



# An Assessment of the Attitudes of Teachers and Learners Towards Female Genital Mutilation and Alternative Rites of Passage in Marigat, Baringo County, Kenya

Kipkoech Lydia Cheruto<sup>1</sup> and Kiptek Edward<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Education, Department of Educational Management & Foundations of Education, University of Eldoret.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Education Psychology, Kisii University, Kabarnet Campus

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received: 24 July 2017;

Received in revised form:

6 January 2018;

Accepted: 18 January 2018;

### Keywords

Alternative Rites,  
Attitudes,  
Female Genital Mutilation,  
Learners,  
Passage,  
Teachers.

## ABSTRACT

The practice of FGM among some communities in Kenya, has been considered a major challenge to girl-child's participation in education. However, some members of the same communities have embraced the alternative rites of passage for girls in which positive aspects of tribal culture are taught, such as self esteem, decision making, and respect for elders. This paper assesses the attitudes of teachers and learners towards female genital mutilation and alternative rites of passage based on a study conducted in Marigat District, Kenya. The selection of the study sample was done using stratified random sampling, simple random sampling and proportionate sampling. Schools were stratified into educational divisions from which 16 schools out of the total of 45 public schools in Marigat District were selected using proportionate random sampling. To get a specific school to participate in this study, simple random sampling was used. The respondents of this study included teachers and pupils from the selected schools, who were selected through simple random sampling. Questionnaires, interview schedules and document analysis were used to collect data. Descriptive statistical techniques such as the means, percentages and standard deviations; and inferential statistics (t-test) were used in analyzing the data using SPSS. From the study, majority of the respondents were of the opinion that FGM rite of passage does not maintain female chastity whereas others stated that FGM rite of passage does not increase male sexual pleasure. While majority of the teachers agreed that FGM rite of passage is an important part of identifying with cultural heritages, majority of the students were not of the same view. This disparity might have been due to the age and experience differences that exist between the two categories of the respondents. Since FGM and alternative rite of passage did not prevent girls from being promiscuous, the learners should be told by parents and teachers on the need to avoid sexual intercourse before marriage.

© 2018 Elixir All rights reserved.

## Introduction

A plethora of reasons has been advanced in support of the continuation of female genital mutilation (FGM). The reasons vary from one practicing community to the other across the world. Generally, most reasons revolve around passing on traditions and culture with great significance being placed on the pursuit of mythical, religious, magical and aesthetic lives of the group of people practicing such a custom.

Some of the reasons given are ambiguous and may sound strange to an outsider as they are often not backed by any substantive evidence but only perpetuated through a complex set of belief systems and taboos (UNICEF, 2005). Research conducted in communities supporting the FGM practice have given major reasons such as it being a norm to be passed on through generations, feminine hygiene, fertility enhancement, a rite of passage, virginity preservation, socio-political integration and maintenance of societal cohesiveness as well as economic reasons. However, marriageability and control of sexual morals accounts for the universality and persistence of FGM (UNICEF, 2005).

In her book *The Female Circumcision Controversy: An Anthropological Perspective*, Ellen Gruenbaum (2001) argues that FGM is carried out to pass the traditions of the society to the next generation, to appease ancestors and to fulfil religious obligations, especially among Muslims, where FGM is practiced with a misguided belief that it is a requirement of their religion.

This misconception has since been refuted by sheikhs (Islamic religious leaders) as not being founded on the Koran. The sub-regional conference on FGM/C hosted by the government of Djibouti in February 2005 affirms that FGM practice is contrary to the religious beliefs of Islam and "there is no text in the Koran *sharia* or prophetic *sunna* addressing FGM" (UNICEF, 2005).

Poldermans (2006) also notes that the claim that FGM is a requirement of Islam is a fallacy, because even the radical Islamic countries such as Iran do not practice it. Wangila and Nyangweso (2007) argue that FGM is a highly valued ritual in many cultures, whose purpose is to mark the transition from childhood to womanhood; therefore, it is an important rite of passage from one stage of life to the other.

Tele:

E-mail address: [cherulk@yahoo.com](mailto:cherulk@yahoo.com)

It is intended to impart the skills and knowledge a woman needs to fulfil her duties as a wife and a mother. FGM is traditionally practiced as a ritual signifying the acceptance of a woman into society and establishes her eligibility for marriage as it is extremely difficult, if not possible for a woman to get married if she has not undergone the ritual in such societies. A girl who does not have her clitoris removed is considered a great danger and a fatal to a man if her clitoris touches his penis (Sarkis, 2003).

