

Influence of Organizational Dynamics of Male Traditional Circumcision Ceremonies on Household Socio-Economic Wellbeing in Keiyo South Sub-County, Kenya

Ruth Jelagat¹, Evans Nyamwaka², Paul Sutter³

¹Department of Sociology and Development Studies, Kisii University, Kenya

²Department of History, Kisii University, Kenya

³Department of Sociology and Psychology, Moi University, Kenya

Abstract: Male circumcision ceremonies are part of cultural traditions in most African communities. These ceremonies require commitment of household social and economic resources which consequently impact on livelihoods. This paper therefore, examined how organizational dynamics of male traditional circumcision ceremonies influence household socio-economic wellbeing in Keiyo South Sub-County, Kenya. The study used exploratory research design to facilitate in-depth understanding of the impact of male traditional circumcision ceremonies among the Keiyos. The target population for the study consisted of all community members who have participated in one way or another in the male traditional circumcision ceremonies in Keiyo South Sub-County. The study used a sample size of 110 respondents informed selected through snow-ball sampling technique. Interview questionnaire and observation the main methods of data collection. The study found that boys are circumcised at an average age of 14 years where their household members are expected to pay a sum of Ksh. 2000. Findings further revealed that provision of financial and nonfinancial resources for traditional circumcision is burdensome to some families as some are left in a poor socioeconomic status. The study recommends that the mode of circumcision should be altered in order to allow families and households adopt modern circumcision methods. This will save them a lot of resources and time spend on the ceremonies.

Key Terms: influence; organizational dynamics; male traditional circumcision ceremonies; socioeconomic wellbeing

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditional and Religious circumcision ceremonies are celebrated all over the world. It has been celebrated since ancient times and is still performed on boys at puberty to symbolize their transition from childhood to adulthood. According to UNAIDS [1] 30% of men in the world are circumcised for religious and cultural reasons; as a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood, and as an initiation ritual [1].

Male circumcision in sub-Saharan Africa is a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood, but is only practiced in some nations (tribes). In Kenya, very few tribes does not practice male circumcision while most tribes engage in male

circumcision. According to Ng'etich[2], the Keiyo of Kenya practice traditional circumcision which was started in the 1960s by the initial converts to Christianity and the circumcision rites are so elaborate and secretly guarded, that if anyone who did not go through the rite would not know beyond what women know. The Keiyo initiate their boys annually around end of November and early December during school holiday and after harvesting has been done. The boys live in seclusion during the period between initiation and graduation [2].

Chang'ach [2] have argued that the boys undergo rigorous cultural education during seclusion. Kiplagat, (2016) have explained that the initiation ceremonies acted as a rite of circumcision and commencement of the secret rituals of the Keiyo and the traditions of tribal customs. Seclusion is the period the initiates stay in the camp as they get trained for adulthood. The lessons given to the initiates while in seclusion are referred to as *kaayaaet-aaptaarusyeeek*. The initiates learned many practical things which help them later in life. There are a series of ceremonies accompanying traditional circumcision; preparation ceremony (*Rootyineet, yaaitaet, laabet-aap-eun, Tyenjiinet, Lang'uneet-aap Aineet*) and the ceremony for coming out of seclusion (*Ng'etuneet, Tileet-aap Kirokweek, Keetuchemetit*). All these ceremonies are accompanied by slaughtering of animals and preparation of traditional brews (*kumik*).

Similarly, it was also revealed that some communities such as the Kenya who used to revere tradition male circumcision are now changing trends due to high cost involved in the ceremonies [4]. These requirements continue to burden the residence of Keiyo South Sub-County who majorly practice subsistence farming, but traditional circumcision ceremonies are still witnessed. However, despite the cost and methods used during traditional circumcision being criticized, others argue that initiates gain more through traditional education and teachings during seclusion period.

