

Elements of Alternative Rites of Passage Marking the Transition to Adulthood among the Youth in Sotik, Bomet County

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ABSTRACT: As societies advance in literacy, there is an increasing abandonment of traditional cultural practices that negatively impact individuals, particularly the youth. Many initiation rites into adulthood, practiced across various cultures, have been shown to influence transition into adulthood. This study examines the elements of alternative rites of passage marking transition into adulthood among the youths in Bomet County. The study employed mixed method approach of convergent parallel research design. The target population consisted 384 youths in Bomet County. Sample size was selected using the Krejcie and Morgan algorithm. Data was analyzed with the use of SPSS version 27, which includes both descriptive and inferential statistics, as well as Pearson's correlation coefficient. The findings indicate a significant shift towards ARP, with high participation rates in activities that promote essential adult skills and responsibilities. Vocational training emerged as the most prominent rite, with a mean score of 3.26 and 71% of participants affirming its role in preparing youth for adulthood. Religious teachings also had a substantial impact, scoring 3.06, with 60.5% recognizing its importance in reinforcing moral values and community integration. Alternative rite of passage such as Tumdo Ne Leel scored 2.82, while faith-based rites were acknowledged by 46.3% of youth, scoring 2.58. Medicalized circumcision had the lowest score (1.98), suggesting a marked shift toward less invasive rites. Furthermore, psycho-education emerged as a vital alternative, emphasizing mental and emotional readiness for adulthood. The study recommends integrating ARPs into age-appropriate education to foster responsibility. Support community programs to ensure cultural relevance. Partner with religious institutions to enhance community acceptance. Conduct education campaigns to raise awareness of ARP benefits and address harmful practices like FGM. Strengthen policies, improve healthcare access, and enforce regulations to support affected individuals and promote ARPs as a culturally sensitive pathway for youth development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Among many communities in Africa, boys and girls undergo traditional rites of passage as a means of transiting from childhood into adulthood life. The type of rite of passage practiced varies from one community to another and may take the form of song, dance, wearing masks, tattooing, male circumcision and female genital mutilation (FGM). Any or a combination of the sepractices are used as rituals to symbolize graduation in to adulthood (UNICEF, 2017).

The negative consequences of certain conventional initiation rituals inspired the idea of ARP, or Alternative Rites of Passage. World Health Organization (2019) defines ARP as a series of culturally relevant rites that help people reach puberty without participating in harmful practices like child marriage, child cutting, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/FGC), traditional male circumcision (TMC), and early pregnancies.

These alternatives were aimed at retaining the cultural significance of traditional rites while eliminating the risks of physical injury, psychological trauma, and social stigmatization.

In Kenya, the push for ARPs has been particularly strong, driven by both local and international efforts to protect young people from harmful traditional practices. The success of ARPs in regions like Sotik, Bomet County, highlights the potential of these alternatives to foster healthier and more supportive environments for youth. ARPs in Kenya often incorporate educational elements that emphasize the importance of health, personal development, and social responsibility, thus providing a holistic approach to the transition into adulthood (Gitagno, 2015).

The concept of Alternative Rites of Passage (ARP) emerged as a response to the detrimental effects associated with certain traditional initiation practices.

The ARP was first introduced in Kenya in 1996 among the Maa Communities of Narok, Kajiado, Samburu and, Laikipia by Maendeleo ya Wanawake (MYWO), a National women's rights movement and PATH Inc. as an 'alternative rite of passage' which avoided genital cutting. In order to gain community acceptance, these ARP maintained the important components of FGM such as education of girls on women's roles and family life, exchange of gifts, social celebration, and a public declaration of community recognition and acceptance of the initiates (Njue and Askew, 2004). The reasoning for the introduction of ARP was to encourage communities that practice FGM to maintain the public celebration of the passage of girls into womanhood without including the excision procedure (Njue and Askew, 2004).

In many African societies, including Kenya, traditional rites of passage are particularly significant. They are viewed not just as cultural rituals but as essential processes that integrate individuals into the social fabric of their communities. These rites often involve elaborate ceremonies that test physical endurance, mental resilience, and social readiness, with the ultimate goal of equipping young individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to fulfill their roles in society. However, these practices have increasingly come under scrutiny due to the physical and psychological harm they may cause, leading to a growing awareness of their potentially detrimental effects (Breton, 2005).