Immediately after the genital cut, an elaborate series of ceremonies accompany the event, and special songs are sung with dancing and chanting intended to teach the already circumcised girls their duties and community desirable behaviour as wives and mothers. They are then confined in seclusion for a number of days or months from which they are trained on proper wifely duties followed by a colourful graduation celebration to mark the pass out. During graduation day the initiates are offered gifts and praises through songs and ululations. As such, the pride and prestige are bestowed upon the girls who have successfully endured the pain without crying and so to their parents who acquire new higher status in the society as a result of it. On the other side, the girls who did not undergo it are mocked instead along with their parents. In some circumstances women who have not undergone FGM face derision from other women who have undergone the ritual.

In marriage, circumcised girls do provide their parents a lot of wealth through dowry, also referred to bride wealth or pride price payment from whoever they will marry typically in form of livestock and in some cases money exchanged. On the other hand, uncircumcised girls are not married within the community and if any marriage it is with the outcasts of the society or outsiders who will risk to do so. For those who are lucky to get husbands, it is a taboo for their parents to receive a dowry as they believe the bride is not pure. More often than not, the girls who do not heed the call for the practice are cursed, blamed and ostracized or even banished from the society. They believe that an uncircumcised girl is unhygienic, smelling, their genital organs are unsightly and when one marries will exhibit unbridled and voracious appetite for promiscuous sex. Due to this belief, FGM becomes a valued mandatory social rite. In fact most girls are willing to succumb to the tormenting pain amidst subsequent dangers of long term health problems to secure this pride, respect, and acceptance and to overcome prejudices shown to uncircumcised girls.

However, whether they wished to be excused or not, the choice is not within their decision because of the patriarchal structure of these societies, where women are dependent on men for social and economic survival. For instance, the Kalenjin community of Kenya, an ethnic group from which my mother hails from, believes that a person attending uncircumcised girl during childbirth will die whenever she sees or touches her clitoris due to a bad omen associated with it and for this reason, no one is willing to risk her life to assist uncircumcised girls during child labour, but to be abandoned to deliver babies by themselves in the bushes far from the homestead and kill the babies.

Therefore, to discourage pregnancies from uncircumcised girls, FGM is the panacea that is done earlier before girls reach puberty. Similarly, the Somali ethnic group found in north eastern part of Kenya highly value virginity for the honour of her family and future husband. A girl is not

allowed to engage in sex before marriage for any reason whatsoever.

To ensure this, the Somali girl is obliged by her culture to face the worst kind of FGM (Type III or In fibulation) where genital parts are cut and "stitched up" and only "opened" (de-infibulation) for her husband during their first conjugal right (Amnesty International USA, 2008). Though this type of process extremely narrows and interferes with the natural shape of the vagina for sexual intercourse, the husband is supposed to be man enough to penetrate his wife. If he does not do so, it becomes imperative for the groom to use yet another knife to enable him to sexually access his wife.

Like other men in many societies, pastoralist men in their jealousy and deliberate intent to subjugate women by controlling their sexuality, believe that FGM inhibits women's urge for sex, inspires submissiveness, reduces infidelity, promiscuity and instills chastity and therefore the deadening of woman's sexual pleasure by mutilation is the only way of guaranteeing her virginity and fidelity. In some cultures, a potential mother in law uses FGM to discover virginity status of the bride. If she is found not to be virgin, her husband to-be has the right to reject her and demand a return of the pride price. When a woman is rejected in this manner, her family as well as the whole clan is disgraced and stigmatized, leaving the woman with little choice but to vanish from the area forever before facing the wrath of the angry family members.

It is clear that there are still several myths surrounding the FGM practice such as FGM inhibiting women's urge for sex, inspiring submissiveness, reducing infidelity, promiscuity and instills chastity. Since fidelity and chastity are moral values in the society the communities still practicing FGM remain convinced that deadening of woman's sexual pleasure by mutilation is the only way of guaranteeing her virginity and fidelity. This belief itself poses a great challenge to the alternative rites of passage. This study sought to assess the potency of the alternative rites practice in mitigating the negative effects associated with FGM and in specific its capacity to enhance the girl-child self esteem and participation in education.

The introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in January 2003 in Kenya raised the national Gross Enrolment Rate from 88.2 per cent in 2002 to 102.8 per cent (105.0% for boys and 100.5% for girls) in 2003. Therefore, the introduction of FPE witnessed a widening of the gender gap in favour of boys. Regional gender disparities were evident in enrolment, competition, repetition, transition and performance in the Kenya Certificate of primary education. National primary completion rate for boys are higher than for girls. Gender disparities in transition from secondary to public universities have been wide (Ministry of Education, 2007).

To address girls' lower participation, the government provided grants to some girls' schools, and implemented the affirmative component to address the plight of the girl child on participation in education. For example, the provision of sanitary pads to girls and readmission policy of school-going mothers enables the girl-child to continue participating in school activities. It is also observed that the girl-child's transition and completion rates at secondary school educational level are still low (Ministry of Education, 2007). It is, therefore, evidently clear that in Kenya, gender parity is yet to be achieved.

One way of mitigating this is by first establishing and dealing with the factors responsible for this scenario. In communities that still practice FGM, the practice has been considered a major challenge to girl-child participation in education.

However, some members of the same communities have embraced the alternative rites of passage for girls in which positive aspects of tribal culture are taught, such as self esteem, decision making, and respect for elders.

### Methodology

The study was carried out in Marigat sub-county of Baringo County. The area was selected because it is a place where both FGM and alternative rites of passage are practiced by the same local community and was therefore ideal for the study since. The area provided an opportunity for comparison between the two practices. The study utilized the descriptive survey design. This design enabled the researcher to collect data from relatively large population.

The primary school teachers and Standard Seven pupils constituted the target population. Schools were stratified into educational divisions from which 16 schools out of the total 45 public schools in Marigat sub-county were selected using proportionate random sampling. This ensured that the sample was proportionally selected from the various subgroups constituting the population. To get a specific school to participate in the study, simple random sampling was used. From a target population of 422 teachers, simple random sampling was used to select 32 who participated in the study. Simple random sampling was also used to select 100 pupils from the selected schools.

The independent variable was the potency of the alternative rites of passage. The dependent variables were the girl-child self esteem and participation in education. In testing self esteem, statements related to self esteem were generated and responded to on the Likert scale. Participation in education was measured using different indicators such as enrolment, transition rates from one grade to the other as well as the drop-out rates. The main research instrument for the study was the questionnaire. An interview schedule was also used to overcome the limitations of the questionnaire.

### Discussion of Findings

#### 1. Teachers' and Learners' Attitudes towards FGM

The study sought to establish the teachers' attitudes towards FGM as regards to girl-child self-esteem and participation in education. A Likert scale was used whereby SA, A, U, D and SD were awarded 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 points respectively. A mean of 2.5 and below was considered as 'Disagree' while a mean of more than 2.5 was considered as 'Agree'. reveals that a great fraction of the teachers who participated in the study were of the opinion that FGM rite of passage did not maintain female chastity, did not increase male sexual pleasure, did not enhance fertility, did not prevent girls from being promiscuous, did not prevent girls from engaging in sexual intercourse before marriage nor is it an important part to womanhood.

The means for the mentioned responses are 1.78, 1.44, 1.91, 2.03, 2.47 and 2.28 respectively. However, FGM was considered as an important part of identifying with cultural heritages and that men prefer marrying women who have undergone FGM as indicated by mean of 3.41 and 2.69 respectively with standard deviations of 1.54 and 1.65 respectively.

On the other hand, the group means are 2.4672 and 2.2841 for teachers and learners respectively. This implies that there was no significant difference between teachers and learners towards alternative rites of passage. However, they both have a low attitude towards alternative rites of passage. Over half of the teachers were of the opinion that alternative rites of passage go against culture and that alternative rites of passage did not lead to complete womanhood.

They also stated that alternative rite of passage was still a foreign practice in the society. Teachers who participated in this study stated that men prefer marrying women who have undergone FGM and alternative rites of passage was a practice for cowards. Table 1 below shows the teachers' and learners responses on this variable.

