

Is Less Trauma Traumatizing? Call for Negotiated Circumcision Rites

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Abstract

The question of masculinities traumatizing other masculinities is a phenomenon that cuts across different ethnic groups across Africa. The most evident time is during post war and conflict. However, a study carried out in Kenyan schools revealed that male children from communities that circumcise boys as a cultural practice feel traumatized by the experience. In the African communities that conduct male rites of passage, one of the major marks of masculinity was the ability of a man to face the knife without a flinch during the rather public and elaborate male circumcision. This was a communal activity that involved mentors' thorough preparation and education of boys, often over long periods, so that they went through the ordeal as stoically as expected. Incidentally, lack of preparation for such rites due to various factors has influenced the boys' view of such practices, causing a major disconnect between the boys and their mentors.

Despite the changing lifestyles, many parents in Kenya, still value traditional practices of male circumcision causing a great rift between parental ideologies and those of their sons towards the circumcision rites. Often, young boys who have barely had experience with a kitchen knife are suddenly confronted with the literal circumciser's knife during the elaborate circumcision rites. Many boys get whisked off during school holidays for such ceremonies with little or no social and psychological preparation for such an emotionally involving undertaking. Bewildered and physically tortured, majority of those boys go through the prescribed rites with no value connection of their experience to a culture that is ever so familiar to their parents but a painful and mysterious endeavour to the boys.

This presentation is informed by the stories told by primary and secondary school children in 2009 through essay writing competition that was conducted by the Institute for Gender, Equity, Research and Development, of Moi university-Kenya. The students were asked to write essays on gender issues and specifically the plight of the boy child. More than 1500 essays were received and most of them revealed that boys are traumatized by the experiences they go through during initiation. Most have missed on the intended values of circumcision their parents thought valuable. A disconnect exists between mentors who guide them when undergoing these rites and the initiates. The boys wish for a less elaborate and less traumatizing rites with little publicity and accompanied with meaningful activity.

Introduction

Across different ethnic groups in Africa there is proof that masculinities traumatize other masculinities. The most evident time is during post war and conflict. However, in the African communities that conduct male rites of passage, one of the major marks of masculinity was the ability of a man to face the knife without a flinch during the rather public and elaborate male circumcision. In some communities this was and still is a communal activity that involved mentors' thorough preparation and education of boys, often over long periods, so that they went through the process as stoically as expected. The societal assumption is that boys and men are strong and any display of human weakness is unacceptable. During circumcision, the picture assumed is that of masculine stoicism that must be displayed throughout the initiation rituals as boys become men. It is this very picture that boys present during circumcision. In this paper we argue that behind the mask of calm obedience to mentor's instructions lie troubled souls silently crying for change, wishing for renegotiated and friendlier rites during circumcision. In this paper we describe an incident traumatic if the respondents perceived it as a threat in the process of preparing for circumcision or during the healing process after circumcision. The event could have been perceived to cause physical, psychological or emotional wounds or to injure an initiate's sense of self and consequently making him feel helpless and vulnerable.

Background Information

Male circumcision is traditionally a rite of passage in 40 out of 45 ethnic groups in Kenya. The groups that traditionally circumcise boys are distributed among the Bantus, Nilotes and Cushites. Most of these ethnic groups never circumcised infants, and all except the Luhya groups circumcised their girls. However, the Islamized groups and/or families circumcise boys before they are ten years old (Khamasi and Kibui, 2010).

The benefits of male circumcision illustrate that the practice has health and social benefits to society. However, the way male circumcision rites and ceremonies are carried out in different communities in Kenya confirm that it is also a source of emotional, physical and psychological pain that traumatizes many boys in communities that practice male circumcision as a rite of passage. Trauma can be linked to the type and mode of mentorship. This is because of a number of factors. Notably, a great divide exists between mentors of the boy child and the boys resulting to intimidation, fear and confusion. Mentorship, in this context is the role played by a selected group of individuals entrusted with the care of the boys during circumcision. Normally each boy gets a mentor or a group shares ones. Fathers are not expected to take up the role of a mentor in these circumstances. The process of mentorship involves making sure the boy's shelter is secure during the healing period, counseling the initiates and inducting them into adulthood, ensuring that the wound heals as expected among other defined roles. In a number of communities in Kenya such as the Bukusu, Tiriki, Kuria, Maasai and Kalenjin mentoring also involves use of physical punishment if the initiates show emotional vulnerability like shedding tears while in pain or when they are in fear of the knife during initiation. In some communities mentors basically organize and partake in elaborate traditional rites and ceremonies that are part of circumcision process during the initiation period. Mentors are also expected to offer guidance to the participants during the circumcision ceremonies and thus their roles are significant particularly in communities with elaborate ceremonies.

