receive the best education possible for adult life. Each year the government spends a large amount of her budget on improvement of the education sector as part of their strategy to achieve the aspiration of Vision 2030 of creating a globally competitive quality education, training and research for sustainable development, and education related goals- the MDGs and EFA by 2015. Despite the government's efforts in improving the education sector, most public schools in Bungoma County continue to register school drop outs and absenteeism. The study is of considerable importance to policy makers as well as the community in the development of strategies to improve the schooling standards in the county as well as the country at large. The County Government of Bungoma will find the study findings of great benefit since cultural activities are a devolved function.

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Literature Review

Society's Perception on Circumcision Ceremonies

Male circumcision is the cutting off of the foreskin from the tip of the penis without damaging the organ itself (Nahid, 1993). Traditional circumcision is as old as history itself. Jews have traditionally performed circumcision on the eighth day after birth for many thousands of years (Gairdner, 1993).

The perceptions of people towards circumcision are influenced by attitudes of the community that practices it. It is believed that group activities that encourage cohesiveness and corporate communal experiences are preferred by most traditional blacks (Boykin, 1983, Matjeke, 1999). The Bukusu of Bungoma County, Kenya, values traditional circumcision ceremonies and rituals seriously as a way of transition from childhood to adulthood. They circumcise their children in the month of August every even year. During this time, they leave all other activities pending and concentrate fully on traditional African circumcision, even when someone dies very few people would attend that funeral ceremony. This is because they believe that it's a taboo for one to attend the funeral and circumcision ceremony at the same time as it may cause harm to the initiates, if one attends, he or she can be blamed for causing harm to the initiate and be punished by clan elders. The Bukusu indulge in wasteful and dangerous ways of circumcising, like using the same knife for circumcising (Nahid, 1993). Africans believe in circumcision as a rite of passage that prepares boys and girls for manhood or womanhood. However several health problems have been associated with it: For example, botched circumcisions performed by inexperienced, traditional surgeons. It also defines who one is in the cultural group in the societies where it is a tradition. Those who have not undergone it are seen as outcasts or they are socially unacceptable (Walker, 1993).

The role of Education in the Socio-Economic Development of Society

Throughout the world, education is recognized as an important human development tool. It is the primary agent for transformation towards sustainable development. Educated people have increased capabilities to transform their visions for society into reality. All countries strive to create school systems where their citizens receive the best education possible (World Bank 2012).

According to World Bank statistics, education is stated to be one of the most powerful tools for reducing poverty and inequality. It lays a foundation for sustained economic growth. Global development and welfare indices reveal that poverty is a function of illiteracy, and most countries afflicted by poverty have been shown as faring poorly in terms of knowledge economy indices, availability and absorption of new technologies (World Bank 2012). Therefore, in order for countries to achieve economic growth and sustainable development, they should invest highly in the education sector.

The Basic Education Act 2013 provided the legal framework for ensuring that every citizen of Kenya has access to basic education, among other economic and social rights. Articles 43 (1) (f) and 53 (1) (b) of the Constitution of Kenya guarantee the right to education, for every citizen (Government of Kenya 2010). The holistic approach for development of the education sector is a critical vehicle for attaining the United Nations Millennium Development Goal (MDGs) and the aspirations of Vision 2030, the road map for development (Government of the Republic of Kenya 2007; UNESCO, 2012). Additionally, Kenya is party to a number international instruments on education, including, the International Convention on Economic and Social Cultural Rights 1966, Article 13. So far, it can be said that Kenya is on track to achieving the six Education for All (EFA) goals as set

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by the international community, during World Forum that happened in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000 (UNESCO, 2012).

Since independence, Kenya has put into place reforms and innovations for the education sector. The implementation of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2003 and Free Day Secondary Education (FSDE) in 2008 , for instance, have seen the enrolment of pupils and students in primary and secondary schools soar to an all time high (Government of Kenya, 2013). The abolition of school fees has been a major step to ensuring Kenyan children can access free elementary education.