**Table 1. Teachers' and learner's Attitudes towards FGM.**  
**a)Teacher' Attitudes towards FGM**

Statement	N	Mean	SD
FGM rite of passage maintains female chastity	32	1.78	1.29
FGM rite of passage increases male sexual pleasure	32	1.44	0.76
FGM rite of passage is an important part of identifying with cultural heritages	32	3.41	1.54
Men prefer marrying women who have undergone FGM	32	2.69	1.65
FGM rite of passage is an important part to womanhood	32	2.28	1.57
FGM enhances fertility	32	1.91	1.55
FGM rite of passage prevents girls from being promiscuous	32	2.03	1.06
FGM rite of passage prevents girls engaging in sexual intercourse before marriage	32	2.47	1.76

#### b). Learners' Attitudes towards FGM.

Statement	N	Mean	SD
FGM rite of passage maintains female chastity	100	2.33	1.45
FGM rite of passage increases male sexual pleasure	100	2.42	0.48
FGM rite of passage is an important part of identifying with cultural heritages	100	2.67	1.58
Men prefer marrying women who have undergone FGM	100	3.14	1.61
FGM rite of passage is an important part to womanhood	100	2.19	1.37
FGM enhances fertility	100	2.23	1.46
FGM rite of passage prevents girls from being promiscuous	100	2.28	1.52
FGM rite of passage prevents girls engaging in sexual intercourse before marriage	100	2.69	1.76

**Table 2. Independent Samples Test Results.**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig(2-tailed)	Mean difference	Standard error difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Alternative rites of passage	Equal variances assumed	25.176	.064	4.3216	258	.081	0.1831	0.0469	1.85726	4.96529
	Equal variances not assumed			4.2278	252.391	.081	0.1831	0.0469	1.77561	4.84637

## 2. Teachers' and Learners' Attitude towards Alternative rites of passage

Other than FGM, the study sought to establish the teachers' and learners' attitude towards alternative rites of passage. The results were statistically tested by using t-test to test the third hypothesis of this study. The null hypothesis as stated that:

*There is no significant difference between teachers' and learners' attitude towards alternative rites of passage.*

The rejection level was set at 0.05. The null hypothesis is rejected if the p-value or sig is less than or equal to 0.05 and if more than 0.05, then we fail to reject the null hypothesis. After testing the above hypothesis the results were found to be as shown below in Table 2.

Since the p-value in the column labeled 'Levene's Test for Equality of Variances' is greater than alpha (0.05), we use the row of data labeled 'Equal Variances Assumed' and ignore the second row since it is not significant. Therefore  $t(258) = 4.3216$  and  $p = 0.081$  was found. Since  $p > 0.05$ , we fail to reject the null hypothesis, implying that the difference in means is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This implies that there was no significant difference between teachers' and learners' attitude towards alternative rites of passage.

### Findings

#### 1. Teachers'/Learners' Attitudes towards FGM

The study sought to establish the attitude of the teachers and learners towards the FGM. It was found that majority of the respondents were of the opinion that FGM rite of passage does not maintain female chastity whereas majority of the teachers disagreed to the statement that FGM rite of passage increases male sexual pleasure. Majority of the teachers agreed that FGM rite of passage is an important part of identifying with cultural heritages whereas majority of the students disagreed. A study by Ibum and Ephigemia (2000) has established that all human behaviour within cultures has value for the people who initiate and perpetuate the practice.

The circumcision ritual has a place in the life of the people, a woman or man is placed in her/his proper status because of the rituals she/he undergoes as she/he grows up. This is why FGM is being practiced. However, marriage ability and control of sexual morals accounts for the universality and persistence of FGM (UNICEF, 2005). Gruenbaum (2001) argues that FGM is carried out to pass the traditions of the society to the next generation to appease ancestors, and to fulfil religious obligations especially among Muslims, where FGM is practiced with a misguided belief that it is a requirement of their religion. Another half of the teachers disagreed to the statement that men prefer marrying women who have undergone FGM. This contradicts the belief by the communities practicing FGM that uncircumcised girl cannot be married.

Sarkis (2003) stated that uncircumcised girls were not married within the community and if any marriage it was with the outcasts of the society or outsiders who will risk doing so. For those who are lucky to get husbands, it is a taboo for their parents to receive a dowry as they believe the bride is not pure. More often than not, the girls who do not heed the call for the practice are cursed, blamed and ostracized or even banished from the society. It was also noted that over half of the respondents asserted that FGM rite of passage was not an important part to womanhood, whereas the rest of the respondents considered it important. Majority

of the teachers and learners were of the opinion that FGM does not enhance fertility.

