

Effects of Initiation Rituals to Primary and Secondary School Girls in Morogoro Rural District

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ABSTRACT: In spite of its usefulness, initiation rituals in Lugurus have been blamed to impede girls' education. In a research conducted in Morogoro rural district between April and June 2011 with the aim of investigating the effects of initiation rituals to primary and secondary school girls, a sample of 74 respondents were involved of which 46 were girls from Mkambarani ward and from both primary and secondary schools. From the research it was found out that girls attend initiation ceremonies as early as they reach puberty be eleven or twelve years. Further it was established that the girls who attend the ceremonies encounter mistreatments, abuse and sometimes they miss their precious school time. Complementing that it was learnt that after the ceremonies, girls change their behavior and thus some of them feel they cannot cope with formal education. As a result of the change of behavior the girls reported dropping out of school to pursue other womanly responsibilities of getting married and having families.

KEYWORDS: Ceremonies, Girl, Initiation, Rituals, Education.

INTRODUCTION

Anthropologist worldwide has commended initiation rituals as being a sturdy tool which has often played an important role in transferring cultural norms of appropriate sexuality across generation and making individual transition to sexual maturity (Herdt, 1987). Complementing these it also has been reported that the rituals provide young people with instructions on gender roles and family life, including the details of sexual activities and reproduction.

In spite of its usefulness in society, the same rituals are criticized by different intellectuals as being a reason for girls' dropout from school as they are reported to be unfit for academic cycle since the rituals only prepares them to become better wives and mothers. This has been reported in different studies done in Tanzania and elsewhere i.e. Mrotto, 2011; Haki elimu, 2010; Helgesson, 2001 and Mtewe, 2012). Supplementing this argument, the Ministry of Education (URT, 1995) also states that certain traditions, customs and practices including initiation rituals hinder girls' education in Tanzania. Coclough (2003) and Mtewe (2012) also support this from evidence on the study done in Tanzania, Guinea and Ethiopia.

According to Hari (2009) these rituals are further blamed to be a cause of girl dropout since they are none educative and are often held during the school term and result in girls missing a considerable amount of school time. Additionally, participation in these rituals generally does affect girls' participation in education in two major perspectives namely attendance and performance. This happens due to the fact that time spent at these rites is at the expense of precious school time. When these girls eventually return to school, teachers find it difficult to find the time to give them the individual attention required to help them catch up with the others. Another reason is that these rituals encourage girls who are initiated to regard themselves as adults and ready for marriage hence they no longer concentrate on their school endeavors since they feel that it would be of little use to them in their future roles as mothers and wives. It is from this concern that this research embarked on a journey to find out the effects of initiation rituals to girls enrolled in primary and secondary schools.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In recent years, education for both girls and boys has been emphasized through primary and secondary education development programs initiated by the Government of Tanzania. Through these efforts, it has been observed that the gross enrolment ratio has been improving tremendously from 50% in 1990/ 91 to about 104.9% in 2011/12 (UNDP, 2005, 2011) and gender parity has been achieved.

Despite these achievements in education, it has also been reported that the dropout rate is high as enrolled students encounter variety of challenges and hence they end up withdrawing from school. Of the enrolled students more girls are said to leave school as compared to boys due to early pregnancies, early marriages, traditional and cultural reasons. For instance in 2009 about 300 girls dropped out of school in Tanga Region due to different reasons; in 2010 about 880 girls dropped out in Kagera Region and 500 girls dropped out of school between 2005 and 2009 due to pregnancies (Haki Elimu, 2010). In Morogoro Region, the situation has been the same as between 2007 and 2009 about 331 girls had to leave school due to pregnancy. This situation in Morogoro is reported to be perpetuated by different cultural practices including initiation rituals done to girls throughout the region. The rituals which are conducted immediately on the onset of puberty are reported to have an impact to girls since what they learn does not encourage them to study but rather encourages them to become good wives and mothers.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the study was to investigate the effects of initiation rituals to primary and secondary school girls in Morogoro Rural District.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

INITIATION RITUALS IN AFRICA

Female African initiation ceremonies or rites as other tribes will call them are celebrated by many ethnic groups though not all. The rights are regarded as a passage rite from childhood to adulthood to both boys and girls. To girls they extend from simple words of wisdom from mature women, to infliction of extreme pain on women in the form of genital mutilation and sometimes it involves extreme tattooing.