II. Elements of Alternative Rites of Passage

Transition into womanhood among the natives of the Mentawai Islands, Indonesia entailed one being beautiful and they had a belief that if a person's soul becomes uncomfortable with her appearance, the person should die (Parker, 2011). As a rite of passage, beauty among the girls who were approaching puberty were enhanced by sharpening their teeth with a rough rock and chisel then filing them to have sharp points. This was a very painful process to go through and it caused a lot of damage both physically and mentally to the girls as a rite of passage and as a culture. According to Parker (2011), alternative rites of passage from puberty to womanhood among the natives of Mentawai Islands is slowly but surely changing as introduction of religion is strongly taking over some of the cultural practices especially the challenging practices in native cultures.

In his research, Norris, (2011) described an Indian culture where a rite of passage to adulthood by boys in their puberty were taken for a trip to a secluded area. The *Algonquin* of the Indian origin practiced a rite of passage, where the young men's bravery, were tested by taking them to a secluded forest and then fed a very powerful drug referred to as "wysoccan". The drug made them forget the childhood memories including those of family and friends. After the trip and taking of the drug, the young men were not supposed to remember any of their childhood memories, and if so, they were administered the drug a second time to experience the passage rite again. This was a traditional way of transiting boys to adulthood and perceived unhealthy as it entailed many risks including seclusion in a forest for days and taking a concoction to flash one's memories. As Norris (2011) reported, this culture of transiting boys to adulthood is drastically fading after modernization in terms of education, and religion became dominant in the region thus the natives adopting alternative transition methods as rites of passage.

In West Africa, according to Droy et al. (2018), the Fulani tribe had one of the most challenging cultures when it comes to rites of passage from childhood to adulthood, as girls approached puberty, they were taken through a painful facial tattoo using sharp pieces of wood. They were to endure the pain without crying

and anyone who cried during the process was a coward and not ready to be a woman. Similarly to boys approaching puberty. They were thoroughly whipped and whoever cried was not ready to become a man. Just like other challenging traditional rites of passage, research by Droy et al. (2018) revealed that the victims underwent developmental issues including mental and physical well-being and thus strongly recommended alternative methods of passage to help in better personality development.

Traditional male circumcision was done as a ritual of entry into adulthood in many West African countries, such as Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Ghana, and Guinea. Due to its negative effects, such as the spread of HIV/AIDS, the practice became a subject of extensive study by Backer and Ricardo (2005), who also provided recommendations for alternatives to the practice. When boys reached adulthood, elders separated them from their families (women and girls) and sent to a camp in the woods, where they learnt the responsibilities of men from their elders (Barker & Ricardo, 2005). Conflict resolution, family dynamics, male-female dynamics, and the responsibilities of adults were common topics covered in these lessons (Langa, 2014). Teenage boys underwent circumcision as part of many societies' initiation rituals (Barker & Ricardo, 2005). Boys were encouraged to be composed during the circumcision trial, despite the fact that the procedure is extremely painful without anesthetic. After undergoing circumcision, the initiates undertook greater responsibilities in their communities, including consulting with elders, cooperating with peers, and mediating conflicts within their families.

In Malawi during the initiation the songs that accompany the sex-simulating dances were filled with sexual innuendos and explicit language. The girls danced naked and anyone attending can pay a small fee to be allowed to touch the breasts of any girl (MHRC, 2006). An elderly person called "fisi" (meaning "hyena") would be paid to engage in sexual relations with the initiates, sometimes without protection, in order to test their readiness for marriage (Munthali&Zulu et al., 2016). Initiation ritual organizers or the girl's parents often employ "Fisi" (Ayikukwei et al., 2007). A girl would be considered an adult in the eyes of her society after having sexual relations with the "fisi" (UNFPA, 2020).

In Ethiopia, the disappearance of puberty rites had multiple negative outcomes both individually and socially. For example, Bell (1997) warned that the lack of formal puberty rites is contributing to social ills in modern societies. He argued that in the absence of puberty rituals, young girls and boys were unaware of their changing sexuality and about the consequences and responsibilities associated with sexual activity (Wohabie, 2014).