Statement of the Problem

Male circumcision ceremonies are part of cultural traditions in most African communities. These ceremonies require commitment of household social and economic resources which consequently impact on livelihoods. The circumcision ceremonies demand the rampant use of traditional brews, slaughter of animals and preparation of different types of food. Lengthened stay among the initiates in seclusion is witnessed and household heads, who in most cases are bread winners, sometimes stay with the initiates for many days. All these organizational dynamics as a result of traditional circumcision may have an adverse impact on household economic stability and productivity, thus, affecting the wellbeing of the residents. From preparation to the final stage of tradition circumcision of boys in the community is lengthy and resource demanding, driving families into quagmire of poverty. This paper therefore, examined how organizational dynamics of male traditional circumcision ceremonies influence household socio-economic wellbeing in Keiyo South Sub-County, Kenya.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study was done in Keiyo South Sub-County, Elgeyo Marakwet County, using exploratory research design. This design facilitated in-depth understanding of the research problem. The targeted population for the study consisted of all community members who have participated or still participate in one way or another in the male traditional circumcision ceremonies in Keiyo South Sub-County, Elgeyo-Marakwet County. A sample size of 114 respondents (30% of 383) was used in accordance with the Krejcie and Morgan (1970). However, the final sample was 110 recording a response rate of 96%. Snowball sampling was used to identify community members who were knowledgeable about the subject under study.

Observation schedule was used to gain firsthand experiences through ascertaining the state of the households housing conditions and other observable aspects of the study. The researcher first visited the sampled areas to book appointment for the actual study, introduced herself to the research assistants and area chiefs, and then visited the selected areas as required to collect data.

The study used both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis where quantitative data was coded and entered into the SPSS program, then analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data was synthesized, interpreted and presented as quotations and narratives according to key variables of the study.

III. FINDINGS

Circumcision Organizational Dynamics and Household Socioeconomic Wellbeing

Organization of male circumcision is quite elaborate and time bound. In understanding these dynamics various activities

have been discussed below. They include: preparations before circumcision as well as activities during and after circumcision.

Preparations for Male Circumcision

While preparing for traditional circumcision of the initiates, there are several arrangements and activities that need to be considered as well as after circumcision too. For instance, the initiates' age, pre circumcision activities, reasons for circumcision, activities during seclusion and the role that family plays during seclusion.

Age of Circumcision

When asked to state the age at which boys are circumcised among the Keiyo community, the majority (75%) said that male circumcision takes place at 14 years and above, 9.4% said that it takes place at 13 years while 15.6% said that male circumcision was done for boys who were less than 14 years. This is as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Age of Circumcision

	Frequency	Percent
Less than 13 years	17	15.6
13 years	10	9.4
14 years	55	50.0
15 Years and Above	28	25.0
Total	110	100.0

The study results above indicate that majority of the boys are circumcised at 14 years and above. Various circumstances may delay the age at which boys are circumcised such as schooling as well as lack of financial and non-financial resources. Accordingly, in an interview with the retired chief who was also one of the respondent regarding age of circumcision, he said the following:

'Age of circumcision of our boys may vary slightly with some being circumcised early while others may be delayed. Delay for instance may be due to external forces such as education or lack of resources. The delay therefore may be as a result of waiting the boy to complete school or for parents to look for the required resources'

Pre-Circumcision Activities

Regarding preparations done before circumcision, findings indicate that 43.1% said that traditional brew must be prepared to facilitate the ceremony, 42.2% acknowledged the fact that for the ceremony to be successfully, there should be effective planning and organization while 14.7% said that before circumcision, people are assigned various roles to play in order to make the ceremony a success. This is as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Pre-Circumcision Activities

	Frequency	Percent
Preparation of traditional brew	100	43.1
Ceremony Planning and organization	98	42.2
Role Assigning	34	14.7
Total	232	100.0

N=232 due to multiple response*

Traditional circumcision is a ceremony that brings together the entire Keiyo community and therefore planning or organizing for the event is critical. The study established that preparation of traditional brew is a requirement since it is used for cultural and religious reasons. Drinking of traditional brew during the ceremony is perceived to bring a connection between the living and the dead and therefore, it is done to appease the spirits.