The enrolment of children in primary schools in Kenya has increased from 5.9 million (boys, 3 million and girls, 2.9 million) in 2000, to 7.2 million (boys , 3.7 million and girls, 3,5 million) in 2005 and 9.4 million (boys, 4.8 million and girls, 4.6 million) in 2010 (UNESCO, 2012). The transition rate from primary to secondary increased from 43.3 % (boys, 43.8 % and girls, 42.6 %) in 2000 to 56 % (boys, 57.2 % and girls, 54.7 %) in 2005 (Orodho, et al., 2013) . Few pupils across the various public schools transitioned to secondary schools due to the skewed performance in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE), (Gakure, et al., 2013).

The all-time high rate of enrolment of children in schools increased the pupil-teacher-ratios beyond the recommended level of 45:1 (Government of Kenya, 2013; Orodho, et al., 2013). However, the education sector has faced serious challenges over the years, particularly relating to access, equity, quality and relevance. There is increasing concern on the quality of education provided and the overall performance of children in schools, given the fact that basic education is free and compulsory.

Several authors (Bourdieu, 1986; Purves, 1973; Guthrie, 1978; Taube, 1988; Elley, 1994; Lehmann, 1996; Lietz, 1996; OECD, 2001, 2002; Fredriksson, 2002) emphasize that parents' level of education, socio-economic position of the family and cultural heritage play an important role in the learning achievements of children. Cultural identity and the desire to continue ethnic traditions are the strongest determinants for continuing traditional practices. In some societies, male circumcision as a rite of passage is of major importance to the social status of a man, essential to him becoming a full and acceptable member of society. In some communities, an uncircumcised man remains a boy forever, whatever his age. It has been established that in the rural areas where cultural practices and traditions are highly prevalent, more pupils have dropped out of school. Cultural practices and a number of other factors account for the high dropout rate from school (Goodwin, 2000).

Eshiwani (1983), UNESCO (2001), Ayoo (2002), Njuguna (2004) and Kitavi (2005) have established that those factors which students interact with or depend for their livelihood during their school life affect their final outcome at the end of their course. The home background constitutes of parents, social-economic status of the home, educational level of parents and living conditions in the home environment. SACMEQ (2005) identified the home background as the quality of the house, possessions at home and the parent's education and income. Kitavi (2005) in his thesis observes that parents and the community influence are the two most important components in the home background affecting both learning and performance in schools. He argued that good home environment supplements teacher's efforts in school and in a related studies UNESCO (2001), observes that quality education requires strong support from the home of the learner.

The Impact of Timing of Circumcision Ceremonies on Education

The Bukusu's circumcise their boys between the ages of 12 -16 in August every after 2 years of an even year. During the month of August, the family engages in a long process that takes

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between 2-3 weeks before the boy finally saunters into adulthood. The process starts with the boy hinting to the father that he was ready for the rite. The father then plans for the date of circumcision. Traditionally, it takes up to two weeks as the boy has to literally go to homes and relatives of the family to invite them to the ceremony. On the day the boy starts the process; both the father and mother must be there to set him off. Usually when he comes back home after running distances with jiggles dancing with a group of young girls who escort him, the mother must always be at home to receive him. This means that the mother must be at the home. The people who accompany him to various places also need time to be with him all through.

The month of August is a very crucial period in the preparation of national examinations in Kenya; namely the KCPE and the KCSE. The fact that the initiate must be accompanied in all his undertakings, including visiting all the identified relatives' homes inviting them for the ceremony means it's not just the initiate who goes round the villages but will always be moving around with other school-going children who are usually related to the boy. The timing of these circumcision ceremonies definitely interferes with the examination preparation period as well as interferes with all the other activities in social fabric like concentrating on the maturing crops in the farms.