Just like in the above countries in Africa, in Kenya various cultures practiced various methods of initiation making transition from childhood to adulthood. Most of these practices, however, according to WHO (2019) were harmful and not healthy from a public health point of view. Female genital mutilation is one of the most prevalent and widespread initiation rites in Kenya. A UNICEF report from 2019 found that the practice was most prevalent in the north-eastern region of the country, accounting for 79% of all cases, while a small portion of Nyanza, particularly the Kisii region and Kuria, accounted for 22%. The World Health Organization found that the majority of these societies used a painful method of female genital mutilation as a means of entering maturity.

In Sotik, initiation process marking the transition to manhood among the youth entailed isolation and seclusion. The Kipsigis, making up the majority of Sotik, Bomet County practiced the initiation process by taking the boys to seclusion and together with their elders, share community lessons on their expectation after the initiation process. Regardless of age, boys and girls after the initiation rites are ready for marriage and raising up families, which may be detrimental to their personality development going forward. According to Wodon (2016), children who are married off at a young age often experience emotional trauma and despair as a result of family pressure.

Among the girls, their initiation process in the previous years entailed female genital mutilation just like in the other communities like the Kuria and the Kisii. This, however, according to Gitagno (2015) is slowly but surely changing and replaced by alternative rites of passage. Girls who approached puberty were trained on values, which assist them on matters pertaining personality development. According to Gitagno (2015), these

alternative rites replacing the traditional ones was referred to as “*Tumdo ne Leel*” meaning the dynamic of traditional rites to the new alternative rites.

This study focused more on FGM as a traditional rite of passage as it was the most common practice among the various communities in Kenya including the Sotik community. This is focused as well because it is still practiced, thus an area of concern in the society. Worldwide, the practice of performing a non-medical operation to remove all or part of a woman's genitalia is known as female genital mutilation. The phrase "female circumcision" implies a connection between the practice and the male-performed procedure. It is currently uncertain where FGM first appeared in history (Thomas, 1987).

According to research conducted by the Demographic Council Kenya in 2014 among the Maasai, female genital mutilation (FGM) is an important rite of passage that helped initiate girls into a more respected femininity. Because of this, the community highly respected the fact that a woman who had experienced FGM was submissive, responsible, and conscious of her place in the home and the larger society (Population Council, 2004). TRP practices made the girls and boys and their parents proud by preparing them for the next level of life. Because of this ritual, their social standing as a whole improved. FGM is practiced to curb sexual desire in girls and women before and after marriage, in an effort to ensure marital stability (Njue& Askew, 2004).

III. METHOD

Research Design

To effectively accomplish the study goals, the research design (as described by Kothari, 2004) creates the circumstances for systematic data collection and analysis. It is the plan or conceptual framework that the study follows while gathering, measuring, and analyzing data.

A convergent parallel research design; was used in this study. In this design, the researcher employed both quantitative and qualitative aspects simultaneously throughout the study (Cresswell and Pablo Clark, 2011). Each approach is considered equally important, examined separately, and then interpreted collectively.

The convergent parallel research design has a number of benefits, one of which is that it allows for the integration of different data sources, which may make the results more reliable. The research gains from both qualitative and quantitative data by combining the former, which provides more in-depth insights, and the latter, which is more generalizable. Studies that need rapid and solid findings could benefit from this approach since it is time-efficient in comparison to other mixed-methods techniques.

Additionally, the design used structured questionnaires to individual participants which provided them with a chance to give their views on demographics, opinions, and habits. Cozby (2003) emphasized the effectiveness of such instruments in collecting a broad variety of data, including the frequency of past, current, and future behaviors, and this strategy is compatible with his suggestions.

The convergent parallel design was both feasible and crucial for assuring the reliability and validity of the research results, given that the study aimed to examine the elements of alternative rites of passage.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Kenya's Rift Valley province, specifically within Bomet County, with a focus on Sotik sub-County. Sotik is a unique setting for such a study as it combines both urban and rural characteristics, offering a diverse context for examining the cultural practices that influences the transition process of the youth from childhood to adulthood.

