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## **The Emergence of Bukusu-Christian Rite of Initiation and its implications on Societal Value system among the Youth in Bungoma County, Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

Christian churches have been in existence in Bukusu land for over a hundred years and their influence on African cultural practices cannot be overemphasized. The role of traditional circumcision initiation of boys into adulthood, as practiced by various communities in Kenya has been transformational, especially in the development of positive social values such as morality. Over the years, traditional Bukusu circumcision has however failed to produce moral 'graduates', especially because the focus has been to instill values such as bravery, which requires encouraging boys to violence and coarse talk. This has resulted to increased sexual promiscuity among the youth, violent behavior, dropping out school prematurely, robbery et cetera. Many people in Bungoma, especially Christians, have adopted a Christian circumcision model, to provide an alternative rite of passage, which would allow for both developments of positive values and propagation of their Faith. The purpose of the research was to find out how Christian circumcision model helps to enhance positive societal values among the boys in Bungoma County. This was an ethnographic study which was cross-sectional and exploratory in nature. Qualitative methods of data collection were employed, that is, focus group discussions, in-depth interview, and observation. The central question of this study was how the Christian circumcision as practiced by Bukusu Christians enhances inculcation of values among the initiates. This study operated with three objectives: to find out how Bukusu Christian circumcision and initiation into adulthood processes are designed to inculcate positive societal values; to explore the circumcision candidates' perspectives on the role of Christian circumcision in the development of positive societal values; to examine existing challenges which inhibit Christian circumcision initiation from successful development of positive societal values. The findings of this study revealed a relationship between the adoption of Christian circumcision, and the growing attraction to good morals and values.

**Key Words:** Positive societal values, morality, Christian circumcision, behaviour, community responsibility, moral values

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## Introduction

Christian churches have been in existence in Bukusu-land for over a hundred years and their influence on African cultural practices cannot be overemphasized. This has culminated in the transformation and metamorphosis of the Bukusu traditional circumcision rite in what is currently referred to as the Christian Bukusu circumcision. This form of rite is practiced by a wider proportion of the Bukusu Christian families in Bungoma County who claim to deviate from the traditional circumcision practice to be guided by Christian values and principles. It has been observed variously that as generations of people encounter a new religion, their practice of the new faith could be visible in two distinct forms. On one hand, there are those who may cut off completely from the old religion to practice the new religion and on another hand are those who may end up blending and combining the two faiths in an act of syncretism. This is the scenario with the Bukusu rite of circumcision where some Christian families try to mix the two practices while others follow the Christian teachings to abandon completely the traditional circumcision rite. Wasambo Were (2014) with reference to the types of circumcision initiation among the Bukusu asserts:

There are people who blend the traditional and the modern way of circumcision. The initiates will go through part of the traditional ritual which include song, dance, eating and drinking and visit to the maternal uncle but instead of going to the river for mudding, they go to the hospital for clinical circumcision. Some Christians practise this type of circumcision and counselling is done by the Pastor... they are influenced by the prevalence of HIV and AIDS. They fear using the traditional knives and using African medicine and therefore opt for the hospital process which they consider more hygienic than at the village courtyard (p. 109).

This has given rise to a dual form or pattern of circumcision among the contemporary Bukusu people. Informants for instance noted that since the year 2000, there has been a notable wave in the Bukusu traditional circumcision such that the preparation process, actual circumcision and ceremonies have been taken up by churches in collaboration with medical institutions. This transformation has had some impact on the entire life of the Bukusu people in terms of youth moral values which is part of the core interest of this study (Wanyama, 2005).

In this study, initiation will be used to mean the process surrounding circumcision of boys, which includes training, mentorship, circumcision, some form of torture meant to harden the initiates *et cetera*. 'Positive societal values' is a concept phrase used in this study to mean all the acceptable behaviour in the community, for example honesty, hard work, protection of minors, respecting people, listening to advices, good discipline, protection of property, *et cetera*. The term Bukusu-land in this study is used to include Bungoma County and the neighbouring counties, where the Bukusu people have inhabited; which includes large parts of TransNzoia County, and some parts of West Pokot, Uasin Gishu, Busia, Kakamega and Nandi counties.

