

The Role Played by the Religious Leaders, Community Leaders/Elders and Other Stake Holders in Adoption of Alternative Rites of Passage in Oleguruone Sub-County, Nakuru County, Kenya

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Introduction

This paper sought to examine the role played by religious leaders, teachers and village elders, in either supporting or discouraging ARP to replace FGM. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is practiced in many parts of the world although it is much prevalent in Africa. It is a cultural practice which has been going on for a long time, even though its origins all appear untraceable in human history. Despite this fact, FGM has been a key ritual event of initiation in various communities for girls since time immemorial. The practice of female genital mutilation/circumcision FGM/C dates back to ancient times. Female circumcision has existed for over 4,000-5,000 years originating in a period predating God's covenant with Abraham to circumcise his people (male only). This act of circumcision gave the Israelites an identity and sense of belonging to the Jewish community which was God's chosen Nation. It began in Egypt and was frequently performed by the ancient cultures of the Phoenicians, Hittites, and the ancient Egyptians. Those people had the idea that was based on the belief that, the foreskin was the feminine part of the male and the clitoris the masculine part of a woman. (Tanui 2006.) According to International Organization Interagency Statement Report (IOISR) (2008)

Africa is the continent where FGM/C is rampant, although it is also practiced in other continents such as Europe, Asia, India, among others. Practices affecting the health of women and children held its landmark conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Many of the Africa first ladies led by the first lady of Nigeria officially declared "zero tolerance to FGM" to be commemorated every year on Feb 6th. In 2008, the donor working group under the auspices of UNFPA and UNICEF produced a platform for action towards the abandonment of FGM/C that same year known as UNFPA - UNICEF which formed a strategic partnership in "Accelerating change". Since then,

the two groups have been working together in headquarters and field offices to develop fund and implement policies and programmes which would accelerate the abandonment of FGM/C.

Alternative Rites of Passage (ARP) also called ‘circumcision with words’ is a program which seeks to weave together the themes of girl’s graduating to womanhood. It is considered a better alternative to FGM for it will see them graduate to full women without being subjected to the “cut”. Since the conception of ARP, there have been continuous and joint efforts of eradicating FGM and adoption of ARP. For instance, in February 2003 the Inter-African Committee on Traditional

In spite of rigorous campaign for adoption of ARP for girls, many communities seemed to have rejected the whole idea of (ARP) viewing it as a foreign idea which lacked community input. Nevertheless, with sustained campaigns some communities slowly by slowly began to embrace the new methodology of initiating girls. In 2012 the 67th session of the United Nation General Assembly passed a wide reaching resolution urging states to condemn all harmful practices that affect women and girls in particular FGM giving

This paper revealed that various stakeholders have been instrumental in accelerating the acceptance of ARP program in Olenguruone Division. Enacting laws against FGM and sponsoring campaigns against it, has been one of the important inputs of the government. Enforcing these laws where offenders are taken to court and the FGM victims taken care of, represent the commitment of the authorities to eradicate the vice. On the other hand, non-governmental organizations have also been key influencers, setting up workshops and seminars, especially targeting the youth and sensitizing them on matters related to FGM and other health concerns. The research adopted descriptive survey technique which made it possible to work with a large sample and provide numerical descriptions of the targeted population. The target group was high school students from seven different schools, youth out of school, elders and trainers in ARP which will summed up to a sample population of 104 persons. The study findings would be useful to the government in formulation of policies against FGM and other Nongovernmental organizations interested in ARP campaigns.

Keywords: Female Genital Mutilation, Alternative Rites of Passage, Initiation for girls.

The practice of FGM still continues unabated in many parts of the world. A global review of female circumcision today, however, shows that the custom is mainly rampant in the continent of Africa. African countries have the highest percentage of FGM. Girls and women of 15-49 years, Somalia with 97.9%, Egypt with 95.8%, Guinea with 95.6% Sierra Leone with 94.0%, Djibouti is 93.1%, and Northern Sudan with 90.0%, While in East African countries, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda have the least at 32.2% 14.6% 0.6% respectively. The work during this decade a powerful boast forward. (Parsitau and Chacha 2012).