The population of Sotik is predominantly composed of the Kipsigis ethnic group, a sub-group of the larger Kalenjin community. The Kipsigis are known for their deeply rooted cultural heritage, characterized by the preservation of traditional customs and practices. These include rites of passage such as circumcision, which play a pivotal role in the socialization and personality development of individuals within the community (Simuli, 2017). This practice, deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric, is maintained despite external pressures to abandon it, highlighting the community's commitment to their traditions (Langat, 2007). Furthermore, Sotik hosts minority groups from other ethnic communities in Kenya, such as the Kisii, Somali, and Indian

populations, contributing to the region's cultural diversity and enriching its social dynamics (Chebet-Choge, 2007).

This study area was chosen because it represents a community in Kenya that remains deeply rooted in its cultural traditions, even in the face of modernization and external influences. The persistence of challenging traditional rites of passage, such as female genital mutilation (FGM), in this region makes Sotik particularly relevant for a study focused on personality development and the impact of alternative rites of passage.

By selecting Sotik as the study area, the research was able to delve into the cultural practices that shape personality development within a community that values its traditions. The study aimed to explore how these traditional practices, alongside emerging alternative rites of passage, influenced the youth's development in a rapidly changing social environment. The findings from Sotik are expected to provide insights into the broader implications of cultural practices on personality development in similar communities across Kenya and beyond.

Target Population

According to Fox and Bayat (2007), a study's population is the whole set of people or things that the research intends to draw conclusions. The people of Sotik sub-County were the subjects of this research, particularly the young people (those between the ages of 13 and 25). The study chose this age bracket because of the available first-hand knowledge of the shift from conventional to non-traditional rites of passage and because they have deep insights into both. Since this research intends to comprehend the effects of this shift on the progress of young people's personalities, its emphasis on this demographic is very pertinent. This study is well-suited to this age group of youths since they are just entering a formative period of life when rites of passage have a profound impact on who they are as individuals.

There were 4,194 people living in Sotik between the ages of 13 and 25 in the 2019 Kenyan government census. According to the 2019 Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2,221 were men and 1,973 were females. A representative sample may be created with the help of this demographic data, which gives a clear picture of the target group.

Sample Size

To determine the appropriate sample size for the study, the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula was utilized. This formula is widely used in social sciences to calculate a sample size that adequately represents a given population, ensuring that the findings are statistically significant and generalizable. The formula is expressed as follows:

$$S = \frac{X^2 \times N \times P \times (1-P)}{d^2 \times (N-1) + X^2 \times P \times (1-P)}$$

Where:

- S = required sample size
- X^2 = the table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (3.841)
- N = the population size
- P = the population proportion (assumed to be 0.50 since this maximizes the sample size)
- d = the degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (0.05)

Given that the target population for youth aged 13-25 years in Sotik sub-County is 4,194, the formula was applied as follows:

$$S = \frac{3.841 \times 4194 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{0.05^2 \times (4194-1) + 3.841 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}$$

$$S = \frac{4,027.2885}{11.44275}$$

$$S = 351.9511$$

Rounding up, the required sample size for the study was determined to be 352 respondents.

Elements of alternative Rites

The study findings after data collection and analysis are provided as follows;

Table 1

Elements of Alternative Rites of Passage marking the transition to adulthood

| Elements of Alternative Rites of Passage | Strongly | | | | Mean |
|---|---------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------------|--------|
| | Agree Count/% | Agree Count/% | Disagree Count/% | Strongly Disagree Count/% | |
| I have participated in an alternative rite of passage organized by faith-based groups | 65 (23%) | 96 (34%) | 64 (22%) | 60 (21%) | (2.58) |
| I was given some teaching on gender roles | 104 (37%) | 121 (43%) | 34 (11%) | 26 (9%) | (3.06) |
| I was taken through cultural values of our community | 80 (28%) | 117 (41%) | 44 (15.5%) | 44 (15.5%) | (2.82) |
| I learnt how to handle myself as an adult | 129 (45%) | 118 (41%) | 20 (7%) | 18 (6%) | (3.26) |
| I have gone through male surgical cut in a medical facility | 48 (17%) | 41 (14%) | 52 (18%) | 144 (51%) | (1.98) |
| I was introduced to some religious values | 117 (41%) | 103 (36%) | 31 (11%) | 34 (12%) | (3.06) |