The role of traditional circumcision initiation of boys into adulthood, as practiced by various communities in Kenya has been transformational, especially in the development of positive social values such as morality. However, due to the spread of Christianity, influence of modernity, urbanization, and the general socio-economic status of most of the people, traditional circumcision, together with its original benefits, has either been repulsed, or is unavailable to many boys. It is thus feared that the increasing demand to do away with traditional circumcision, could also mean losing significant indigenous values originally embedded in the traditional circumcision process. Several opinion leaders attribute the recent rise of moral decadence to lack of proper mentorship of the

youth and development of positive values, which were fundamental aspects of traditional circumcision. In the recent decades, various stakeholders have been trying different intervention strategies to avoid losing the benefits of traditional circumcision. Among the Bukusu people of Luhya ethnicity living in Bungoma County, Christian communities have tried including traditional processes of mentorship and inculcation of societal values into their circumcision process. It was envisaged that the increase in Christian circumcision would result in increased development of positive social values. Sadly, the rise in moral decadence continues unabated. This study sought to answer three questions: How Christian circumcision and initiation into adulthood processes among the Bukusu people is designed to inculcate positive societal values; what view candidates of Christian circumcision hold concerning the role of Christian circumcision in the development of positive societal values; and what challenges exist that inhibit Christian circumcision and initiation into adulthood from successful development of positive societal values?

### Conceptual Framework



This study examined how the Christian circumcision rites (X), influences the development of positive societal values (Y) of the boy-graduates. It is conceived in this study that circumcision rites influence values through the process of initiation into adulthood (intervening variable).

### Methodology

This was an ethnographic study. It was also cross-sectional and exploratory in nature. Qualitative methods of data collection were employed, that is, focus group discussions, in-depth interview, and observation. Ethnography was employed to study social interactions, behaviours, and perceptions of Christian Bukusu initiates, to understand their view on the transformational aspect of Bukusu Christian circumcision processes, challenges and success. Ethnography was chosen because of its potential to provide an insider's view and holistic insights of how Bukusu Christian initiates, parents and the church, understand their world. The culture, worldviews, perceptions and practices of Bukusu initiates were documented as people lived in their natural setting (Creswell, 2007). Three focus group discussions were organized, each involving 4 people (four initiates, four parents, and four religious leaders who have participated in Christian circumcision). Six key participants were further interviewed (in-depth). The key participants were first determined through expert judgement, and the rest accessed through snowball technique. The central question of this study was how the Christian circumcision as practiced by Bukusu Christians enhances inculcation of values among the initiates. This study operated with three objectives:

- (i) To find out how Bukusu Christian circumcision initiation into adulthood processes are designed to inculcate positive societal values.
- (ii) To explore the circumcision candidates' perspectives on the role of Christian circumcision in the development of positive societal values.
- (iii) To examine existing challenges which inhibit Christian circumcision and initiation into adulthood from successful development of positive societal values.