In addition, organization and planning must be done in order to ensure that the ceremony is a success. In doing this, the study found that various people are involved in organizing the ceremony. They include: elders, circumcisers, initiates' parents/family, appointed trainers and community leaders. Organizers are in most cases the custodians of the community's culture such as elders and community leaders. However, parents of the initiates are also involved since they are required to provide various items to facilitate the ceremonies. Trainers are very vital as they participate in taking care of the initiates as well as providing teachings and community education while in seclusion.

Reasons for Circumcision

In understanding why men undergo circumcision among the Keiyo community in Elgeyo Marakwet County, various reasons were highlighted. The majority (29%) said that it is a rite of passage, 27.7% cited cultural identity, 23.8% said that circumcision was critical in preparing young boys for future manhood responsibilities while 19.5% said that circumcision of male brings forth status and respect. This is as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Reasons for Circumcision

	Frequency	Percent
Rite of Passage	82	29.0
Cultural Identity	78	27.7
Preparations for manhood responsibilities	67	23.8
Status and Respect	55	19.5
Total	282	100.00

N=282 due to multiple response*

As a rite of passage among the Keiyos, male circumcision entails transition from childhood to adulthood. Thus, being an adult comes with responsibilities and initiates who undergo circumcision are not allowed to mingle with uncircumcised

ones. Boys who are uncircumcised are considered children until after they are circumcised, is when they are considered adult and therefore are allowed to participate in various cultural activities.

In addition, this transition (rite of passage) is accompanied by religious and sacred teachings in order to safeguard the community's identity. Cultural identity is very important to the Keiyo community because it enhances preservation and continuity of their tradition from one generation to the other.

Findings also revealed that male circumcision is a way of preparing the initiates for manhood responsibilities such as marriage. These preparation for future responsibilities among the initiates is done during seclusion period where the boys are trained and given the sacred and religious teachings regarding their community. It is at this time that they are also prepared on the responsibilities of marriage. During seclusion, boys are educated on important matters such as sexual life, marriage, and procreation and family responsibilities. Similarly, a study conducted by Chang'ach, (2013) indicated that the Keiyo boys undergoes rigorous cultural education under circumcision during seclusion period as a way of preparing them for marriage life. Although, he showed concerned that the cultural education they are given is detrimental to aspirations for high education attainment. Consequently, Brenda, (2012) in her article on why initiation is important in tradition African communities asserts that initiation (circumcision) is an entry to marriage since the initiates are taught many things concerning life including the secrets of the community, the importance of corporate living and how to raise a family.

Finally, findings revealed that another reason for circumcision among the Keiyo was to earn respect and status in the community. Earning respect is believed to be associated with bravery during the cut. The practice proves the strength and bravery of the initiates. The practice of circumcision therefore serves to elevate the esteem of the man and his position in society. Once initiated, a Keiyo man belonged to an age set. Sambu (2007) point out that the age set assumed by the initiates does not merely play a normal role, it is a point of reference for each member's commitment to his initiates and to the community at large.

Traditional Male Circumcision Expenses

When asked whether there is payment involved before one is being circumcised, a majority (84%) agreed that there is payment while few (16%) denied the statement. The study established that certain payment of financial or non-financial resources is necessary if the ceremony is to be successful. According to a village elder who participated in the study payment is mandatory to ensure that the ceremony succeeds. 'Payment facilitates various activities of the ceremonies including paying the trainers and circumcisers' he said.

In addition, when asked to state the amount that they pay during circumcision, the mean amount established was 2000

Kenyan shillings. This is also attested by 50% of the respondents. The minimum amount was found to be 1000 shillings while the maximum amount was 3000 Kenya shillings. The variation in payments was a result of negotiations with circumcisers and traditional trainers especially in cases where some households are financially disadvantaged. This was reiterated by the circumciser who said the following: ‘Circumcision fee is around 2000 shillings but it varies depending on the socioeconomic status of the household’. Figure 1 has a summary of the amount paid for circumcision.