In some tribes in Malawi, as soon as a girl reaches puberty, she is taught the norms and values of her society in order to maintain and develop it. These instructions are considered directly relevant to a girl, preparing her for life as a wife and mother in a village. 'Sometimes conflict arises between what is taught at home (in initiation ceremonies) and at school which may lead to parents opposing girls' continued attendance at school' (ODA, 1996). Indeed, girls' behaviour is often directly related to the many tribal and traditional taboos which dictate what and what not to do at the various stages of their development which may conflict with the demands of schooling.

In Zambia different tribes conduct initiation ceremonies to girls on their onset of puberty. Among other tribes the *Ngonis*, *Chewe*, *Nsenga* and *Kunda* do practice these. Diverse kinds of initiation ceremonies are performed but mainly when the girls reach puberty stage she is normally kept in house and taught variety of things by much older women. Explicitly, the girls are taught how to handle men during sex, child birth and motherhood (Powersistas, 2012). Further, from a study done in Sierra Leone (Ahmadu, 2000) reports that, initiation ceremonies involve variety of practices but mainly the physical removal of clitoris. It is estimated that about 94% of girls were initiated by January 2010. The girls as part of the rite are initiated through FGM which prepares the girl for adulthood through singing, dancing and teaching domestic skills. The removal of the clitoris to them symbolizes the physical, psychological and separation of women from men. Through this transformation, women achieve, "a negation of masculine in feminine creative potential".

INITIATION RITUALS IN TANZANIA

With 120 tribes, Tanzania has got a variety of gender differentiated socialization which differs from tribe to tribe. Initiation rituals are offered once boys and girls had reached puberty. Boys and girls are separated for these rites. Boys' initiation is called (in Kiswahili) *jando* and that for girls is referred to as *unyago* (Ntukula 1994). Among the Zaramo, for example, the *jando* curriculum for boys include good manners, bravery, the secrets of life, marriage, death, the responsibilities a man has to carry, and the customs and taboos to be observed. Girls were taught about male physiology,

sexual intercourse, pregnancy, childbirth, and responsibilities of a good wife and mother in their *unyago* 'schools' (Mbunda 1991)

Traditionally in Ngoni culture, when a girl has her first monthly period, she must tell her grandmother or aunt. The elder woman then shares the news with the rest of the community, and women are called upon to perform the initiation ceremony. The young girl is placed in an isolated hut for the duration of the initiation, which can take up to one month. At night, the women crowd into the girl's hut to teach her about womanhood. An elaborate "cleansing" ritual takes place where the girl is symbolically "washed down" by an elder woman. She is told how to look after herself physically, how to behave with men, and how to be a good wife to her future husband. The most important thing she learns, however, is how to have sex, which is demonstrated through dance (Kenny, 2005).

In case of Luguru people from Morogoro region, the initiation rite is conducted immediately at the onset of puberty. A series of rites are done including the *Mwali* and *Mkole* rites. After the girl sees her first menstrual she is supposed to report to her maternal grandmother who is responsible for the process. The granny then immediately reports to several women including the girl's aunts. Then the girl is transferred from her parents place to her granny's place where she is fit into a special room. In the room the girl is provided with a bed which is made specific for that reason. The bed is created in such a way that the girl does not fit into it so she is forced to lie down bending her legs towards her chest since the bed is made short. The time spent in that particular confinement room ranges from few months to several years (Mteweke, 2012 and Hamdani, 2012).

During the confinement period the girl is not allowed to do heavy domestic chores but rather helping her granny in light duties. She is served with the best food to make her become more attractive and beautiful. On her skin the girl applies castor oil and she is obliged to avoid sun burning her skin. While inside the girl is taught how to become a good wife and mother. She is taught different womanly activities such as hair plaiting, sorting vegetables, pounding maize, making mats, baskets, pottery and caps. Supplementing this knowledge the girls are also taught how to become good sexual partners to their future husbands (Mteweke, 2012 and Hamdani, 2012).