The Impact of Practices Associated with Circumcision Ceremonies on Education

When a Bukusu boy feels that he is strong enough to face the knife or *Embalu* as they call it, he informs his father. His father then consults with his peers over a pot of traditional brew known as *busaa*. Once a consensus is reached, preparations are set in motion. The man of the house, a father, selects a bull that would be slaughtered during the ceremony and if there is no bull, one has to buy. A bull having been chosen, gives the boy a go ahead to look for special jingles or bells or traditionally known as *chinyimba* and a whistle. These are the two important tools that the candidate or the initiate will need during the ceremony.

A period of inviting relatives and friends then starts. This is called *Khulanga* or simply calling. The boy has to move from homestead to homestead, far and wide, within and without, playing the jingles or *chinyimba* with a group of other singing and dancing to traditional circumcision songs. During this season of *Khulanga*, the boy is given gifts mostly foodstuffs, birds like chicken and money as some tease him to taste his courage.

The last person to be invited before the last ceremony is the uncle. This is the most important person. The uncle is informed in advance. He then slaughters a bull and when nephew, he takes piece of meat, called *luliki* and makes something like a necklace (simply a whole to fit the neck) and puts on his nephew's neck. This meat is called *Likhoni*. The rest of the meat is carried in bags to go and be eaten during the ceremony. "Once the boy accepts *Likhoni* from his uncle, his fate is sealed. He cannot escape the knife. Even if he dies, he must be circumcised," Mzee Wangamati confirms with a lot of emphasis.

Another important person during this ceremony is a traditional surgeon, a circumciser, the man without no knowledge in the medical world but with the ability to perform surgeries on young boys' foreskins and turning them into men. It is said that the man is often guided by powerful spirits that are within him in what the tribe calls *Kumusambwa*. The guy uses a special kind of knife called *Embalu* to work on his customers without anything to reduce the pain as a true measure of bravery of the initiate.

The night before the cut is usually the final one. During this night, people come from all walks of life, both invited and those who have invited themselves. They sing and dance the whole night as they mock the initiate. Beer is usually in plenty especially *busaa*. Both young people and the old are usually united during this night. They dance, they sing, they drink, the

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play sex, they do all manner of nasty things during this night. The night and the ceremony is called *Khuminya*. It is as if all the moral standards are thrown to the dogs during this particular night.

At exactly four in the morning, the boy is taken to the river, at a special place known as *Silongo* or *Sitosi*. Here, there is a special kind of soil that the initiate is smeared with. The boy is then made to walk totally naked from the river with a special song to the homestead where the traditional surgeon will be waiting to circumcise him. All these practices have a special way of distracting attention from attending school. Given that the practices take place during the month of August, school-going children willingly drop out of school to go and either escort the initiate during the invitation journeys or to move from one home to another to enjoy the freebies. The almost unsecured sex either introduces very young boys and girls to sex or gives them an opportunity to engage in sex which usually has devastating effects to school-going children, especially girls.

The Impact of Teachings Given to Healing Initiates after Circumcision Ceremonies on Education

Bukusu traditional education was to expose the young people to the nature and practice of the various ethnic institutions that existed in Bukusuland: institutions of law, languages and Bukusu values. The young were expected to understand the working of the Bukusu government as this was supposed to foster a close-knit communal society. As the young turned into adults, they were supposed to defend the community against the “marauding leopards” as the Bukusu called their enemies. The idea was that if the young man cannot stand the circumcision knife, then he would be unable to protect the community against the invading enemies. *Bravery* was, therefore, a trait necessary for a would-be warrior. Resilience is another aptitude that goes hand in hand with *warriorship*. A Bukusu initiate must train himself to withstand difficult conditions and be able to recover quickly. The circumcision songs are about bravery but at the same time satirical, making fun of cowards. Any person who was afraid of circumcision had no place in the Bukusu society.

Songs were supposed to psyche the initiates to face the knife with courage. Real education for the young takes place during the healing process. *Lubito* is actually the school where formal teaching and counselling take place. It takes place when the initiate is healing and this is in seclusion in most cases. This is after the initiate has been circumcised and is convalescing in Likombe where he is basically under treatment. During this time, it is the circumciser who is in charge of giving elementary education to the young. He counsels the initiate in the presence of the father, the mother, the uncles and the aunts and mainly dwells on the transition between boyhood and adulthood.