## Literature Review

H. Richard Niebuhr (1975) discusses the concepts of culture and Christianity, showing various approaches to their relationships. This book is relevant to this study because Christian circumcision is an area where a cultural practice of circumcision is implemented in the context of Christian faith. Niebuhr explores five approaches to Christ and culture relationships. First, he presents the concept of 'Christ against Culture.' He notes that this is the most radical view, where Christian faith is seen to be antagonistic to culture, rubbishing all cultural activities (in this sense, including Bukusu traditional circumcision) as being satanic. This is based on 1 John 2:15, where Christians are to avoid loving the world, or anything in the world. The second approach is known as Christ of Culture. This view claims that Christ is to be understood as the highest aspiration and fulfilment of culture. In this way it is possible to affirm both Christ and culture and to deny any necessary opposition between the two. The third approach is known as Christ above Culture, where cultural practice is accepted, but must be understood as being subject to Christian faith, but not in competition. The view emphasizes that good works are carried out in culture, yet are only made possible by grace, so that the kingdom of grace impinges on the kingdom of the world from above. In this view, through grace we can love our neighbour, but it is only in culture that we can act on that love. The fourth is Christ and Culture in Paradox: The paradox view differs from the preceding one by maintaining that while both Christ and culture claim our loyalty, the tension between them cannot be reconciled by any lasting synthesis. The fifth view is that of 'Christ the Transformer of Culture' where Christ is seen to adopt cultural practices (such as circumcision in this study) and transform them to achieve a Christian goal.

The first relevant article reviewed is by Stephen B. I. Akaranga (1996). He asserts that Bukusu initiation, even before the coming of the missionaries included a systematic mentoring system, where senior members of the community imparted knowledge and values to the growing members of the community. The elders and other community leaders always purposed to behave well, in a manner that would be exemplary to the youth. In the case where an elderly person behaved questionably, mechanisms were put in place, to ensure that such a person gets punished, and sidelined, to make a communication that his/her behaviour was loathed. Over the years however, traditional circumcision waned from its original goal, and has been taken over by social outcasts, thus converting the entire process to be malevolent. Akaranga thus provides a context basis why there was a need for change of circumcision practice.

Daniel Lagat (2017) in his article "Burial Rituals among the Luhya People of Kenya" avers that traditional rituals have remained resilient among the Bukusu sub-ethnic group of the Luhya people of Kenya. These rituals, such as circumcision and burial rituals are held with high respect, and have not changed significantly, even after the advent of missionary religions in Kenya. This study operates with the understanding that the traditional circumcision is held highly but investigates how the Christian circumcision succeeds in its influence on moral values in order to create attraction among the Bukusu people of Bungoma County.

Prior to the coming of missionaries and the subsequent introduction of Christianity in African communities, the Bukusu people of Western Kenya believed in a divine trinity that is headed by an almighty and creator god of life and everything in the world; A god who was a giver, an all-powerful and good god. This god is popularly known by the Bukusu people as *Wele Khakaba*- the Supreme giver. The historian Makila (1982) explains that *Wele Khakaba* is the creator and sustainer of all the good things among the Bukusu people. *Khakaba* is believed to have created human beings whom

he chose to retain his power and control over their welfare by either blessing them with life and prosperity or bringing upon them misfortune including poverty and death. He also chose to control their imagination and thinking to ensure that their thought was moral and everything they did was for the good of their subjects. Makila further elaborates that below the supreme god in the divine trinity were two messenger gods- *Barumwa* namely, *Malaba* and *Mukhobe*. *Malaba* was *Omurumwa Omwayi we Babandu* –a messenger guardian for all human life and animals whose responsibility was to take care of the welfare of the people and their livestock. *Mukhobe*, on the other hand was *Omurumwa Omwayi we Babami*- a messenger guardian for the rulers. *Mukhobe*, oversaw rules and was responsible in guiding the wisdom, thinking, and speech of the rulers so that their decisions would always be for the good welfare of their subjects.

This divine trinity hierarchy among the Bukusu people is further intertwined with the cult of the ancestral spirits whose conduct is believed to be controlled and influenced by *Wele Khakaba*. Although the place of the spirit world is often misconstrued to mean that Africans worshiped the ancestral spirits, the Bukusu people believed and worshiped a supreme god whose special dwelling place was known as *Lukongo*- a high resting place possibly like the peak of a high mountain or in the sky where he observed, monitored and influenced every activity on the created universe and all the prayers were dedicated to *Wele Khakaba*. In some cases, the Bukusu people would erect sacred religious shrines in homesteads known as *Namwima* and on special occasions, community members would gather to worship and sacrifice an animal on *Namwima*. Wasambo Were (2014) summarily makes the following observation on the religious beliefs and practices that pervade the Bukusu community:

A person prayed in the morning to welcome the day. Travellers prayed for safe journey. Hunters did the same for successful hunting trips. Prayer was said for the sick. God's blessings were sought out on all important occasions making a turning point in a person's life: at birth and in circumcision for a successful operation, at initiation when imparting rules of adulthood and at marriage and death. God's blessings were also sought when sowing and reaping. Special thanks were again given to God when a harvest was successful. The *Babukusu* also prayed when building a new hut (p. 10).