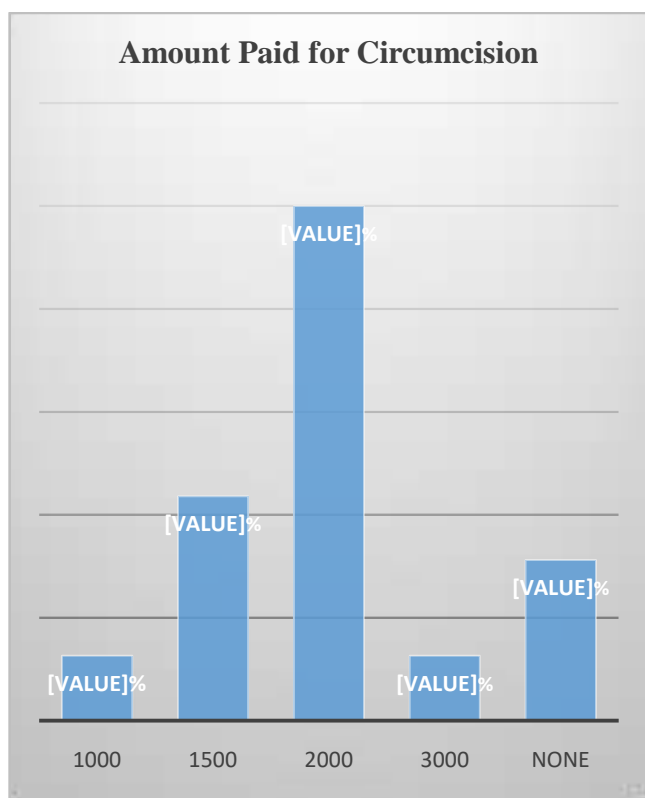


Figure 1: Amount Paid for Circumcision of Boys

Activities during Seclusion

After circumcision the initiates are secluded from the community members. They are taken into the forest for a certain period of time. There are various activities that are conducted during this period. They include the period of time in seclusion, types of lessons during seclusion, persons responsible as well as the role that family members play during seclusion.

Period for Seclusion

When asked to state the period that initiates are secluded, findings revealed that 35.5% said that the initiates takes four weeks in seclusion, 24.5% said that they take five weeks, 20.9% stated that they take six weeks while 19.1% said that the initiates are secluded for three weeks. This is as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Period for Seclusion

	Frequency	Percent
Three weeks	21	19.1
Four Weeks	39	35.5
Five Weeks	27	24.5
Six Weeks	23	20.9
Total	110	100.0

Findings above indicate that majority (80.9%) of the respondents assert that seclusion period for the initiates is more than three weeks. The period of seclusion is considered critical to the initiates in particular and the community at large. To the initiates, this is the time that they are taught the community’s secrets and as well as sacred and religious teachings. Cultural education to the initiates is considered vital in preparation of the duties and responsibilities awaiting them as adults. During this period, the initiates are well protected and taken care of by the selected members as they await to graduate into adulthood. The kind of training and teachings that initiates receive has been discussed in the next section.

Types of Lessons during Seclusion

During seclusion, it was established that initiates are taught and trained on various issues related to future of the community. The study found that community history (22.8%), marriage and procreation (22.6%), sexual life (20.6%), male responsibilities (17.6%) as well as life skills (16.4%) were the various lessons taught to initiates during seclusion. This is as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Types of Lessons during Seclusion

	Frequency	Percent
Community’s History	92	22.8
Marriage and Procreation	91	22.6
Sexual Life	83	20.6
Male Responsibilities	71	17.6
Life Skills	66	16.4
Total	403	100.0

N=403* due to multiple response

It is clear from the findings above that initiates undergo vigorous cultural education and training in order to ensure that they are well equipped to face future responsibilities as well as preserve the traditions of their community. For instance, during seclusion, they are taught the history of their community. This promotes the sense of belonging as well as enhancing the bond with their community by acknowledging their roots.