THE EFFECTS OF INITIATION RITUALS ON GIRL'S RETENTION INTO PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL

A direct link between girl dropout and initiation rite is merely established. Different studies have correlated school dropouts of girls with the trainings and expectations the girls receive during initiation. In a study done by Hakielimu (2010) this concept was emphasized as it reports that "when a girl passes through different traditional rites her sexual arousal increases and thus psychologically a girl develops a strong sex urge and the girl no longer want to continue with studies". In another argument Colclough (2003) reports that in a discussion with teachers from Tanzania they mentioned that girls interest in schools declined dramatically particularly after being initiated. Mteweke (2012) accentuates this argument by stating that the root cause of girl droup out from school includes truancy and early pregnancy which are correlated to initiation ceremonies.

METHODOLOGY

Morogoro Rural is one of the 6 districts of Morogoro Region, bordered to the East by Pwani Region, to the South by Morogoro Urban and to the West by the Mvomero District. The district is administratively divided into 25 wards. The research was centered at Morogoro rural district and specifically at Mkambarani ward.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The design used was cross sectional which involved collection of empirical data from District Government Officials, Ward Executive Officers, Village Executive Officers, Ward Education Officer, Parents, Primary School Teachers, and Ritual mother, Primary School Girls, Faith Based Leaders and Secondary School Girls.

SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

The study employed both probability and non probability sampling techniques. Probability sampling was advantageous over non-probability sampling due to the fact that it enhanced a chance of getting samples that represents characteristics of the whole population targeted. Non probability sampling was used to obtain respondents from District and Ward levels.

SAMPLE SIZE

The study engrossed the following categories of respondents: District Government Official (1) Ward and Village Officials (4), Primary and Secondary School Girls (46) and other stakeholders (23) making a total of 74 respondents.

Table 1. Sample size Distribution of the population

S/No.	Category of respondent	Frequency	Percentage
1	District government official	1	1.35
2	WEO and VEO	2	2.7
3	WeO	2	2.7
4	Parents	10	13.4
5	Teachers	10	13.4
6	Ritual mother	1	1.35
7	Girls from std. 6&7	10	13.4
8	Faith Based Leaders	2	2.7
9	Secondary school girls	36	49
10	Total	74	100

Source: Morogoro survey, 2011

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Due to complexity of the study both primary and secondary data collection methods were utilized. The methods included interview, questionnaire, and focus group discussions. Interviews were applied to both primary and secondary school girls, District Government officials, Ward and Village officials, and other stakeholders while the questionnaire and focus group discussions were applied to both primary and secondary school girls.

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods were employed. For quantitative data descriptive analysis was done using SPSS program. For qualitative data, identification of themes or patterns from the transcripts was made. The patterns were organized into coherent categories and interpretations made based on identified patterns and connections within and between categories.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**EDUCATION AND AGE OF RESPONDENTS**

Table 2 below shows that 73.9% of the sampled respondents were aged between 13 and 16 years with the remaining minority aged 18 years or older. The study wanted to find out at what age girls do attends initiation ceremony in relation with school time. The study revealed that large number of girls have had attended initiation ceremonies at the age of 12 and above which implied that they passed in initiation ceremonies while they are in school.

Table 2. Standard / Form and Age of the students who responded.

Class level	Frequency	Percentages
Std 6-7	10	21.7
Form one	12	26.1
Form two	6	13.0
Form three	18	39.1
Total	46	100.0
Age of respondents		
8-12	4	8.7
13-16	34	73.9
17-22	8	17.4
Total	46	100.0

Source: Morogoro Research findings, 2011

STAGES OF INITIATION CEREMONIES

The study wished to know different forms of initiation ceremonies and rate of attendance in the community living in the area of the study. Initiated students interviewed asserted that there are different stages of initiation. Firstly there is the introduction which normally takes place on the day the girl experiences her first period and is celebrated by dancing and singing at the family level or clan. At this stage the girl is taken to a room in her family house and briefed on why she has experienced the bleeding, trainers said that songs are sang to mark the transition point from childhood to adulthood of the girl concerned.

Following this stage, girls are confined in house being provided with intense trainings including practical demonstration of various key issues that the girl undergoing initiation should know and practice in her daily life. The trainers and women with very close relationship with the girl demonstrate to the teachings. These teachings are traditionally performed under a huge tree known as Mkole which is the general name for the third training stage; reference is based on *Mkole's* characteristics features and use.