Interpretation

The results presented in Table 1 elucidate the elements' of alternative rites of passage marking the transition to adulthood among youth in Sotik, Bomet County. The highest mean score was recorded for the statement, "I learnt how to handle myself as an adult," which attained a mean of 3.26. This high score reflects the significant impact of this rite on developing self-awareness and decision-making capabilities among participants. Conversely, the statement, "I have gone through male surgical cut in a medical facility," received the lowest mean score of 1.98. This lower mean is indicative of substantial disagreement with the practice, likely influenced by the inclusion of female respondents who do not undergo this procedure. In Sotik, Alternative Rites of Passage (ARPs) are critical in guiding youth through the pivotal transition from adolescence to adulthood. These rites not only reflect traditional and modern values but also adapt to the evolving societal demands for psycho education, spirituality, cultural understanding, and vocational training. This discussion synthesizes the data gathered through participant responses to key statements, highlighting the intersection between these ARPs and various independent variables such as religion, health traditions, culture, and education.

1. Vocational & Skilled-Based Training

The critical role of education is highlighted in the questionnaire with the statement, "I learnt how to handle myself as an adult." The response to this statement underscores the essential nature of education in rites of passage, with a notable mean score of 3.26. An impressive 71% of participants (37.1% Strongly Agree, 33.9% Agree) affirmed the value of vocational and skilled-based training in preparing them for adult responsibilities.

This high level of agreement indicates that education is not merely a supplementary aspect of ARPs but a cornerstone of youth development. By providing practical life skills, these educational rites instill confidence, self-sufficiency, and readiness to engage with the challenges of adulthood, ensuring a smoother transition from dependency to independence.

2. Religion and Spirituality

Religion and spirituality serve as integral elements of many rites of passage, and this is evident from responses to the statement, "*I was introduced to some religious values.*" With a mean score of 3.06, 60.5% of participants (33.7% Strongly Agree, 29.7% Agree) recognized the importance of religious teachings during their transition into adulthood. These rites are vital in instilling moral values, ethical guidance, and a sense of community belonging. Religious values do more than shape individual behavior; they anchor youth in a broader framework of social responsibility and spiritual resilience, providing them with a moral compass as they navigate the complexities of adult life. The integration of religious teachings reinforces the importance of ethical decision-making and fosters a deep connection to the community.

3. Training on Health Tradition and Cultures

Alternative rite of passage, such as *Tumdo Ne Leel*, emphasize the importance of cultural and health traditions. Participants responded to the statement, "*I was taken through cultural values of our community,*" yielding a mean score of 2.82, with 56.6% of participants (23% Strongly Agree, 33.6% Agree) agreeing on the significance of learning cultural values. *Tumdo Ne Leel* reflects the community's commitment to preserving its cultural identity and passing down traditional health practices. This rite offers youth a sense of continuity and belonging, ensuring that they remain connected to their roots while also adapting to modern societal needs. By fostering a deeper appreciation for cultural heritage, this ARP enhances the youth's sense of identity and empowers them to carry forward the traditions of their ancestors in modernized ways.

4. Faith-Based ARP

Faith-based ARPs are also a significant aspect of the rites of passage, blending vocational training with spiritual education. The statement, "I have participated in an alternative rite of passage organized by faith-based groups," received a mean score of 2.58, with 46.3% of participants (18.7% Strongly Agree, 27.6% Agree) indicating their involvement in these rites. These programs, while diverse in their approaches, provide youth with practical skills for adulthood, such as vocational training, while simultaneously reinforcing ethical conduct and community service. The responses suggest that while faith-based rites are valued, their impact may vary depending on the individual's experience and the specific content of the program. Nonetheless, they offer a holistic approach to youth development, where spiritual guidance is coupled with practical life skills.