This information helps to provide a basis for us to understand the religious faith of the Bukusu people before the introduction of Christianity. This is because cultures are incomprehensible without the religious component in them and in understanding the Bukusu Christian initiation; it requires some comprehension of where the community has come from in terms of their religious faith. It further explains that although the Bukusu community later embraced other foreign faiths such as Christianity and Islam, they originally had a traditional religion that wholly pervaded their life and came to the fore during initiation rites.

## Findings

### Inculcation of Values in Bukusu Christian Circumcision

The findings of this study revealed a relationship between the adoption of Christian circumcision, and the growing attraction to good morals and values. We established that there was a projection of parent's faith on the life of sons. Christian parents were more likely to recommend Christian circumcision to their sons, because they believed that it was good for their conduct. In this sense, therefore, circumcision is understood as being a forum for parents to provide guidance on proper living. To further reinforce the idea that circumcision was mostly about religion, most of the parents



involved their religious leaders, priests, clergy, et cetera. Sometimes, the circumcision act was performed in a church compound, and treated as though it was a religious (Christian) worship activity. The invocation of God, the songs, the prayers, and other similar Christian religious rituals, were performed in order to imprint in the hearts of the circumcision candidates that those are the desired values that should be visible in their lives during the circumcision period, and later.

The pre-initiation stage of the Christian Bukusu circumcision does not entail much activity, as is usually the case with traditional circumcision. There are no elaborate procedures and early planning involved in terms of preparations. At the initial stage, the process is considered as an event within the nuclear family. The pre-initiation stage has no specific rituals accompanying the transition and does not involve members of the extended family. All the relatives including uncles, aunties, cousins, grandparents, father's age-mates (*Bakoki*), friends and neighbours are excluded at this stage. The Christians avoid these parties in the attempt to avoid time and financial costs. This is also done to instil a Christian value of prudence in the use of wealth and time. One respondent interviewed observed:

The Bukusu traditional circumcision is clouded with activities, most of which involves eating and drinking. Boys are exposed to travelling exercises, most of which are done on foot, and which require weeks or even months to accomplish. The relatives that attend their circumcision use a lot of money to attend and consume a lot of food. Sometimes, the cost of funding a circumcision of one's son, takes more time, attention, and money than the cost needed for university education (Interview with a 55-year-old Christian Bukusu man).

The practice of Christian circumcision, which tries to eliminate most of the time and financial costs, is thus an opportunity to inculcate the value of prudence among the youth. Parents and elders of the Christian Bukusu Circumcision further emphasized that instead of slaughtering ceremonial animals during circumcision, the cattle are preserved either to be sold to cater for the initiate and his siblings' school fees or for marriage in future. In fact, for them, circumcision for the initiate without education is doom. They seemed to really value schooling as they argued that if the initiate is properly learned, then he can buy as many animals as possible to replace what was sold to cater for his school fees but not vice versa, as is in the tradition circumcision where animals are offered as sacrifices to the ancestral spirits. In this sense, the value of education in the Christian Bukusu Circumcision seems to override the circumcision ritual.

