

## Teacher Perceptions of the Influence of Male Circumcision on Academic Performance of the Boy Child in Baringo County, Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated teachers' perceptions of the influence of male circumcision on academic performance of the boy child in Baringo County, Kenya. Circumcision is considered an important rite of passage among the Tugen people residing in the County. Every year during the December holidays, all male boys undergo the traditional rite. The influence of this rite on academic performance of the boy child has not been investigated yet from anecdotal evidence, it has been known to affect class attendance and discipline of the boy child and in some cases leads to drop out of school as the initiates are considered adults who may marry and start families. Teachers are important stakeholders who hold key information on the influence of this rite of passage on the academic performance of the boy child and it was considered necessary to obtain their views. Descriptive Survey Research Design was used. A self-administered questionnaire was administered to the respondents. The target population was the primary school teachers from Baringo County who attend part-time holiday tuition at a local university. Ten teachers were sampled. Frequencies and percentages were obtained. Results indicated that pupil's academic performance and discipline was affected by the circumcision ceremonies. However, teachers did not support the view that pupils should drop out of school to get married nor should they be given special treatments because of their new status.

**Key words:** Male Circumcision, Teacher Perceptions, Academic Performance

## I. INTRODUCTION

Circumcision of the male child started way back in history as far as the biblical times. It has been increasingly encouraged globally for religious, medical and cultural reasons. In Kenya, male circumcision is practiced by many communities for all the three reasons mentioned earlier. However the prevailing reasons for most communities, the Kalenjin included, is the cultural factor whereby male circumcision is considered part of cultural rites of passage. Rites of passage are the ceremonies or rituals performed to mark a change in status, in this case from childhood to adulthood (Ginsberg *et al.*, 2014). The ceremony includes teachings of rules and taboos of the society, moral instructions and social responsibility (Ampim, 2003). In most Kenyan communities, circumcision for both sexes was the landmark of entry into adulthood. Ampim (2003) observes that:

The process of initiation concerns undergoing a fundamental set of rites to start a new phase or beginning in life. It marks the passing from one phase in life to the next more mature phase. Initiation fundamentally has to do with transformation, and has been a central component of traditional African cultures since time immemorial. As with most communities in Kenya, traditional male circumcision is among the most secretive and sacred of rites of passage practiced by the Tugen community residing in Baringo County of Kenya. The initiation ceremony has been practiced by the Kalenjin sub tribes of Nandi, Tugen, Keiyo, Marakwet, Sabaot, Terik and the Kipsigis since time immemorial and a respected traditional rite of passage to manhood.

Considered to be mandatory cultural rite of passage for boys between 13- 17, Kiplagat (2016) writes that the initiation period, which extended over a period of months, was considered to be the most important event in the life of the Kalenjin because the months the initiate spent in camp were a time of training for adulthood whereby an initiate learned many practical things which would help them later in life.

Traditionally the initiation period was supposed to last for a period of six to 12 months. However, due to the demands of the primary school academic calendar, the period has been shortened to one month, preferably over the December holidays which are the longest holiday period in the Kenyan school calendar. During the initiation period, the circumcision ceremony is performed and the boys secluded in order to learn the adult ways and discard childish behaviour. From the foregoing, it is evident that male circumcision marks an important aspect of cultural identity among the communities in Kenya and the Kalenjin people in particular. In Baringo County, previous studies on the circumcision phenomenon and how it impacts on education has focused much on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and little attention give on male circumcision on education. The reason to justify this unequal treatment of identical cultural phenomena can be attributed to the social, religious and medical attention that FGM has received in the past. Momanyi (2001) established that health risks associated with female genital cut including transmission of infections, excessive bleeding and pain while Mukadi (2017) agrees that many scholars have tried to establish the factors that contribute to FGM persistence and its effects on the academic and professional development of the girl child. Other scholars who have researched on female circumcision and girl child education include Kiptiony, (2015), Kimonge (2011) and all agree that the practice of Female Circumcision results in health problems for women inhibits their education opportunities and reduces women participation in development. The conclusion arrived at by most researchers is to outlaw the practice.