The circumciser stresses on what it means to be a man and kind of gives him a code of conduct as he needs to know how he conducts himself as an adult. The initiate will majorly be trained on how not only to behave as a man but how to relate with other people such as the weak, disabled, elderly and the poor. The initiate will also be counselled on how to look after a family as he would soon have a license to get married after graduation. It will be emphasised to the initiate that he should not “enter closed doors”; meaning that he should not have sex with married women. He should however go into open doors (sleep with unmarried women). In this way, the Bukusu community intended to maintain sexual decency. “To emphasise this, the initiate is told not to go to someone’s homestead when the owner of the home is not in and also to avoid incest.” The education that takes place during this time is supposed to make the initiate a mature person who should respect various persons in the community and respect sex. The initiate learns how to be hard working and be able to farm

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and rear animals. He should be concerned with manly duties and not get involved in kitchen affairs. *Lubito* therefore, not only gives a sense of focus but gives guidelines on future expectations. It is a counselling session in preparation for life. It should be noted that these teachings would be being given to 12 – 16 year old boys who would be school-going children. After healing, they go back to school with the new concept, that they had become men and not boys. They will have been taught that as men, they could either seduce girls or even get married for as long as they didn't seduce married women. The boys became rude to lady teachers and wouldn't allow lady teachers to punish them should they be break school routine and school rules. This highly compromises school standards as well as negatively affects their individual performance.

According to Ministry of Education (2007), the constitution of Kenya out-laws discrimination based on gender, tribe or region, and emphasize on social justice and equal opportunities with regard to education. Other policy documents also seek to reinforce a policy of equal opportunities regardless of social- cultural, religious, regional and gender barriers. Disparities between gender and regions in the end widen the gap between individuals in life; and more importantly, they create a vacuum in socio- economic status between communities, which can never be eradicated.

From the socio- cultural point of view, key factors responsible for disparities include cultural and religious beliefs, attitude and practice and social norms that restrict individuals from participating in learning such as age group circumcisions, early marriage among girls, and subsequent celebrations. Performance in national examination is one area where disparities speak volumes.

The Impact of Costs of Circumcision Ceremonies on Education

When a male boy feels that he is ready for the ceremony, he approaches his father who prepares the required materials that are necessary for the ceremony. These are a male bull or a he goat, traditional beer called *kamalwa*, the circumciser and a small house called *Likombe* for the boy. The father, selects a bull that would be slaughtered during the ceremony and if there is no bull, one has to buy. That is why during this season, in Bungoma County, the price of bulls and cows in general usually skyrockets.

Selling animals is one of the lucrative businesses in Bungoma County during circumcision season. Animals like chicken, bulls and sheep are the most bought. Chicken are the most bought during this season and if there is time to sell them, is during this season. Cereals are another business opportunity that thrives during this season. People buy a lot of maize during this season to prepare for the traditional brew especially *busaa* and also for *ugali*. Many people make money from selling foodstuffs during this season in Bungoma County. People also buy new sheets, blankets and new clothes during this season. Starting a small business in clothes just for a month will see you making some profits. All in all, the circumcision season sets the people of Bungoma County on a spending spree. In the Bukusu community, the cost of circumcision can be anything between Shs 40, 000 – 100,000, way beyond annual earnings of most families (Mzee Wangamati).

Circumcision costs must be borne by the family hosting the ceremony, with another cost being shouldered by the maternal side of the initiate since the candidate's uncles must make special arrangement on how to make their *omwiwana* or nephew proud. The cost is equivalent to the fees of the candidate for several years given that the government is offering FPE and FDSE. The cost forces many children to drop out of school in order to team up with their parents to mop up resources to manage the ceremony. These costs divert attention of

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both the boys and girls as well as the parents from schooling to meeting the expectations of the community in regard to circumcision expenses.