The different Kalenjin communities in the Rift Valley Province normally have groups of families organize circumcision ceremonies in their locality. These organized groups have designed schedules ranging from hunting, making cheap weapons like bows and arrows, to counseling classes that are meant to prepare initiates for future masculine roles of defending the community, fending for the family and upholding the masculine dignity and integrity. The Maasai incorporate

thorough induction of the boys to communal roles and responsibilities. Notably, these activities in their totality are designed by the mentors and therefore, the deeply rooted values of these mentors determine what is imparted upon the boys. The mentors' views often do conflict with that of the young boys. In communities where circumcision ceremonies are organized in groups, a number of boys from various social-economic, education and religious background come together. The boys who are brought up in modern homes with little knowledge of cultural practices may interpret such traditions as torture. A real divide occurs also between those born and brought up in urban environment and those living in rural settings. The former are bound to fear the strange surroundings and rites because some have had very little experience with life in the countryside.

A different phenomenon occurs with communities that have shed or lost most of the cultural practices particularly seclusion component like the Gikuyu of Central Kenya and the Kamba in the eastern region. Theirs; being only partial seclusion, sometimes a simple withdrawal to the boys' room has become another major source of trauma. First, the mentor is occasionally just one and sometimes just a few years older than his mentee and with little to offer. Secondly, such mentors add no value to the initiate's life except exposing the candidates to misleading information and sexual harassment by female peers.

Generally, the task of the mentor is geared towards instilling masculine values to the boy child as defined by the particular community. These are often understood as a reflection of male values of courage and stoicism and which happen to be values of the patriarchal culture the circumcision mentors uphold. Unfortunately this approach teaches the boys to wear masks, to hide their feelings and as bell hooks puts it, a boy "learns that his core feelings cannot be expressed if they do not conform to the acceptable behaviors sexism defines as male" (2004, p. 153). But it is important to note that Churches have recently started organizing families to allow their sons to be mentored under the umbrella of the church thus removing the responsibility of assigning mentors from the parents to the Church.

The cultural design of circumcision emanates from cultural beliefs held in a given ethnic group and it tends to shape and influence personal and social experience (Gelles 1999; p.87) as well as determine what is held valuable by that community. As much as lifestyles may change, seemingly,

there are some rituals and practices that take long to change due to the cultural identity they give to their members. This may explain why circumcision rituals have thrived despite the Christian influence in eradicating most of the traditional rituals. In her book, *The Will to Change. Men, Masculinity and Love*, bell hooks (2004, p. 17-34) describes how the modern man is entrapped in peer and social conformity to both ritual and practice even if they disapprove of it or even hate their very actions. bell hooks claims that men will know something is wrong but they keep doing it to avoid being ostracized, churned, laughed at or banished from participation in social activities, all in the name of upholding masculine stoicism.

It is in this light that in many societies, masculinity has been transformed into insecurity, fear and trauma as boys and men go through the socially prescribed roles, rituals and responsibilities. The circumcision rite was previously a cultural mark of prestige and honour for it allowed the candidate to display the full realm of masculinity such as courage, perseverance and endurance. Giddens (2001), a sociologist reveals how certain traditions are difficult to change despite general social change in a community. Male circumcision rites are examples of a conserved tradition that has transcended time unchanged. Giddens observes that: “even in the rapidly moving world of today, there are continuities with the distance past” (p. 42) such that the link between that past and the present is seen from the retained practices and customs. It should however be noted that, there are dangers of assuming that all the retained aspects of a tradition are relevant and acceptable to everyone in the community. Giddens argues that “we no longer assume that customs or habits are acceptable merely because they have the age-old authority of tradition” (p. 44 – 45) and we cannot therefore assume that all aspects of the circumcision rites are relevant or acceptable in every context in the modern African setup.