Male circumcision and its effect on education of the boy child on the other hand have received little attention in research. Studies on this topic however agree on the negative effects on education aspirations of the boy child (Changach, 2013). Azaliwa and Olemong (2016) note that after initiation balancing the demands of schooling and newly acquired Moran ship may be difficult because new initiates do not just take orders from anybody, but they are answerable only to traditional elders. Nyambura (2009) investigating the links between primary school boys' circumcision and academic performance in Gatanga Division, Kenya found out that that the indiscipline among circumcised boys was so much the pupils developed disruptive, behavior during class time and that boys became uncontrollable as they considered themselves mature men. It is thus clear that male circumcision not only has negative impact on education aspiration of the boy child but also on his discipline in the school. However, teacher's perception on this rite of passage has not been investigated yet teachers are at the forefront in dealing with indiscipline issues that emerge from male circumcision. To this end, this study investigated teachers' perceptions on the influence of male circumcision on the education of the boy child in Baringo County.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Traditional rites of passage such as circumcision ceremonies have received much attention in research and in literature in the past decade. This is especially true of FGM and its harmful impact on the girl child's health status and education aspirations. However, not much attention has been given to male circumcision and its impact on the education aspiration of the boy child in Baringo County. Though some researchers have concluded that the practice of male circumcision has negative effect on education of the boy child, no study has ventured to investigate the influence of male circumcision on academic performance of the boy child in Baringo County. This study notes that although there could be other factors impeding education of the Boy Child in Baringo County such as economic factors, male circumcision was chosen in this study as a significant influence worthy of individual focus due to its socio culturally elevated treatment among the Tugen Community living in Baringo County, Kenya.

## III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To determine teachers' perceptions of the influence of male circumcision on academic performance of the boy child in Baringo County

## IV. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a survey research design. This design was deemed appropriate for the study since data obtained would be from a sample at a particular time and would describe the characteristics of the population. The target population was ten part time school teachers in Baringo County who have enrolled for Bachelor of Education degree program and were attending classes when schools had closed for the December 2018 break. They were purposefully selected since they teach in Baringo County and therefore have experienced the effects of male circumcision on the education of the boy child. They were also easily accessible as a group and the researcher did not have to incur travelling expenses to access them in their schools. The Teachers' Perception Questionnaire was distributed to the respondents who were able to respond to the items on their own. The questionnaire contained both closed ended items concerning academic performance and male circumcision.

## V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis involved derivation of descriptive statistics derived from the responses recorded by the teachers. The open ended responses were analyzed for themes that summed up the opinions of the respondents. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics on closed ended items on the questionnaire.

*Table1: Performance of pupils before and after circumcision ceremonies (% figures)*

<b>Statement</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>low</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Total</b>
Performance of pupils when circumcision is approaching	20	10	70	100
Pupils attitude towards circumcision ceremonies	40	20	40	100
Performance of pupils after circumcision	20	20	40	100

Table 1 presents teachers' perceptions on pupils' performance before and after circumcision ceremonies. Results reveal a mixture picture. A high percentage (70%) opined that the performance of pupils as circumcision was approaching was average while 20 % commented that the performance in class, in the same period, was high. This could mean that the approach of the ceremonies had a negative effect on the concentration of pupils in class but the performance became average rather than low (10%). Katam (1996) studying the influence of circumcision of both boys and girls on academic achievement and self-concept among the Pokot community, found that the effect was more negative on girls than boys and concluded that there was a correlation between circumcision and education. Njau and Wamahu (1994) as quoted by Chege and Sifuna (2006) state that, initiation ceremonies affect school attendance and academic performance of learners. This results in dropping out of school. Katam, (1996) concurred with the two authors that the initiates displayed signs of indiscipline, declined academic performance, truancy and dropped out of school since their next expectation was to get married. Forty percent of the respondents reported that the pupil's attitude towards circumcision was high. This means that the pupils had positive view of the rite maybe because of its importance in the society as a gateway to adulthood. A similar percentage (40 %) felt that the pupils' attitude towards circumcision was average while 20 % reported that the attitude of the pupils was low. It can be concluded that some pupils had a negative view of the ceremony due to the adverse disruption on learning or maybe because of the religious background of the learner.

Table 2: Teachers' perceptions of influence of male circumcision on academic performance (% figures)

	Yes	Sometimes	Not at all	Total
Is the work of a teacher affected by circumcision ceremonies	30	50	20	100
Do your pupils continue with education after the ceremonies	50	50	-	100
Should boys get preferential treatment from the teachers after circumcision	-	20	80	100
Circumcised pupils should marry and start their own families	-	10	90	100
Does the circumcised boys attitude towards education get influenced by circumcision	20	50	30	100
Once circumcised a boy becomes superior to his female siblings irrespective of his age	20	30	50	100
In school circumcised boys must be exempted from manual work and corporal punishment	10	10	80	100
Pupils dislike uncircumcised teachers	30	20	50	100
In your opinion does circumcision have any influence on academic performance	20	60	20	100

From the data presented, the teachers' work is affected by the circumcision ceremonies: 30% of the respondents confirmed this while the majority (50%) reported that sometimes, their work was affected. Minority (20%) reported their work not being affected by the ceremonies. This concurs with Mutsotso (2013) who reports that during circumcision ceremonies, there is a lot of distraction since pupils disappears from school with their parents support. This reduces their school attendance and leads to non-coverage of the academic syllabi by the teachers. As a result, teachers may require more time to able to adequately complete the work planned for the academic year. The findings further reveal that 50% of the respondents reported that the pupils continued with their education after circumcision while an equal percentage reported that sometimes, the students failed to continue with their education.