Christian circumcision among the Bukusu is usually done at the hospital, and the caring process is usually offered at home. The mindset behind this option is that the hospitals are places with reliable medical procedures, where approved scientific measures are taken. Furthermore, hygiene is highly maintained in the hospital, and recommended, even when the initiate is at home recuperating. The value being instilled here is that, a Christian ought to care for one's body in the most reliable way, for human bodies are important to God; they are temples of the Holy Spirit. The initiates are thus guided to always choose the best and the approved options for their health. The places where initiates are kept, during the process of healing, are very tidy places, sometimes inside the house of their parents, in a selected room. The cooks who prepare food are usually warned against serving any contaminated food to the initiates. They are encouraged to serve food that is balanced, fresh, clean, and well cooked. This is in contrast with the traditional circumcision processes, where the initiates are usually exposed to dirt, smoke, unclean water *et cetera*. The value being instilled in the

traditional circumcision is bravery and resilience while the value being instilled in Christian circumcision is hygiene and self-care.

Another value being instilled is that of separation from the world. The initiates are nurtured to understand that they are different from the rest of the boys, both uncircumcised, and those traditionally circumcised. This nurture of separation is meant to cultivate in them the desire to supersede the rest, in school performance and general behaviour. They are trained to think and act in a superior way. A male participant aged 46, and who was a parent of Christian circumcision initiates asserted:

Ours are trained to be different. We teach them that they cannot be like the traditionally circumcised boys. They are children of God, and the light of the world. As such, they are educated on how to avoid worldly passions, sexual promiscuity, smuggling, theft, betting and gambling, and to avoid all kinds of silly jokes and idleness (Interview December 2016 in Bungoma County).

As noted above therefore, Christian circumcision seeks to raise a generation of men who seek to be different in conduct, to shine and stand out above the rest of the boys in good morals. This explains why the Christian circumcision attempts to conduct their activities in ways that are not in tandem with cultural and traditionally accepted ways. The Christian circumcision avoids the traditional circumcisers, the use of alcohol, the preparatory rituals *et cetera*. It could be argued that, although most of the boys initially feel odd, especially in relation to what their peers in the traditional circumcision are going through, what Christian circumcision achieves is to set them apart; to cultivate an idea of separateness, and a feeling of superiority. It is important to note, however, that this feeling of superiority is yet to be achieved in practice; it is still an idea being communicated to the initiates.

Similarly, the culture of superior thinking is inculcated in the area of academic hard work. The initiates are encouraged to stand out in their academics, and to shine above and over the rest. In one of Christian circumcision 'graduations' attended by the researcher; one speaker asserted:

... read, and read, and ensure you finish all the available books on this world. once you are done, please ask those in charge if there are more books... In case they confirm that there are no more books, then that is the only point that you may feel that you are highly educated.

Another stressed:

Keep good company always of people who love books, work hard in school to ensure you are always at the top of your class because life is very competitive, and leaders must always be the head not the tail. Throughout my life in school, I never came second to anyone... That is why I succeeded. I am now comfortable in life and a leader with enough wealth and property. Say 'No' to poverty by working hard in school.

Such sentiments clearly demonstrate that the people's attitude to education and wealth in the contemporary society is transforming the Bukusu Circumcision. Education and wealth are valued much more than the transition process accompanying the Christian Bukusu Circumcision. Moreover, although the graduation process is organized as the only formal setting to impact moral values to the initiate in the Christian Bukusu Circumcision, the programme revealed that there are no specific tutors, counsellors and mentors chosen on the basis of their experience to offer moral

guidance to the initiate and the participants were unknown/ strangers to each other such that there was no unity in purpose among participants to co-operate and reinforce each other's message towards achieving a common moral end.