Methodology

A descriptive survey design was adopted. The study targeted class six, seven and eight pupils, head teachers, teachers, village leaders and key people in cultural ceremonies and activities. The class seven and eight pupils were picked because it is at this level that most of the boys undergo circumcision and their counterparts, the girls witness these events. This means that the practices, teachings, schooling interferences if any and other ceremonial accompaniments are fresh in their minds. The class six pupils are prospective initiates who have useful ideas about circumcision ceremonies that need to be captured by the study for purposes of understanding the dynamics involved. The head teachers and teachers were of important due to the fact that they are in charge of running primary schools thus, have pertinent information on circumcision ceremony and its impact on schooling of the children.

The village leaders are in charge of the villages and by extension pupils and other residents including teachers and those in charge of cultural ceremonies. They know when pupils are away from school during circumcision periods and therefore have information that is instrumental to this study. They also have information concerning the role and perception of circumcision in preparing boys for adulthood and the role of schooling in preparing such pupils for adulthood. Key people in cultural activities including circumcisers, advisors and organizers were important in highlighting the role and perception of circumcision rites in the community.

This study employed a combination of sampling procedures to arrive at the actual sample. Random sampling was used to select 33% which is 3 of the 9 administrative and political divisions in the County to be involved in the study. These were Webuye East, Kanduyi and Mt Elgon. Stratified random sampling was then used to select 4 schools namely Sinoko, Musa, Minyali, Malomomonye Primary Schools in Webuye East, Kewabrang, Kiptiroko, Chemses, Chemoge Primary Schools in Mt Elgon, Bukembe, Ududu, Nzoia Industrial and Sipala Primary Schools in Kanduyi in each of the three selected divisions; Webuye East, Kanduyi and Mt Elgon to participate in the study. Stratified random sampling, grouping pupils according to sex, was used to select 10% of the pupils in the sampled schools which resulted in a sample of 180 pupils. Class eight and seven class teachers were purposively selected to participate in the study and therefore 18 teachers participated. The study further sampled head teachers, village administrative leaders and key circumcision ceremony individuals purposively and a total of 50 of these leaders were selected. A total of 260 respondents participated in the study.

In relation to data collection, a questionnaire, focused group discussion and interviewing methods were adopted. In order to discover the general perception and roles of circumcision ceremonies and schooling, the study used questionnaires. Questionnaires were administered to class teachers of standard seven and eight pupils and a group of selected parents, cultural leaders and village leaders. The questionnaire had open and closed ended items. The questionnaire items were developed by the researchers in line with the study objectives.

Furthermore, in an effort to bring out perceptions on circumcision ceremonies and modern schooling, it was important that a group of respondents are brought together in discussions during which dominant perceptions would be captured. During such discussions, free and relaxed but focused interactions would enable generation of ideas that are then documented by the researchers. Focused group discussions were organized for selected pupils.

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The researchers visited the county education office and informed the office about the research and requested for permission to visit schools. The researchers hired and inducted six (6) research assistants in readiness for data collection. The researchers then used stratified randomly sampling to select schools and wrote official letters to those schools informing them about the impending study. Accompanied with written permission from the county education office to carry out research in schools, the research assistants went ahead to collect the necessary data. This letters were presented to the schools by research assistants who then organized with respective head teachers of schools on when to collect data using questionnaires. Once the filled questionnaires were collected, the researchers purposively selected the individuals that were interviewed and dispatched the interviewing team for interviews. Descriptive statistics was used during data analysis. Percentages were used to compare frequencies of responses on various aspects. To facilitate this analysis, raw data from questionnaires were summarized in tables and figures. Data from interview schedules were used to explain the outcomes of quantitative data realised from questionnaires.

Research Findings

Community Perception on Traditional Circumcision

Traditional circumcision in Bungoma County has been practiced for a period similar to the existence of the Bukusu community in the county having a detailed history on circumcision practices. However, despite the major changes in the society due to urbanization and modern technology, traditional circumcision rites still exist. The first objective of the study was to assess the community's perception on traditional circumcision. A series of questions were presented to respondents some seeking their opinion and others facts in relation to circumcision. The responses from each of the questions were analyzed, interpreted and discussed. Below is the presentation of the findings and discussion on each of the questions posed to respondents.