According to the ritual mother, Mkole tree is a symbol of physical strength and order as it is difficult to cut and is used to make sticks for striking children upon showing bad behavior. The tree is very straight which according to the Luguru denotes smartness, straightness or rightness in life. Further the tree is characterized with producing many small fruits which portrays that the initiated girl becomes fertile as the tree.

ATTENDANCE TO INITIATION CEREMONIES

From the study it was revealed that a good number (69.6%) of the respondents had already attended initiation Ceremony between the years 2009-2011. The minority who had not attended the ceremonies mentioned different reasons for not attending including that they were either not lugurus or their families were good Christians. Another group of girls also reported that their parents were educated and thus did not follow the cultural practices.

EFFECTS OF INITIATION RITUALS

The study investigated if the rite or ceremonies had any effect to the girls. From their responses it was learnt that there were two categories of effects, that is, during the rituals and after the rituals. During the ceremonies (during hibernation period) the girls reported to have faced different forms of abuse and wastage of their school time. Further they explained that after the hibernation period most of the girls involve themselves into sex, drop from school, change of behavior, being married below age, and other effects as shown in the table 3.

Table 3. Effects of attending initiation rituals

Description	Frequency	Percentage
During the rituals		
Wastage of school time	6	13
Mistreatments and violence	24	52
After the rituals		
Early engagement in sexual relations	25	54
Drop out from school	28	61
Change of behavior	22	48
Early childhood marriage	14	30
Early pregnancies	18	39
Psychological and mental effects	9	19
Truancy	19	41
Lack of obedience to teachers	20	43

Source: Morogoro Research findings 2011

WASTAGE OF SCHOOL TIME

About 13% of the girls during the interviews and focus group discussion argued that apart from respect to adults and hygienic reasons, initiation for them was meaningless and it is just wastage of school time. They argued that, they attended the ceremonies as a pre-requisite condition to *Luguru* culture since those who did not pass through this rite are taken as unclean and unfit to be a mothers and wives. Apart from that, this group of uninitiated women was segregated from the community as the following case explains;

"I went through the ceremony because everybody in the village goes through it. I was taught how to respect elders and not to sleep with men before marriage. Some of the things taught were irrelevant to me like Sleeping while bending my legs up to my chest level and walking all the way to school and back covered by Khanga cloth on my head for three years. Also, staying without taking bath and without meeting my father during the confinement period was unnecessary to me. Since all these trainings and others were done after school hours I was left with no time for my school work".

MISTREATMENT AND VIOLENCE

More than half of the girls (52%) interviewed responded that in a way initiation rites violated human rights. They reported to be mistreated by the elderly women throughout the process. Some of them reported to be shouted at, beaten, slapped and even being pinched. In a most awkward way, the girls complained of the action of removal of their pubic hair by using hand and hot ash as being torturing and embarrassing. Additionally they retorted that while hibernating they were forced to stay in a dark room and they were forced to whisper instead of talking loudly whenever they communicated. Further they expressed disappointment in an action where they were supposed to stand nude before elderly women for cleansing; to them this was humiliating since they were the centre of mockery to the women, as the following girl narrates;

"I hated the initiation rituals since I passed through a lot of mistreatment. My mhunga and granny used to pinch me a lot. I was forced to do a lot of things which I did not like, when I objected I was severely punished and I was threatened to be cursed. They told me that I will never get married and I will never be mother as result of the curse".

EARLY ENGAGEMENT IN SEXUAL RELATIONS AND PREGNANCIES

About 54% of the girls pointed early sexual engagement while on another hand 39% of them mentioned pregnancies as among the effects associated with initiation. Apart from girls, teachers and faith based leaders interviewed blamed these cultures as a source of early pregnancies. The girls explained that a number of girls who had been initiated within their age group associated themselves with sex though they are still very young. Some of them due to their naivety fell pregnant and are forced to drop out of school or commit abortion. According to them initiation encouraged the girl to engage into sex relations though they are forbidden to do it before getting married. They reported that about 90% of the trainings given during the confinement encourage them to explore sex, as they are told the goodness of the act, how it is done and how

immediately they should do it. Further they complained that they are not educated on the effects one could encounter once they practice sex, as a result majority of them who practice it fall victims of early pregnancies and sometimes they become sick due to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