### **Initiates Perception of Christian Circumcision**

This study also explored the perception of the initiates on the Christian circumcision processes. To get to this, we sought to understand the reasons as to why some families practice the Christian Bukusu circumcision. The views of the parents of the initiates who practice the Christian Bukusu circumcision were that they chose to circumcise their sons guided by Christian principles because they are born again and would not want to mix the traditional ritual with Christianity. They indicated that they opted to deviate from the traditional circumcision to avoid the elaborate rituals and ceremonies that come along with the traditional circumcision which directly contravenes Christian teachings. They also argued that traditional circumcision includes ceremonies of invoking and sacrificing to superhuman beings and destruction of property and foodstuffs by youth. The parents especially, highlighted that the process is safe and that the use of modern biomedicine ensures faster healing of the wound to allow the initiates to go back to school immediately after the August holiday. The following sentiments were uttered by one of the participants, aged 60 and a parent to one of the initiates in the study:

During the traditional circumcision, the youth sing and dance in a very immoral way and there is the drinking of beer making youth to appear chaotic and rowdy. At times, they use vulgar language which is very embarrassing. The ceremonies run through the night allowing boys and girls to mix freely which promotes promiscuity that result in unwanted pregnancies among young girls in Bungoma County after every circumcision season. There is also the fear of spreading the AIDS virus through use of the traditional circumcision knife (Parent of the Christian circumcision).

The opinion of this participant seemed to have been the general perspective of most of the Christian parents in Bungoma. Such sentiments help to understand the genesis of the Christian Bukusu circumcision that is founded on the negative perception of the traditional Bukusu circumcision practices and conduct. In the recent years, most Christian families in Bungoma County tend to see the rituals accompanying the traditional rite as contrary to their Christian teachings besides the security, moral, safety and health issues.

The crux of this study was however the opinions and the perspectives of the initiates themselves. Though in general the boys did not make the decisions on which circumcision option they would like to go through, their own perspectives were important in this study, because they would determine how they accepted and adopted the values inculcated. One of the initiates interviewed opined that the preparation for initiation was disadvantages to the boys going through Christian circumcision because they were not allowed time to invite their friends to witness one of their important life events. Christian circumcision has no elaborate procedures and early planning involved in terms of preparations. At the initial stage, the process is considered as an event within the nuclear family. The pre-initiation stage has no specific rituals accompanying the transition and does not involve members of the extended family. All the relatives including uncles, aunties, cousins, grandparents, father's age-mates (*Bakoki*), friends and neighbours are excluded at this stage. In terms of gender, young girls are also not a target in the Christian Bukusu Circumcision as they have no specific role in the initiation rite. They do not participate in the process and are never



a target in the teaching of moral values. Similarly, those boys to be circumcised soon do not participate actively. In most cases, the consent of the initiate himself is rarely sought as he is just informed about the arrangement by the parents hence the initiate does not willingly and voluntarily declare himself as candidate. The Christian Bukusu circumcision therefore is never a personal choice by the candidate himself and at the initial stage of preparation the candidate does not actively participate in the process.

The initiates had a poor perception of circumcisers. In one of the focused group discussions, an initiate observed:

Unlike our colleagues in the traditional set up, our circumcisers are not interested in having any relationship with us. They treat us just like patients. They do not even care about our names, clans, totems, etc. They just look at our genitals; they operate, apply medicine, then they get going to the next patient! Our friends in the other avenue became attached to their circumcisers, and they have a name for him. With the current trend of circumcision in the hospital, I fear that soon women or even uncircumcised men will be circumcising boys in the hospital!

As noted above, the circumciser is a medical practitioner who performs the operation on the initiate and is mostly unknown to the parents of the initiate and the initiate himself. Whoever is on duty at the health facility and can perform the surgery plays the role of the circumciser. In the Christian Bukusu circumcision, both men and women serve as circumcisers. The role of circumcisers transcends social boundaries to include diverse backgrounds of medical experts from various tribes including but not limited to Kalenjin, Luo, Kikuyu, Teso, Meru, Turkana among others who may be circumcised or uncircumcised; married with children or unmarried.