Respondents were asked whether they had a child or children who had undergone circumcision. This question was critical in determining the perception of the community in relation to decision-making on the mode of circumcision that their children underwent. Majority of the respondents (68%) indicated that they had children who had undergone circumcision. A majority of the respondents who participated in the study had had their children circumcised. This implies that as parents of the initiates, they had been involved either directly or indirectly in decision-making particularly on the mode of circumcision.

The study went deeper to determine the type of circumcision the children of the 68% of the respondents had undergone, whether it was traditional, modern or integration. Majority of the respondents 52.6% indicated their children were circumcised in a modern way while the remaining respondents were divided with one half indicating they used traditional mode and the other half indicating they used an integrated approach. The results are as shown in Figure 1.

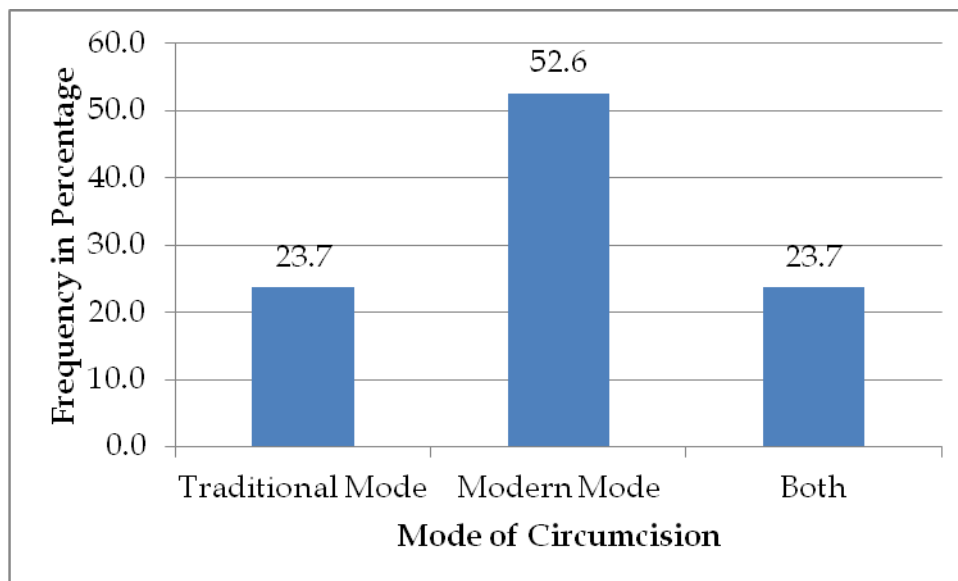


Figure 1: Mode of Circumcision for Respondents’ Children

These findings indicate a shift in how circumcision rites are being carried out in Bungoma County. The shift however, is not homogenous as some have completely shifted to modernity while others have embraced an integrated approach, while still others practice traditional mode of circumcision. This could be an indication that there no common principles that are being based on either to move or remain in traditional mode of circumcision. It is at this point that the study went further to determine the perception that respondents had towards traditional circumcision.

Consequently, other studies (Banwari, 2015; Siegler, Mbwambo, DiClemente, 2012; Wilcken & Dick, 2010; Bailey, Egesah, Rosenberg, 2008) have acknowledged the continued persistence of traditional circumcision in various sub-Saharan countries with Kenya having the highest in East Africa. For instance, it was found that traditional male circumcision, which denotes the practice of circumcision based on cultural prescription is performed in 20% of adolescents and young men in Uganda, 33% of Tanzanians and as high as 80% in Kenya (Wilcken et., al., 2010).

Similarly, data from FGDs and key informant interviews indicated that circumcisers, three opinion leaders, one senior teacher and two cultural leaders supported traditional mode of circumcision while all religious leaders who were interviewed as well as two opinion leaders supported modern mode of circumcision.