In the Kenyan context, this is a great lesson to mentors of the boy child during circumcision in the face of the rituals and practices that accompany the rite. Some of the practices may be strange, outdated and unfamiliar as they are adopted directly from a past that the boys have no connection with. Giddens claims that: “some traditions are also retained longer than others and tend to be superimposed on changed systems causing alienation...” (p.45). He warns that without rational considerations, such retention may cause conflict. This observation again points at that great divide between the rationalizing modern schooling boy who queries about the type of mentorship

he is exposed to and the mentor who will not let go of his traditional approach to mentorship and the circumcision rites. Rationalization may involve asking the question: can the same end be accomplished without traumatization? Can circumcision rites and rituals be renegotiated and restructured to acquire a more friendly form?

Contradictory Socialization

The December school vacation happens to be the longest one in the school calendar in Kenya. It therefore has been a period of choice for traditional circumcision ceremonies for many communities especially those that have elaborate ceremonies. Some communities in Kenya, particularly the Tiriki and Bukusu of western Kenya, and the Kalenjin in the Rift Valley or the Maasai in the south Rift Valley region are known to have such elaborate ceremonies that attract huge crowds. Ironically, for school boys, this is the same period that marks great celebrations in families during Christmas festivities. While most children enjoy with family and friends, those to be circumcised may feel that they are missing out on their normal routine. Consequently, such boys may reflect passive participation in such rites. The following narrative illustrates how conflict of interest and life style manifests itself.

Take a ride down the Chavakali – Kisumu road in western Kenya in December. Spectacular groups of people in pompous circumcision celebrations are a common site. Children, men, women, young and old clad in colourful attires match and dance up and down the tarmac road. One great contrast that greets your eyes however, are the padded feet of the men and women in all sorts of shoes, as seen against the bare feet of very young boys treading on hot tarmac in the middle of a hot afternoon. Some of the boys' feet look too delicate to have been exposed earlier to such harsh conditions. A stranger may find it cruel for such boys to be exposed to such harsh conditions, but it is believed that song and dance and rigorous challenging exposure, will transform the initiates into stronger and better young men. Despite this stoic performance, a keen observer may also not miss out the faltering steps of the tortured weary soles of the boys and the bewildered looks on the faces of some of them. As one watches such a spectacle and the disinterested faces of initiates, who, on the contrary ought to be dancing along enthusiastically,

one cannot help wondering just how long the practice will survive under such lack of interest of the key participants; the boys.

This paper reveals the boys' strong but silent disapproval of the way the practice of circumcision is carried out in the background of strenuous activities, pain and torture. The mentoring process is often associated with unfamiliar traditional approaches that sometimes involve threats and intimidation resulting to intrapersonal conflicts.

The paper therefore deems it necessary to question not only the choice and relevance of mentors and mentorship for the boy child but also the quality, content and of the process of mentoring for the boys as they go through circumcision rites. The appropriateness of any of the rituals that they must undergo is also crucial because the rituals tend to influence the boys' personalities. This is illustrated by the time allocated for the rites, often over short periods during school vacation. The boys are hardly ready psychologically, physically or even emotionally for such exposure and prior preparation may lack due to tight school programs. Most of them are whisked off soon after end of school term examinations to join other groups undergoing the same rites because the complexities and magnitude of the rites demands communal involvement.

Research Approach

Data for this paper was generated from stories written by primary and secondary school children in 2009 through Essay Writing Competition. The Institute for Gender Equity, Research and Development (IGERD) of Moi University-Kenya, in a project meant to create awareness on gender issues, sent adverts to various schools inviting students to participate in an essay writing competition under the theme: *the plight of the boy child*. We were eager to find out what primary and secondary school students would describe as the problems facing the boy child and their interpretation of the causes of the. The need to find out was informed by the fact that between 2007 and 2009 unrests were reported in many boys' secondary schools in Kenya. Boys in the affected schools normally burn school property including their dormitories where personal effects are stored. Many of the boys are ordinarily in their final year of study and do not seem to worry about missing examinations if they are expelled from school, an attitude that baffles minds and disappoints parents and school managers.