In Kenya the ARP approach was first introduced in 1996 by Maendeleo ya Wanawake organization (MAYWO) – a local Women Development Movement as an alternative ritual FGM/C. It was first carried out among the Meru community which had practiced it as part of coming of age ceremony as noted by Elizabeth Mwangi, justice and peace building officer for Catholic Relief Services in Kenya (CRS). Faith based organisations have also shown great interest towards the adoption of ARP. It was thought that, by adopting ARP, the community would stop FGM/C but maintain the essential components of the passage to womanhood.

Population Council conducted evaluation of ARP approach in 2010 and 2011 and the research found out that the approach was only suited to communities where FGM/C involve a public celebration and where ARP could possibly replace the traditional rite without the cutting. This programme was implemented in Kuria and Kisii communities. ARP was successful in Kisii but not in Kuria because in Kuria FGM is more private than public.

Adoption of ARP in Olenguruone Division

Religion has played a crucial role in adoption of ARP by introducing programme which simulates the traditional initiation of Kalenjin in practice and name. They came up with *Tumdo Ne Leel*, a coming of age approach without the “cut” In Olenguruone, Various groups of Christians have shown a positive support towards adopting ARP. One of the major factors contributing to adoption of ARP is progress of education. The students and the teachers noted preference of ARP program as it does not change the girl’s course of education. While proper

adult behaviours are inculcated through education during the program, formal education also forms a significant part of the training and thus, those who undergo the training are able to proceed with their education effectively. The trainers highlighted that the awareness created on the educational benefits of ARP program has led to many parents opting for it

METHODOLOGY

Study Site Description

The study was carried out in Olenguruone sub-county, Nakuru County, Kenya, covering five locations namely, Amalo Location, Cheptuech Location, Kiptagich Location, Ambusket Location and Sinendet Location.

Research Design

. In this paper, qualitative approach was used to probe deeply into the research settings to obtain the depth understanding about the status of the phenomenon. Descriptive method is more applicable in social issues like the current topic of Alternative Rite of Passage for girls. Descriptive research studies are designed to obtain pertinent and precise information concerning the current status of the phenomenon. This paper was more concerned with interpretation of the real situations which sought to explain these challenges in terms of human existence. The paper used the focused-group discussions with the elders and trainers in ARP programs. Varied opinions as far as the topic is concerned, the events as they were and the vastness of the coverage area also provides numerical description. In this paper both the quantitative and qualitative approaches were used. Descriptive method is more applicable in social issues like the current topic of Alternative Rite of Passage for girls. Descriptive research studies are designed to obtain pertinent and precise information concerning the current status of the phenomenon.

3.4 Target Population

The paper targeted social workers, teachers, youth groups, village elders, women groups, and students in public schools in Olenguruone Division of Nakuru County. According to Kuresoi District education officer's records, Olenguruone Division has twenty registered secondary

schools. The study focused on secondary schools. These included the students and teachers. According to social and welfare program officer the Division has two youth groups and three women groups. All the groups were sougheed.

3.5 Sample and Sampling Techniques

The researcher began by grouping schools into categories of girls and boys, then teachers, youth, women and then elder and lastly the circumcisers. To get the size of sample, the researcher used the stratified random sampling. According to Walliman (2005), stratified random sampling is used when dealing with population which is not uniform or has different characteristics in all cases. The researcher selected 10 students from each of the seven schools and thus making a total of 70 students. Further the researcher selected 2 teachers from each school, to make a total of 14 teachers, the select 4 youth and the same to the women, the circumcisers, elders and trainers in ARP programs. Hence, a total of 104 respondents were used for this study.

3.6 Data Collection and Research Instruments

The paper used the following research tools when collecting the data. Such tools include: questionnaires, interview guide, focused-group discussions, and participant's observation.

a) Questionnaires

A closed-ended items containing a list of possible alternatives from which respondents selected the answer that best describes their situations was used. The open-ended questions provided enough space allowing the respondents to freely use their words in responding. Questionnaires were distributed among the respondents (focus groups) who would be able to understand and comprehend the information asked in the questionnaires and were be collected after two weeks from Olenguruone Division resource library in Olenguruone centre. A focused group discussion was used to elicit responses from participants from both genders (youth, elders and trainers).