According to traditional circumcision supporters, boys who go through this process are hardened and trained to be brave. This therefore helps them to face life in future with courage as men. The senior teacher during an interview said the following: ‘I support traditional circumcision because boys are properly hardened and thus face future life with the bravery it deserves.’ He further said that traditional circumcision was in order considering the fact that the initiates are taught pertinent values, norms, virtues and morals of the society; something that modern circumcision lacks.

Furthermore, one of the school administrators when interviewed said: ‘I highly support traditional circumcision to our young boys since it has a lot concerning human values and traditional ethics which support the development of boys into adulthood. African heritage guidelines remain important to our lives.’

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The study at this point had the facts as presented by the respondents on what was going on in the community in regard to circumcision rites, it was however important to go further into the communities perception and opinions that were informing the actions being undertaken during circumcision rites. Respondents were asked if they think traditional circumcision was relevant in their community. It was found that majority 64% thought that traditional circumcision was not relevant and 36% felt that traditional circumcision was relevant. Based on the findings, a majority feel that traditional circumcision is not relevant and therefore by extension it can be inferred that they would be comfortable if it can be done away with. The minority can however, not be ignored since the reasons for or against traditional circumcision are yet to come out.

In pursuit of objective opinions about traditional circumcision, the researchers presented to respondents a set of statements that were to be either agreed or disagreed with, and an option of not being sure was also provided. The findings are as indicated in the Table 1. Majority of the respondents (71.4%) agreed that traditional circumcision brings the community together which strengthens bonding. When asked whether traditional circumcision was a sign of bravery and courage, 48.2% agreed and 30.4% were not sure. Majority of the respondents (60.7%) agreed that traditional circumcision rites were out-dated and should be done away with. There was no clear decision by respondents on whether the community has a positive feeling and attitude towards circumcision. Lastly, majority of respondents (69.6%) agreed that traditional circumcision is expensive and thus people should adopt modern circumcision ceremonies.

Table 1: Community Opinion on Traditional Circumcision

Statement	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree
Traditional Circumcision brings Community together which strengthens Bonding	71.4%	10.7%	17.9%
Traditional Circumcision is a sign of Bravery and Courage	48.2%	30.4%	21.4%
Traditional Circumcision Rites are out-dated and should be done away with	60.7%	12.5%	26.8%
The Community generally has a positive feeling and attitude towards circumcision	37.5%	26.8%	35.7%
Traditional Circumcision is Expensive and thus people should adopt Modern Circumcision	69.6%	16.1%	14.3%

Generally the community's opinion as inferred from the above findings is that traditional circumcision ceremonies should be done away with, however it is important to note that the community believes that traditional circumcision still has a positive impact on the initiates' lives as well as promoting harmony and togetherness among community members.

A qualitative analysis of the information from FGDs and key informant interviews regarding perceptions on traditional circumcision found that after circumcision, the boys feel mature and most of them change their behaviour completely. This change encourages them to feel they are adults and instead of focussing on their education, they shift to focusing on love

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relationships which eventually leads to marriage. This may be as a result of the traditional teachings and advice given to them after circumcision commonly known as *Lubito* which justifies transitional change (that is boys are told that they have left their mothers' clothes and now they are adults thus, likened to their fathers).

The participants who were against traditional circumcision rites argued that the practice is long overdue and that times have changed. The community therefore needs to adopt modern circumcision methods. Secondly, it is time-consuming as the initiates spend a lot of time on these ceremonies as the boys who participate in the tradition practice spend almost one month dancing with the bells while inviting relatives to the event. In fact, practicing on how to use the bells starts as early as June, wasting precious time that would otherwise be useful if they focused on education.

Findings revealed that traditional circumcision rites utilize a lot of resources both money and material as people use a lot of resources in making sure that the event is successful. For instance, it was established that on the eve of the actually event, an animal must be slaughtered, and enough food prepared for the invitees to eat and drink the entire night. There must be also money and poultry (in most cases a fowl) to pay the circumcisers and by the time the boys graduate, a lot of resources would have been used. On the other hand, supporters of traditional circumcision held a positive view that the practice brings people together and thus strengthening the ties and cooperation among them.