### **Challenges of Christian Circumcision**

The second objective of this study was to find out the challenges of Christian circumcision practice among the Bukusu Christians of Bungoma County. Respondents in this study explained that there was minimal preparation of the candidates before circumcision, and this meant that sometimes very young boys got to be circumcised. In some cases, even boys aged 8 were circumcised. The age factor was determined based on only the factor of pain. The assumption was that, since the issue of psychological torture and physical pain was already catered for by anaesthesia and hospital environment, there was no need for serious commitment or tests to ascertain the candidate's seriousness before the physical circumcision. Such group of boys would not be expected to take up any responsible decision-making roles in the society and would not even understand the moral expectations by the society. This however raises concerns on the maturity and preparedness of the candidate for circumcision which is meant to be a transitional stage from child hood to adulthood. If parents are the ones to make this important decision for their sons, then the whole process may be starting on a wrong footing to appear as an imposed involvement by the candidate and not as an individual choice from within the candidate.

The tender age of the initiates further puts to question their ability to receive, retain and later apply the moral teachings that accompany the process. This line of thinking is in agreement with an argument by Joshua Akong'a (1988) who asserts that behaviour change happens when there is communication, not mere information. According to him, information is a one-way flow of knowledge, while communication is a two-way flow which seeks active involvement, participation

and cooperation on the part of the target group. Joshua Akong'a (1988) further argues that in an effective communication, the target group:

Should become convinced of the relevance of the technical message in their lives so that when they adopt the recommended package of behaviour and practices related to new ideas, they view them as advantageous and for their own good rather than as a way of pleasing the change agents (p. 88).

When initiates do not take an active role in the initiation process from the start, we may deduce that the moral teachings that accompany the transition process, if any, may simply be considered as information rather than communication to have any positive impact on youth moral values. There is a need to fully engage the initiates from the beginning to the end of the rite to make the transition process relevant to youth moral values.

It is also noted that although initiates are exposed to Christian values such as love, care, honesty, respect for parents and elders through the healing process, there is no special curriculum or any unified code of teachings targeting initiates. The teachings have no specific tutors and do not appear organized and progressive in any way. Each family chooses how and what to expose the initiates to, making the entire process to appear more of a personal and individualistic affair without much mentoring by the wider community. The parents as key participants and as people vested with the highest authority over the initiate within the nuclear home are seemingly too busy also. They do not spend quality time with the initiates to offer any meaningful mentorship may be due to the modern economic demands and pressure. Similarly, the moral teachings in the Christian Bukusu Circumcision do not target an entire cohort of initiates in a uniform and systematic way which eventually distorts the close-knit feeling of togetherness and unity among initiates.

Another challenge facing Christian circumcision is stigmatization targeting participants of this process. It was revealed that during the healing process, the Christian Bukusu initiates do not freely mix and intermingle with initiates in the Traditional Bukusu circumcision. Respondents acknowledged that in most cases, those circumcised in the traditional way consider themselves as superior and strong men who 'stood the knife' in full view of the public while those circumcised in the Christian way in hospital as cowards. They are called names such as '*be khulupao*' which is interpreted as "those circumcised on the board". This implies that those circumcised in hospital are viewed as weak and inferior by their traditional counterparts because they are circumcised while lying down on the bed/ board and do not experience any pain because of the anaesthesia.