Adverts for essay writing competition were sent to various schools. In the package was a letter to the school asking for approval. The letter explained the aim of the competition and the fact that participation was voluntary and that the school and the students' identity would be protected. The teachers were also advised that IGERD was only interested in the ideas that students would communicate and not sentence construction. Many schools responded positively to the advert. More than 1500 hundred essays were received from both boys and girls. A group of researchers spent two days reading, sorting and classifying the essays according to various themes. This paper has used only the essays that mentioned male circumcision as an issue of concern which were about 600. A grounded thematic analysis was adopted to let the voices of the respondents speak (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). In this regard, the essays were sorted accordingly and read severally in search of better understanding of what the students attempted to communicate.

Discussions and Findings

Traumatic experiences often involve a threat to life or safety, but **any situation that leaves one feeling overwhelmed and alone can be traumatic, even if it doesn't involve physical harm.** It's note the objective of facts that determine whether an event is traumatic, but your *subjective emotional experience* of the event. The more frightened and helpless you feel, the more likely you are to be traumatized (Smith & Segal, 2011, http://helpguide.org/mental/emotional_psychological_trauma.htm, retrieved June 4).

From the findings, majority of the essays featured circumcision as an issue in the life of the boy child and many of them were written by boys from primary schools in the western province of Kenya. In this region, boys are circumcised before the age of 12. The rest of the essays were from boys in secondary schools; however, a few girls also contributed to the male circumcision debate. The essays were administered in classrooms and not to individual student separately. A number of the issues raised as challenges related to circumcision are discussed in this section with verbatim quotes taken directly from the essays. Cases of incorrect grammar have been ignored for the sake

of originality. A few suggested meanings for ambiguous words are however offered or suggested for clarity.

Male circumcision as a cultural practice

The majority of the essays stressed the importance accorded male circumcision as a necessity and an equally significant mark in ensuring social acceptance and maintained male identity and dignity. Most therefore understand it is a rite of passage that they have to adhere to. One of the secondary school boys aptly put it:

...in our communities, a male child is not considered as a great and useful person if he has not been circumcised. This means if you are not a man (you only become a man after circumcision), you would be defamed, cursed by elders or even thrown out of the community as an outcast (Jemo).

The above words may imply that irrespective of the boys' disapproval of the accompanying rituals it is mandatory for them to take part in circumcision rites. The respondent above is aware that circumcision is a mark that culturally differentiates adult males from boys.

The essays also reveal that the older boys who might have exposure to literature and religion as a course of study in school are aware of the values of circumcision as told by the elders and possibly communicated through text books for example. One boy writes: "... the boy has been the victim of culture. Secondly, during circumcision, the boy experiences seclusion ... he is taken to a separate place where he is taught on how to live and guard the society ..." (Ely).

The cultural practice does not seem to bother the boys at all and none of the 600 essays had hinted about abandoning the rite. What seems to bother the writers of the essays were the processes and experiences they had to go through which in their understanding, seemed against the values gained through formal education as pertains to health and respect for parents and worse still, the pain and torture that is inflicted physically or psychologically during the preparation for circumcision.

Inadequate Parental Involvement

From the findings, parents seem to have taken second place and the mentors the center stage when it comes to offering guidance or teachings pertaining to male circumcision. According to the boys, parents have abandoned their responsibility to initiation mentors who seemingly may be unfamiliar with boys' real feelings towards the rites. The boys expressed lack of prior preparation before surgical procedures are carried out either at home or in a health facility. The need to dispel the fears expressed in the essays such as bleeding to death is a parental responsibility before a boy is handed over to the mentors. This lack of prior information, according to Santrock (2005), stresses individuals and consequently contributes to trauma.