Some of the key people who were interviewed revealed a worrying trend of complications arising from traditional circumcision. It was noted that traditional circumcision is not 100% safe as compared to that done in hospital by professionals. For instance, in the last circumcision season (2016) two boys died in one of the areas due to wrong circumcision procedures while six others were taken to hospital for corrective surgeries. This finding concurs with those of Bailey, Egesah and Rosenberg, (2008) who stated that circumcisions done by traditional practitioners continue to be associated with significantly higher complication rates. In a cross sectional study that they conducted in Bungoma region which was then known Bungoma District, they found that 156 (35.2%) complications were reported in 443 males circumcised in traditional settings as compared to 99 (17.7%) complications in 559 individuals who had circumcisions done in clinical settings (Bailey, et., al., 2008).

Community Perceptions on Modern Schooling

The study partly sought to determine the community's perception on modern schooling. This was important based on the findings that traditional circumcision rites have interfered with modern schooling. Respondents were requested to rate their satisfaction levels in relation to modern schooling as a way of preparing young boys for adulthood. Majority of the respondents (82.2%) were satisfied while very few (17.8%) were not satisfied. The findings are as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Satisfaction Levels of Modern Schooling in Preparation for Adulthood

	Frequency	Percent
Very satisfied	22	39.3
Satisfied	24	42.8
Less satisfied	8	14.3
Unsatisfied	2	3.6

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The findings indicated a higher level of satisfaction that modern schooling prepares young boys for adulthood. This to some extent explains why the community said that traditional circumcision rites can be done away with regardless of their role in preparing boys for adult life. On further interrogation, majority of the respondents agreed that modern schooling has a positive impact on future lives and good at instilling discipline. On the other hand majority (87.5%) refuted the fact that modern schooling is more demanding and not suitable. These findings are as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Opinion on Modern Schooling in Preparation for Adulthood

	Yes	No
Modern schooling has a positive impact on future lives of young boys	89.30%	10.70%
I feel that modern schooling is more demanding and not suitable	12.50%	87.50%
I feel that modern schooling is good as it instills discipline which is vital in future	85.70%	14.30%

The interview data on perception of modern schooling as a way of preparing young boys for adulthood yielded interesting information. The community perceived modern schooling as key to future prosperity of all children including the circumcised boys. According to them, modern schooling imparts necessary skills required by youth to succeed in future. They advocated for young boys to take education with all the seriousness it deserves.

Despite all key informants agreeing that modern schooling has a positive impact on the preparation of youth to adulthood, they did not hesitate to point out the flaws that modern schooling has. They pointed out that the school curriculum is too congested and besides being exam-oriented, it does not cater for life-skills and important traditional African virtues, therefore it does not adequately prepare children for adulthood. However, if adequately strengthened, modern schooling can effectively replace traditional ways of teaching through cultural ceremonies like circumcision rites successfully.

Conclusion

The study sought to assess the perception on circumcision rites and schooling of boys in Bungoma County. The researchers delved into working with the community stakeholders, both in community traditions as well as the education stakeholders. The tools used to collect data were considered adequate to gather as much information as was required about the community perception on circumcision rites and schooling in preparing boys for adulthood. Most respondents gave as much information as was necessary although some respondents willingly withheld some information for what they considered as “*top secret*”. The findings pointed to the fact that there’s need for the community stakeholders to integrate modern circumcision into schooling to avoid one side of the practice to adversely affect the other

Recommendation

From the findings and conclusion, it is recommended that there should be a deliberate move to educate the Bukusu community to embrace the modern method of circumcision and the formal school curriculum in Kenya should be enriched to include the positive traditional African virtues that are found in the diverse communities in an effort to ensuring that the learners are globally competitive but also relevant in their various communities of origin.

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