TRUANCY AND DROP OUT FROM SCHOOL

Truancy was also among the effects of initiation rite mentioned by the girls, teachers and other stakeholders during interviews and focus group discussions. About 41% of the girls mentioned that truancy is faced by initiated girls both during and after the rite. During the hibernation period they reported that they were not comfortable coming to school covering themselves with *Khanga* (a wrapper) as the boys will start to mock and tease them as a result they opted to dodge school and stay home comfortably. Complementing this, girls claimed that sometimes their parents would seek permission for them to stay at home and hence whether she agrees or not she is obliged to obey. They further explained that low attendance to school always impacted their performance and as a result they performed poorly in their examinations.

As a result of the poor performance most of the girls opted to drop from school since they could not cope with the others. Apart from low attendance some girls and teachers mentioned that the trainings and instructions received during the confinement period did not encourage formal education but rather they encouraged the girls to obey and do what is right within their culture which is becoming good sexual partners to their future husbands and good mothers to their children. With this type of training the girls were lured into leaving the formal education and enter into the adult world of marriage and child bearing. They were taught that a *luguru* woman should get married at a young age and bear children at that tender age. With this type of education they were made to believe that these formal schools were meant for boys and men while they were only meant to be mothers and wives.

In failure to meet these expectations i.e. becoming wives and mothers, the girls argued that they faced a lot of challenges due to poverty levels in the villages and hence they were prompted to leave their communities in search of better living condition, in most cases ending up with domestic work, prostitution, street work, and informal or illegal work in urban cities.

DISOBEDIENCE AND CHANGE OF BEHAVIUR

A good number of girls interviewed (43%) revealed that lack of obedience and change of behavior (48%) were observed after the girl initiated. They retorted that due to the fact that they are introduced to all secrets of womanhood they felt that they are equal to adult women. As a result of this the initiated girls felt they were not supposed to be told what to do or what is best with elders. They reported that they felt as adults should never be commanded or reprimanded by other elders. With stress they reported that they were made to believe that men and especially their future husbands are the most important human beings though they were also told to respect other adults. This had an impact both at home and in school as the teachers interviewed complained that the girls after being initiated they no longer respect them and especially female teachers. When probed about this complaint the girls denied it but commented that they would not tolerate any punishment given to them unfairly by teachers as the following case explains;

“Women teachers always punish the class for very minor mistakes. One day at the morning assembly, a teacher felt that students were mocking about the way she was dressing, so she demanded to know who made the mockery. Nobody volunteered and she was very furious. She immediately commanded our class to kneel down as a punishment. I did not agree with the punishment, I was eventually to meet her at the office and later got suspended. I never agree with the unfair punishment because as an adult I needed her to justify why she punished our class which she could not....”

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MENTAL EFFECTS

Few girls (19%) reported to have succumbed different psychological and mental trauma. They reported to suffer from these traumas due to the act of cruelty performed towards them during the confinement period. Some of them recalled crying a lot due to beatings and pinchings, while others recalled being harshly shaved their pubic hair. A number of them even lamented the act of being nude in front of people as being very humiliating. Following this trauma some of the girls curse being born as *Lugurus* and swear never to expose their daughter through that experience.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

Much as initiation rituals in Morogoro is important for sexual maturity of girls they are also not in favour of encouraging the growing girls in their education. This was confirmed through a research conducted in Morogoro Rural in 2011. From the research it was found out that inspite of the usefulness initiation rituals affect girl's education in different ways. The girls and other stakeholders mentioned different effects they face during the ceremonies and after. Among others they included wastage of school time, mistreatment and violence, and early engagement in sexual relations. Other effects included school drop out, being married at early age and psychological and mental effects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the research findings and the above conclusion, following are recommendations put forward:

- The government should enforce laws and bylaws against adult males who engage in sexual relations with girls under legal age of 18 years.
- The local authorities should emphasize on the importance of performing these rites during school holidays. Further they should emphasize that these rites should never interfere with the school programmes be it homework, examinations, etc.
- The public should be made aware on both the importance and triviality of initiation rituals.

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