Smith and Segal (2011) articulate this point further and explains that a stressful event is most likely to be traumatic if it happens unexpectedly, repeatedly, or someone was intentionally cruel, or the event happened in childhood and/or one felt powerless to prevent it. Lack of prior preparation for the boys makes the rites experience repulsive to the initiates. It also creates a gap between the parents and the individuals charged with the responsibility of mentoring the initiates whose approach to mentoring often contradict majority of parents' approach. Most parents bring up their children in comfort and in a much protected way, only to suddenly give them up to strangers who seem ruthless to the initiates. That lack of prior knowledge about the demands of such rites creates apprehension and fear. One of the boys wrote:

In some communities like the Bukusu ... [in western Kenya], a boy undergoes a lot of processes which are hurtful ... a boy is to move from place to place calling [inviting] relatives and friends in any climatic condition [despite the weather conditions]. Besides, this he also undergoes some punishment by members of the family or friends such as the uncle who may slap the boy to see whether he is ready for circumcision (Kim).

The above experiences can be annoying to a child who has not had similar incidents in life such as walking long distances for no convincing reasons, and spanking at home or by unfamiliar relatives. Such experiences bring out feelings of betrayal by parents. Boys emerge out of these experiences emotionally wounded.

Problematic Mentorship

To some of the respondents, the seclusion period during initiation provided social loopholes where mentors as role models engaged in activities that could negatively influence the behaviour of the young boys. It is in such social environments that men learn about some of the traits admired by patriarchal adult male such as power, control, fear, secrecy, isolation and distance (bell hooks, 2004, p. 155). For example, adults taking alcohol and engaging in discussions that have sexual innuendoes in the company of the initiates who are normally minors could encourage the boys to practice what they see and hear, out of curiosity or conviction. None of the respondents however was against sex education as such; but they seemed embarrassed by mentors who used obscene language when talking about sexuality. One such boy, secondary school student observed:

For me I think the old people did not consider that boys don't enjoy those things of living in the forest ... sometimes issues like drinking alcohol begin thereeven if you try to explain, you are misunderstood as fearing or trying to teach elders ... it is all so bad (Felix)

A student like Felix above understands the role of modeling in mentorship where boys could fall victims to copying behaviors such as taking alcohol. Normally alcohol consumption is allowed during these celebrations and no participant is denied a sip; not even a minor! The fact that the initiates are minors and expected to continue with their schooling thereafter was a concern for Felix. Felix's reaction tells of how unprepared most initiates were because parents or guardians did not prepare them accordingly and hence found some experiences embarrassing.

Emotional Torture

The respondents who had an experience of being put in seclusion expressed that they missed their friends which made them homesick causing deep sadness and tears which were mistaken by the mentors for cowardice and hence resulted to punishment. These would normally be boys between age 7 and 12 years. During circumcision ceremonies the boys are threatened with dire consequences should they cry or show as much as just a flinch. Initiation here presents moments of inner antagonism and bewilderment because apart from the threats and the sudden removal from familiar environment, there is the sudden absence of familiar playmates in new environments

where the mischief of participants results to physical torture. Ben sympathized with such a victim and expressed the following:

....I saw one boy who was hurt by beating because he shed tears because he was homesick and they said he was a coward. The place was far and he missed his friends ... they should talk to them nicely ... so that they don't feel so bad (Ben).

Ben understood the effects of loneliness as not being just a feeling but a trauma that not only consumes the victim but also extends to his sympathizers like Ben himself. It is also scandalizing in many societies for a boy to express emotions of fear or pain during circumcision yet initiation consists of a series of painful experiences. The worst bit may be the fact that no one seeks initiates opinion about their feelings as Jeff, a secondary school student emotionally revealed:

On the side of circumcision the boy child undergoes a lot of processes which are tiresome, painful and destructive in his life. For example, in our Bukusu community, a boy has to run here and there collecting uncles, aunties and neighbours while carrying heavy bells. He is spitted upon, slapped, rained on, which causes the boy to suffer a lot (Jeff).