b) Interview Schedule

This paper also involved some interview guide questions. It is an instrument used during data collection to direct verbal communication between the researcher and the respondent. The

interview guide was used to gather information from the ARP graduates, teachers, elders and others.

c) Detached Participant's Observation (D P O)

This paper used an observation guide in order to observe the flow of events and to study the phenomenon as they naturally occur. This was done by the researcher herself attending the actual ARP ceremonies where interview with the trainers was also conducted. The researcher used an observation guide which is a research instrument that guides the researcher in gathering data from key areas using sight. The guide defines the behaviour to be observed by the participant. The researcher observed how the rite of ARP is conducted from the beginning of the ceremony up to the moment the girls graduate so as to know to what extent it has been acculturated and how educative it is. The observation guide focused on the observation of the gestures, the words, movements, symbols used by the girls involved in this new rite of passage.

3.7 Data Analysis

This paper is descriptive in nature. After data collection, data was corroborated and analysed using using statistical package of social science (SPSS). The data analysis based on objectives of the study informed the chapters of the study, given that the study made use of analytical frames, namely, theoretical reflection and content analysis. Theoretical reflection involved parading the findings against the theory which had been used. On the other hand, content analysis involved itemizing collected data against the objectives set.

Results and Discussion

The various focus groups were aware of the government intervention in the practice of FGM. The elders reported that in their frequent meetings with the chiefs of the various locations in Olenguruone, they have encountered a number of cases that involved FGM. Parents who force their daughters to go through the rite are arrested yet the women group stated that there have not been severe measures taken against such parents. Accordingly, they believed that despite the arrest, very few are taken to the court of law. All the groups thus were of the opinion that if more strict measures are adopted by the government, cases of FGM would be eradicated.

The youth and the students also noted having heard of circumcisers being arrested, but were not aware of the verdicts that those arrested got. A number of members in the youth and student groups narrated that they have at one point attended training or some form on awareness campaign that had government representatives and in which matters of FGM and others such as drugs abuse, alcoholism, AIDs/HIV among others were discussed. This shows that the government in partnership with other organizations has undertaken the roles of sensitizing the residents of Olenguruone division regarding FGM.

On the other hand, all the focus groups noted that religious leaders have been on the forefront in the fight against FGM. For instance, the trainers revealed that most of the ARP programs are conducted in churches and are organized by the church leaders. The church leaders according to women group had carried the message of opposing girl circumcision, stating that it is a vice. In addition, the women and trainers noted that the religious leaders provide the girls who have already been circumcised and their cases reported with a place where guidance and counselling can be given. The religious leaders therefore, like the government, are not only engaged in proactively shunning female genital mutilation but also offering psychological healing for the victims of the FGM.

Additionally, the church and NGOs were mentioned by all the focus groups as playing an important role in promoting the alternative rite of passage for girls and in that way reducing the rate of FGM in Olenguruone division. According to trainers, the church and the NGOs provide venues and facilities for ARP program to be conducted. Those who had undergone through the ARP programs noted that the church also provided the training material as well as the personnel

to conduct the program. The trainers and the students groups stated that certificates awarded to the ARP graduates were issued by the church. All these represent the involvement of the church in ARP program and thus its role in offering an approach different from the traditional circumcision.

Conclusion

The paper presents the various phenomena surrounding FGM and ARP in Olenguruone Division. It is apparent that while there has been decline in the rate of FGM cases, the division is not without a number of families still practising the FGM. This is attributed to the growth in the rate of school attendance by girls, the law which prohibits the cut as well as churches and non-governmental organisations that have been spreading message that oppose FGM practice. Through the responses collected from the various focus groups, most of the people in the region have a positive perception on ARP as a program and they believe that it is largely accepted. Only a small proportion of the population believe that the ARP graduates are not really grown up. However, with the growing embrace of ARP, there is need for total eradication of FGM in the region owing to its negative influences on those who undergo the cut. The study recommends intergenerational dialogues that unearth reasons, values, customs and principles behind undertaking a given rite. Objective and amicable solutions will thus be arrived at. Education centres which are gender responsive should be opened to provide education, act as ARP centres and rescue centres for girls fleeing the knife of the circumciser. Such girls should be supported and reunited with the parents or retained in the centres to complete their education.

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