5. Medicalization of Male Circumcision

The medicalization of male circumcision, traditionally viewed as a rite of passage, is evolving within the community. Participants responded to the statement, "I have gone through male surgical cut in a medical facility," with the lowest mean score of 1.98. 56.2% of participants (14.9% Disagree, 41.4% Strongly Disagree) expressed dissatisfaction with the medicalization of this rite. This response reflects a cultural shift toward non-invasive, educational rites that prioritize psychological readiness and health over traditional physical procedures. While medicalized circumcision is intended to ensure safety, many participants prefer rites that emphasize personal and emotional development. This evolving perspective suggests a broader reconsideration of masculinity and maturity, with a growing preference for rites that cultivate mental and emotional well-being.

6. Circumcision without a Cut: Psychoeducation

The non-invasive alternative known as "Circumcision without a cut" or "Circumcision with words" focuses on psychoeducation, offering a modern approach to rites of passage. In response to the statement, "I have participated in an alternative rite of passage organized by faith-based groups (psychoeducation)," participants highlighted the growing relevance of psychoeducation in contemporary ARPs. This method places

emphasis on mental and emotional readiness for adulthood rather than physical rites. By fostering self-awareness, personal growth, and reflective learning, psycho education empowers youth to take an active role in shaping their identity and future. This rite aligns with the broader societal trend of prioritizing psychological health, personal agency, and informed decision-making in the transition to adulthood.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

The findings underscore that rites focused on personality development are perceived as the most valuable among the youth. This observation is consistent with the arguments presented by Karine de Souza and Jafaarthe (2010), who contend that rites of passage signify critical life transitions. Their research demonstrates that markers of adulthood vary across cultures, with physical maturity and educational attainment being prominent indicators in Malaysia, financial independence in the United States, and decision-making capability in Brazil. This comparative analysis highlights that alternative rites, while important, are just one factor among several influencing personality development and the transition to adulthood.

In support of this, Thomas (1987) posits that traditional practices, such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Africa, are predominantly driven by cultural and societal motivations rather than medical reasons. The Kisii culture, for instance, regards individuals who have not undergone circumcision as “unclean,” thereby restricting their participation in certain activities such as handling food or water. This cultural perspective illustrates the broader context in which traditional rites are embedded.

Furthermore, the findings align with UNICEF (2012), which emphasizes that alternative rites of passage (ARP) offer substantial benefits, including enhanced personality development, continued educational opportunities, and improved decision-making capabilities in marriage. ARP also plays a role in reducing maternal mortality and psychological trauma associated with traditional practices. It offers a culturally sensitive alternative to harmful rites, supporting gender equality, personal dignity, and overall well-being (Chebet, 2007; Population Council, 2007).

V. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study shows that alternative rites of passage as valuable cultural practice plays a critical role in facilitating the transition to adulthood. These rites have demonstrated a strong influence on key aspects that helps in marking transition to adulthood, particularly in enhancing a sense of responsibility and comfort in social interactions. Such outcomes suggested that alternative rites are effective tools for preparing youth for the adult roles and responsibilities they are expected to undertake in their communities. This conclusion is consistent with theoretical perspectives that view rites of passage as fundamental to socialization processes, particularly in their role in reinforcing communal values and expectations (Turner, 1969; Mbiti, 1990).

The findings reaffirms that alternative rites of passage, when designed to address both cultural and developmental needs, are powerful tools for preparing youth for adulthood. However, addressing disparities, such as inconsistent effects on self-esteem, requires a more tailored approach that acknowledges individual and contextual differences.

Rites of passage, as Turner (1969) and Mbiti (1990) argue, serve not only as a marker of the transition from one life stage to another but also as a mechanism for inculcating social norms and responsibilities. By engaging youth in these culturally embedded practices, communities ensure the continuity of social values and norms across generations. The strong positive impact on responsibility highlighted in this study aligns with Turner's concept of "communitas," where the shared experience of rites fosters a collective sense of belonging and duty among participants. This communal reinforcement is crucial in ensuring that young individuals internalize the values necessary for the successful assumption of adult roles, thus contributing to social cohesion and stability.

This study's findings support Turner's (1969) argument that rites of passage reinforce social cohesion while simultaneously extending McCrae & Costa's (2008) view on personality development as influenced by environmental factors. The variability in self-esteem outcomes also aligns with Baumrind's (1991) assertion on the moderating role of family and social environments.

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