The Christian Bukusu circumcision initiates are therefore generally viewed as weak men who 'feared the knife', by those circumcised in the traditional Bukusu circumcision. Such initiates are considered as second-class citizens among members of the Bukusu community while those circumcised traditionally are the first-class men of the community. In some cases, the Christian Bukusu initiates are ridiculed by their counterparts circumcised in the traditional circumcision and may run away on seeing them approaching. In other cases, they chase after them with a view to tease, harass and embarrass them. This view has had some negative impact on the image and self-esteem of Christian Bukusu initiates who may shy away or be denied opportunity to take up leadership roles in society. Another challenge is the stigmatization associated with lack of courage among the Christian circumcision initiates. Theirs is often referred to as '*Sikhebo*' (mere cut) as opposed to '*Embalu*' (the initiation into adulthood); with aspects such as 'facing the knife bravely and enduring the pain.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The central question of this study was how the Christian circumcision as practiced by Bukusu Christians enhances inculcation of values among initiates. This study operated with three objectives. The study firstly sought to examine how Bukusu Christian circumcision initiation into adulthood processes was designed to inculcate positive societal values. The study found that the act of parents projecting their own Christian faith on their sons, helped nurture them to behave as would be expected of their parents. The act of treating initiates as though they had become mature Christian decision makers, helped to motivate them to want to behave well. The sons were influenced to act as expected by their parents, because they were treated as though they had made the decision (which of course was made by their parents). Secondly, the limited resources (time and money) spent by their parents in the process of circumcision (in the context where people spend a lot of time and money in the traditional circumcision), helped to inculcate a value of prudence. The act of limiting the time and money used, in order to spend the rest in school fees and business, helped to change the worldview of the youth, instilling in them a culture of spending one's resources and time on profitable endeavours. It was also found that the practice of circumcision happened in the hospital environment, a practice that was meant to instil a culture of positive acceptance of modern science and technology. It was envisaged that when the youth accept the use of modern science in their most important life event, they would be stirred to want to be educated and to use other scientific means of achieving important things in their lives. Hygiene was maintained in the process of circumcision, and this was to help cultivate the value of cleanliness. Another finding was that of separation from the 'world.' Christian initiates were nurtured to remain 'light' and 'salt' of the world, rather than wanting to behave like their peers. This value helped inculcate a value of leading exemplary lives and managing peer influence. It was envisaged that the youth growing with an attitude of wanting to set good examples, would be more zealous in behaving morally. There was also a value of superior thinking that influenced the initiates to want to stand out in academics and in other activities in the society. This assumption of superiority was understood to help raise youth that are confident and focused, knowing that a lot was expected from them.

The study also explored the circumcision candidates' perspectives on the role of Christian circumcision in the development of positive societal values. We found that while the initiates felt that they were not accorded enough preparatory time before circumcision, their perceptions remained positive at the end of the process. The boys felt that their parents did not consider their opinions as important; and did not even consult them. The relatives were not even invited, and friends not given time to cheer the initiates before the circumcision practice. The parents gave more attention to setting them apart from the "rest", which they achieved, but would have done it better. It is thus recommended that the parents could consider preparatory exercises to be organized; activities that help raise the excitement of the boys before the circumcision. This is to generate a positive attitude of the process, right from the start. The involvement of other relatives would also add value, as some would cheer them up, and creating an attitude of accountability, making the candidates understand that many 'witnesses would be watching them during and after the circumcision process.

The existing challenges which inhibit Christian circumcision and initiation into adulthood from successful development of positive societal values was also examined. We found that the maturity and preparedness of the candidate for circumcision was treated as a non-issue, a factor which severely compromised their perception of morality in general. It was found that because the circumcision candidates were young, unprepared, and un-consulted, the feeling of accountability

was also inexistent. No one would expect the youth to behave in a way foreign to their minds. The initiates thus could not take seriously the moral lessons given to them during the process. It was also found that there was no special curriculum or any unified code of teachings targeting initiates in the Christian circumcision. This affected the youth, because they could not be taken to account on any one aspect of morality. In case of immoral activities among a group of men who went through Christian circumcision, the society could only blame the system, but not the individuals. Finally, we found that the men who went through Christian circumcision were stigmatized, based on the processes they went through, and their 'different' value systems. It is arguable that if the stigmatization aspect is not managed well, it could lead to the youth avoiding the process, something which could affect future Christian circumcision practices. It is recommended that the managers of Christian circumcision should manage the stigmatization aspects, but communicating the worth of their changed 'values', so that the initiates understand, and be proud. For example, instead of bravery to face the knife (which is a value in the traditional circumcision) the Christian circumcision should be nurtured to regard highly their values such as prudence, co-operation, academic hard work, and embracing modern medicine, and to understand that they are superior, not inferior.

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