However, the respondents (80%) were unequivocal that pupils should not get preferential treatment from the teachers after circumcision while a similar trend (90%) rejected the statement that circumcised pupils should get married and start their own families. Only 10% supported the statement that circumcised student should discontinue their education and start a family. This finding revealed the strong value that the respondents and society gave to education which should be acquired for socio- economic advancement. Dropping out for whatever reason was considered unacceptable. This contradicts Muthaa and Bururia (2011) who assert that the high drop-out rate for boys at primary school level in Igembe, Meru County, was attributed to their participation in circumcision and the *miraa* trade. The contradiction in study finding could be attributed to the differing cultural background of the two study locales. On whether the attitude of the circumcised boy towards education gets influenced by circumcision, a majority (50%) revealed that it was sometimes affected, 20 % reported that the attitude was affected while 30 % concluded that it was not affected. Mutsotso (2013) also reports similar findings in a study to establish pupils', teachers' and parents' perception of the influence of circumcision on academic performance in Bungoma District, Kenya that circumcision has got no significant influence on the pupil's academic performance.

The nature of participation in the ceremonies implies that pupils like circumcision ceremonies and this may have some influence on their academic performance since pupils seem to work harder in order to improve and merit for the next class. They also work to cover for the lost time. 50% of the respondents further denied that once circumcised, a boy becomes superior to his female siblings irrespective of the age while 30% agreed that sometimes a circumcised boy could be considered superior to his female siblings. A minority (20%) agreed with the statement meaning that they considered circumcision an enabler towards male superiority over females. Changach (2013) concurs with this finding reporting that among the Keiyos (a Kalenjin subgroup) once circumcised, the Keiyo youth assume new social roles and responsibilities. Psychologically, he is expected to exhibit behavior ascribed to adult code of conduct. His environment is altered as he is not expected to mix freely with uncircumcised and should respond to women in specific ways. This scenario provides serious challenges to boys who have undergone Keiyo traditional circumcision. The cultural induction provided under the initiation curriculum puts the 'man' above the 'woman' competing with the girl therefore poses a serious challenge to the boy who has been indoctrinated to believe that he is superior to the girls.

In the same vein, on being questioned as to whether circumcised boys could be exempted from manual work and corporal punishment, 80% responded in the negative while 10% supported the statement. This reveals that teachers considered circumcised pupils as any other pupils who should be given equal treatment as others. Regarding the statement that pupils disliked uncircumcised teachers, majority (50%) rejected the statement while 30% reported that pupils disliked the uncircumcised teachers and a few (20%) were ambivalent. This finding contradicts Nyambura (2009) who in study to investigate the links between primary school boys' circumcision and academic performance in Gatanga Division, Kenya found that the indiscipline depicted by boys who had been circumcised was so much such that the pupils developed disruptive, behavior during class time and one respondent added that some of the boys chewed papers and threw them at the teacher while the teacher looked away. The boys became uncontrollable as they considered themselves mature men. Nyambura (2009) adds that the circumcised boys did not accept to perform any tasks when assigned and when given punishments, they often declined to do. This often happened in the schools whose head teachers were female as the boys lacked respect and demeaned the female teachers. Being mature men they felt they should not be under women authority.

On whether circumcision had an influence on academic performance, majority (60%) reported that sometimes it had an influence on education while 20% reported that it did. A similar number 20% reported that circumcision did not have an effect on education. Mutsotso (2013) also agrees on the negative effects of male circumcision on education. She adds that those initiated report back to school late due to delayed healing. Some girls who were charged with responsibilities as caretakers of initiates are also forced to delay in reporting. They may perform poorly in examinations and continuous assessment tests (CAT) due to exhaustion and lack of revision. There is a clash of interest between the traditional cultural demands and education. With such confusion many boys and girls may drop of school prematurely.

## VI. CONCLUSION(S)

From the study findings, it can be concluded that

- i. Circumcision ceremonies in Baringo County may have a negative influence on education of the boy child but the influence may not be detrimental to the academic progress of the pupil.
- ii. The teacher's work is affected by the circumcision ceremonies since they disrupt learning and the pupils' concentration in class.
- iii. Teachers' do not support the view that circumcised male pupils be given preferential treatment in school, nor should they drop out of school and get married. This marks a positive view of education among the community.
- iv. Pupils liked circumcision ceremonies but this attitude did not affect their education.
- v. The attitude of circumcised male pupils towards female teachers remained positive after circumcision hence their discipline remained good despite the rite of passage.

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