It was also established that during seclusion, initiates are taught and trained on marriage life. Through teachings, they are prepared to face the challenges of marriage life where procreation is encourage in order to preserve and ensure continuity of the lineage. During this stage, they are also taught on sexual life regarding their relationship with women.

In addition, the study found that the initiates are taught how to be responsible adults. They are trained on ways of accumulating wealth as well as taking care of their families. They are also made aware that gaining manhood status comes with responsibilities of safeguarding not only their families but the entire community. They are therefore taught the general life skills crucial for survival in the modern world. These findings also concur with those of Kasomo (2009) who establish the role of cultural education to be based on sexual life, marriage, and procreation and family responsibilities.

Person(s) Responsible during Seclusion

While in seclusion, the initiates are taught the way of life of the Keiyo community. This includes taboos, morales, folklores, norms among others. They are also taught the community's secretes. For this to be successful, various people are assigned with the responsibilities. They include: initiators, appointed traditional trainers/instructors, elderly men and traditional caretakers.

Role of Family Members during Seclusion

When asked to state the role of family members during seclusion period, 35.9% said that family members are required to provide security and ensure safety of the initiates, 32.3% said that the family is supposed to provide food while 31.9% said that the family is supposed to provide a traditional clothes made from skin for the initiates. This is as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Role of Family Members during Seclusion

	Frequency	Percent
Safety and Security	90	35.9
Food	81	32.3
Traditional Clothes for the initiates	80	31.9
Total	251	100.0

The study found that majority (35.9%) of the respondents cited safety and security of initiates as one of the major roles played by the family. In the seclusion, the initiates are supposed to be well protected. This was reiterated by Mr. Joseph, an elder from the community and who was one of the respondent. He said the following:

'Once initiates are secluded to a certain place, then parents of the initiates together with other community members have to ensure that the boys are safe and secure since the period is intense, tender and delicate'.

This therefore implies that safety and security of the initiates is prioritized by the community. This is to ensure that all initiates undergo seclusion period successfully before they graduate into manhood.

Furthermore, another important role that family members play during seclusion is by ensuring constant supply of food not only to the initiates but also to caretakers including the traditional trainers and any other person assisting the imitates during the period. In an interview with a mother who was a housewife over the issue said:

'The family has to ensure that food and milk are supplied on a daily basis to the secluded initiates. We also have to prepare adequate firewood which is taken along for the initiate to warm themselves and scare away wild animals during the night'.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Before and after a boy is circumcised among the Keiyo community, a lot of preparations are made to ensure that the ceremony is successful. However, some of the residents are feeling the burden of high costs that is attached to traditional male circumcision where traditional requirements and demands are becoming hard to meet especially to economically disadvantaged households. This has plunged some households into debts that are yet to be settled. Thus, there is need for the community to consider an alternative mode of circumcision which is cheaper, safe and without consuming time for the initiates who should be in school. This will improve the socioeconomic status of residents as part of the resources will be saved for household development.

REFERENCES

- [1]. UNAIDS. (2007). Male Circumcision: context, criteria and culture (Part 1). UNAIDS.
- [2]. Chang'ach, J. (2013). Influence of Keiyo Traditional Circumcision on Aspirations for Higher Education Among Boys in Secondary Schools, Keiyo South District, Elgeyo-Marakwet County, Kenya: American International Journal of Contemporary Research 3(4).
- [3]. Kiplagat, S. (2016). Understanding Kalenjin Initiation Rites: The Kalenjin Heritage. The Star, Kenya.
- [4]. Kibebe, L.W, and Mutua, M. (2012). The Emerging Trends in Luhya Circumcision Ceremony among the Bukusu Community in Bungoma North District, Bungoma County, Kenya: A Socio-Economic Perspective. *Electronic Journal of SSRN*. 10.2139/ssrn.2158448