Psychological Torture

The public spectacle of ringing bells as one runs across a village attracting attention and trying to invite people, is a phenomenon condemned in most of the essays from the western region. It was described as heathen, unfamiliar, strange and outright unbecoming. Many boys recommended that it should be eradicated. Unfortunately, these activities, practices and rituals seem dictated to the boys rather than negotiated. In this regard, the boys are left with no choice but to conform to the very behaviour they consider traumatizing. A number of essays expressed the concern over the time devoted to such circumcision drills and public involvement, seeing it as a waste of time and resources. The crowds of onlookers are seen as a public embarrassment. Some of these onlookers are neighbors, classmates, school mates, friends and relatives. Hence the embarrassment takes long to dissipate because whenever a boy meets any of these onlookers, he is reminded of this

critical incident. This gets worse if one flinched or shed tears because the news spread across neighborhoods and into schools. The story gets told and becomes ‘a tale thrice told’.

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment was reported as an issue. Girls were reportedly seducing the initiates before their wounds healed. This could be associated with communities that practiced partial seclusion like the Gikuyu where girls were mischievously allowed to coax the boys to erect as a test of a functional manhood; a traumatizing experience because if the wounds are not healed, an erection is horror. If the selected mentor is young they often have no restrictions to visitors in the boys’ rooms and the boys are exposed to sexual harassment that may eventually lead to premature sexual partnership with some of the girls who occasion such places. On the other hand, circumcision ceremonies in many communities are times of merriment. Songs and dances are accompanied by obscene utterances and gestures, and are an embarrassment to the boys particularly when they observe adult neighbors, male or female, ecstatically gyrating and shouting obscenities. Due to unpreparedness, a number of boys are offended and disorientated.

Physical Torture

Trauma presents itself also in torture and torment which are apparently intensified particularly on the boys who come from elite backgrounds or seem protected or pampered. The torture is meant to harden them or for the cheer enjoyment of the spectators during the celebrations. This is the only time the spectators and the mentor has access to these kinds of children. Some essays exposed how boys are physically beaten to try and drive them to tears, a punishable act during such rituals. The exposure to pain through slapping or kicking or abusive language was basically meant to create forbearance rather than malicious torture in such communities, but mischief often leads to open, sometimes ill intended torture which assaults the boys’ spirits.

Health Issues

The rite itself is obviously painful and traumatizing especially if it does not conform to modern medicine and the use of anesthesia. The scare of contracting HIV through shared knives or getting infection from septic wounds psychologically tortures the boys. This concern was recurrent in the

essays and it implies that some families circumcise boys at home without anesthesia. One female respondent expressed sympathy as follows:

I think it is most painful thing because you have never experienced it anywhere else in life before and it may lead to death from bleeding or the wound may rot....some of the old men use a common knife or razor and have no idea of AIDS....I hear boys say they have circumcision yet I know they can get AIDS or die of other diseases ... our boys have no one to talk for them (Jane).

Though Jane above is supposedly unfamiliar with the spectacle and cannot differentiate HIV from AIDS, she raises pertinent issues of health and hygiene that might cause trauma. An undertone of this kind of fear was particularly conspicuous in essays from the Western region where a critical number of families use indigenous methods of circumcision normally without anesthesia.

Other concerns

A number of essays highlighted pertinent issues particularly when the question of handling weapons was concerned. The respondents did not seem to understand why they were forced to walk around with weapons that are often termed illegal like bows and arrows. For many, the teachings and processes contradicted their Sunday School teachings and were an outright violation of their moral values just as walking around with weapons is unconstitutional and odd. Ironically, boys are likely to be getting little from the moral lessons given by their mentors which sometimes come when one is in pain. The sentiments expressed by the respondents clearly indicate that the majority of the mentees disliked the methods used and the processes they went through.