Further, it was found that FGM rite of passage did not prevent girls from being promiscuous and that it did not prevent girls from being engaged in sexual intercourse before marriage. As established by Ibum and Ephigemia (2000), circumcised girls consider themselves mature and then begin unhealthy preoccupation with their sexuality, soon their performance in school slowly goes down, and then they begin to feel ashamed when smaller girls perform better than them in class. When this trend, continues for some time, together with accompanying punishments for low performance and taunting from small boys in school, the circumcised girls end up pregnant or just leaving school to be married or driven to prostitution by poverty and frustration.

#### 2. Teachers'/Learners' Attitude towards Alternative rites of passage

Other than FGM, the study sought to establish the teachers' and learners' attitude towards alternative rites of passage. As revealed by the findings of the study, half of the teachers and the learners were of the opinion that alternative rites of passage go against culture. As stated by Sarkis (2003), FGM is traditionally practiced as ritual signifying the acceptance of a woman into society and establishes her eligibility for marriage as it is extremely difficult, if not possible for a woman to get married if she has not had her clitoris cut off in such societies. Further, majority of the learners disagreed to the statement that alternative rites of passage did not lead to complete womanhood.

Wangila and Nyangweso (2007) argue that FGM is a highly valued ritual in many cultures, whose purpose is to mark the transition from childhood to womanhood, therefore it is an important rite of passage from one stage of life to the other. It is intended to impart the skills and knowledge a woman needs to fulfil her duties as a wife and a mother. It was also stated that some men do not prefer women who have undergone alternative rites of passage whereas majority of the learners agreed that alternative rites of passage were still a foreign practice in the society. A girl who does not have her clitoris removed is considered a great danger and a fatal to a man if her clitoris touches his penis (Sarkis, 2003). The study also established that majority of the teachers and the learners agreed that alternative rites of passage are a practice for the cowards.

### Conclusion

The study sought to establish the attitude of the teachers and learners towards the alternative rites of passage. It can be concluded that majority of the respondents were of the opinion that FGM rite of passage does not maintain female chastity whereas others stated that FGM rite of passage does not increase male sexual pleasure. While majority of the teachers agreed that FGM rite of passage is an important part of identifying with cultural heritages, majority of the students were not of the same view.

This disparity might have been due to the age and experience differences that exist between the two categories of the respondents. It was also observed that FGM rite of passage was not an important part to womanhood and it does not enhance fertility. Further, it was found that FGM rite of passage did not prevent girls from being promiscuous, thus it does not prevent girls from being engaged in sexual intercourse before marriage. Concerning alternative rites of passage, it was found that alternative rites of passage were still a foreign practice in the society.

However majority of the respondents agreed to the statement alternative rites of passage is a practice for the cowards.

#### **Recommendations**

1. Since FGM and alternative rite of passage did not prevent girls from being promiscuous, the learners should be taught by parents and teachers on the need to avoid sexual intercourse before marriage.
2. More campaigns and seminars need to be conducted in the area of study in order to make the community aware of the alternative rites of passage.

#### **References**

Amnesty International (2008). *Female Genital Mutilation: A Fact Sheet*. New York: UNICEF.

Gruenbaum, E. (2001). *The Female Circumcision Controversy: An Anthropological perspective*. The Falmer Press.

Ibum, G., & Ephigemia, W. (2000). *Female Circumcision*. Nairobi Kenya: Paulines publications Africa.

Poldermans, S. (2006). *Combating Female Genital Mutilation in Europe. A comparative Analysis of Legislative and Preventative Tools in the Netherlands, France, the United Kingdom and Austria*. Austria: University of Vienna.

Sarkis, M. (2003). *Female Genital Cutting: An Introduction*. FGC Education and Networking Project.

UNICEF (2005). *Communication for the Abandonment of Female Genital Cutting*. UNICEF.

Wangila, M. N. (2007). *Female Circumcision: The Interplay of Religion, Culture and Gender in Kenya (Women from the Margins)* (1<sup>st</sup> ed.). Orbis Books.