

Is Less Trauma Traumatizing? Call for Negotiated Male Circumcision Rites

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The question of masculinities traumatizing other masculinities is a phenomenon that cuts across different ethnic groups across Africa. The most evident time is during war and conflict. However, a study carried out in Kenya schools reveals that male children from communities that circumcise boys as a cultural practice feel traumatized by the experience. In the African communities that conduct male circumcision as a rite of passage, one of the major marks of masculinity was the ability of a boy 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 have 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 endeavor 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 hundred essays were received and most revealed that boys are traumatized by the experiences they go through during initiation. Most have missed on the intended values of circumcision that their parents thought valuable. A disconnect exists between the 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.