Conclusions and Recommendations

While circumcision remains a healthy practice, the traditional view that condemns a professional medical procedure remains contentious as revealed by the responses from the students. Health issues related to lack of anesthesia leading to unnecessary pain, trauma and possibly HIV infections were discussed. Also, it is clear that mentors are far removed from the world of the mentees who find some rituals as responsible for negative experiences like unnecessary exposure to the public torture and pain in being slapped, pinched or caned. There is also the issue of

alcoholism and the embarrassing exposure to public scrutiny of their private parts. In addition, exposure to harsh weather conditions during the ceremonies and sexual harassment where girls are allowed to taunt and entice them sexually. These often will have detrimental effects on them (Khamasi, & Muita, 2010). Male circumcision in all communities that conducts it as a cultural practice is acclaimed as good and befitting were it not for the loopholes the students identified which point at the way sexist masculinity and patriarchal culture as transmitted by the mentors assaults the boys spirits thus dehumanizing them. However, the role of parents in preparing the boys for the rites was shown as failing to dispel fears that may traumatize them. The boys' knowledge of mentorship and its implications lend to mistrust of the mentors while ignorance on the features, principles and characteristics of mentorship rendered the mentors irrelevant. Emotional and psychological torture was also highlighted in many essays, implying the need for negotiated circumcision rites. The ethical issues of morality taught in school in guidance and counseling furthered the antagonism of the beliefs and values of the mentors and the mentees in relation to circumcision. A number of factors would therefore require attention if the boy-child is to be protected from physical, emotional and psychological torment and sexual harassment.

Though biologically strong, the boys' age, nature and nurture are factors that need consideration in any exposure the boys are subjected to (Fernald and Fernald, 2002, p.66). A more acceptable alternative mentorship, preferably one that conforms to modern medicine, practices and ideas should be attractive enough to help develop a positive attitude towards the circumcision rites. It is rather unfortunate that the attitude towards the circumcision rites has changed in its content and practice, a deviation from the original intent, so that it is now associated with trauma, pain, irrelevant teachings and drastic change from familiar friends and play mates to superficial roles which initiates hardly understand.

It should also be noted that the role of instruction to initiates, their adherence to it, perseverance in its practice and the strong moral and physical foundation of their character were strongly advocated for in the past to prepare the boys for the vital role of providing security for the community and becoming responsible and respectful family members. It should be noted as well, that some youth's role was to organize security against cattle rustlers or raids from neighboring communities and also protect individual families from criminals and thugs at both the community

and family level. Modeling that is geared towards such traditional responsibilities therefore becomes redundant because such functions have been taken over by security personnel in homes and by the State. It would imply that the perceived curriculum of mentorship will require revision to make it relevant, appealing and a positive learning experience.

From yet another point of view, circumcision was essentially, meant to kill individualism that tends to develop in childhood (Parke, 1999, p.238), so that the young boy views himself as a member of a community. There was need therefore for community involvement in instilling the true values of a village soldier; one who is not deterred by pain, harsh weather or fatigue while attending to duty. Apart from the development of cultural appreciation of dances and music, rigorous activity was meant to boost physical development of muscles and burn extra calories that often would come with the intense food consumption during the period of healing. Intense feeding at this time in some communities was meant to bring out a visual difference between the boy he was and the man that he becomes. This whole endeavour is viewed as torture by the boys. Living different lives today one may be tempted to believe that such a tradition may lose meaning with the school calendar being very demanding. There is need to listen to the boys' voices in order to modernize and therefore transform circumcision rituals.

Not all potentially traumatic events lead to lasting emotional and psychological damage. Some people rebound quickly from even the most tragic and shocking experiences. Others are devastated by experiences that, on the surface, appear to be less upsetting. People are also more likely to be traumatized by a new situation if they've been traumatized before – especially if their earlier trauma occurred in childhood (Smith & Segal, 2011, http://helpguide.org/mental/emotional_psychological_trauma.htm, retrieved June 4).

Data from this paper came from a small semi-structured sample. There is need for a similar research using a larger population and multiple sites. Further research in this field may include parents' views towards circumcision, in order to establish whether they are traumatized by the

same experiences as they hand over their children to the mentors and in preparation for circumcision. Ethnographic research is also recommended in the various communities that conducts male circumcision as a rite of passage. We also recommend that communities review the practices surrounding male circumcision so as to give the rite its rightful significance in order to refocus in the intended positive impact on the initiates and consequently on the boy child and future male parents. May be by doing so, we are likely to socialize the boys' with positive masculinities that are gender responsive.

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