

**“A CASE OF CULTURE GONE AWRY”:
AN INVESTIGATION OF FEMALE INITIATION CEREMONIES
AND NYAU DANCE VIGILS ON THE RIGHTS OF TEENAGE
GIRLS TO EDUCATION AND
SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AMONGST MIGRANT
COMMUNITIES IN NORTON, ZIMBABWE**

Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the harm suffered by teenage girls who, often forced into early marriages by poverty, must first engage in the customary practices of initiation ceremonies followed by participation in highly ritualized dance vigils.

Evidence from a wide range of sources analysed in the context of various methodologies, in particular the Women’s Law Approach, testifies loudly to the serious harm caused, primarily, to their health and education as a result of the growing abuses of these practices. In order to protect and realize the human rights of these vulnerable young women in terms of local and international HR instruments which bind Zimbabwe, the writer does not suggest abolishing the practices, but rather reforming them internally by educating their adult overseers.

BY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication.....	4
Acknowledgements.....	5

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the Research.....	6
1.2 Statement of The Problem	8
1.3 Aims and Objectives of The Research.....	10
1.4 Why A Two Tiered Research.....	10

Chapter 2: Research Methods and Methodology

A. Methodology

2.1 The Women’s Law Approach.....	12
2.2 The Grounded Theory Approach.....	14
2.3 The Human Rights Perspective.....	17
2.4. The Semi Autonomous Social Fields	19
2.5 The Actors and Structures Perspective.....	20
2.6 Sex/ Gender Analysis.....	21

B. Methods of Data Collection

2.7 The Case Study Approach.....	22
Location of Study, Description of Social Group	
2.8 Interviews and Observations	24.
2.9 Obstacles and Challenges	26

Chapter 3: Findings and Analysis: Female Initiation Schools

3.1 Origins, Nature and Prevalence of Practice.....	28
3.2 Detailed Description and Appraisal of Practice.....	29
3.2.1. Pulling of the Labia minora	30
3.2.2 Menstruation Management, Chastity and Virginity Testing.....	31
3.2.3 Training on sexual performance.....	35
3.2.4 Training on respect, good morals and a woman’s place in society.....	42

3.3. Sustaining the Practices	44
3.4. The Emerging Distortions Over Time	49

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis: Nyau Dance Vigils

4.1 Origins, Nature and Prevalence of Practice.....	53
4.2 Detailed Description and Appraisal of Practice	53
4.3 Sustaining the Practices.....	58
4.4 The Emerging Distortions Over Time	60

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Analysis and Recommendations	61
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Bibliography.....	67
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Table of Statutes.....	70
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DEDICATION

In memory of my late father, Petrous Mubuso Thabethe

and

To my mother Eleanor Thabethe nee Magwenzi

for making me all that I am today.

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I could write another entire dissertation if I was to mention everyone who has contributed to the compilation of this work so for the purposes of brevity pardon me if I have overlooked mentioning anyone important.

First and foremost I thank God for the life that he has given me and the family and friends that he has chosen for me.

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God Bless You All!

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

I had always known about the existence of Gule/Nyau amongst the migrant community particularly the “mabwidi/ maNyasaland”¹ as I was growing up. In fact, on divers occasions I had had the opportunity to watch them in action as their dances offered entertainment but always being mindful not to get too close as there were also numerous myths about what could happen to you if you ever mocked or jeered at any one of them. Some such myths included that one’s mouth would move to the side or that you would develop a wound that would not heal. There were lots of stories told about the Nyau about their mystical powers, about the charms they used and potions they possessed and that they never talked about their practices to ordinary people. I was totally oblivious to any other fact about their practices and never bothered to gain any knowledge about them over and above what was discussed as hearsay. However, as regards the initiation of female teenagers into adulthood known as the “chinamwari” my first knowledge of it was not until I was doing my Ordinary level at Goromonzi High school in 1995. After the august holiday two girls Lorraine and Charlene confessed to us that they had attended the initiation school over the holiday. Both of them had grown up in Zimbabwe but they had Zambian and Malawian descent respectively. This was my first time to hear of the practice and the word itself “chinamwari”. Many other teenagers like myself at the time, were fascinated by their revelations and thus we probed them further to reveal what had actually transpired. They revealed that the course content they had been exposed to included lessons on how women must aim to please their bodies during sexual intercourse. Of the two girls, Lorraine was more forthcoming to reveal what had transpired and even offered to demonstrate a bit to us who at the time were novices about the subject matter that she seemed to have acquired great detail.

¹ People of Malawian origin are called by this name by the indigenous Zimbabwean population

For along time thereafter I was to forget about this incident except when I attended some wild baby showers and kitchen parties² where sexually explicit discussions could take place and on these occasions the “knowers” on sexuality would indicate that it would be beneficial for women to get the chinamwari training as it would help them cement their relationships and keep their husbands or lovers from philandering.

In 2006, I was made the Programme Officer for the Children’s Legal Services Programme at Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association (ZWLA)³ for a project that was to be implemented in the Norton area. As part of the project we were required to provide legal aid assistance to children and their guardians, provide legal education on women and children’s rights and lobby and advocate for law reform on issues affecting them. As part of the legal education we recruited peer educators from the community comprising both adults⁴ and children. Part of the peer educators mandate was to act as watchdogs for children’s rights violations and strive to take action on those issues by raising/reporting them with the relevant authorities and the community. In one meeting an issue was raised on girl child drop outs in the area as well as early marriages as one of the worrying trends that the teachers in the area had observed and other peer educators agreed that the rate of early marriages was quite significant. In a brain storming exercise I asked the peer educators to identify some of the reasons why this trend was emerging. Some of the responses provided included poverty, the effects of HIV/AIDS and orphan hood, religious beliefs amongst the Apostolic sect, indiscipline, and also included on the list were female initiation and the Nyau dance vigils. I asked the peer educators how these two practices fueled early marriages and one female school teacher, Mrs. Nyangari explained that once girls attended the chinamwari, they would become sexually active leading them to become pregnant or get married, hence dropping out of school. She also explained that some girl members of the Nyau culture would abscond school to attend the Nyau dance festivals and at the dance festivals which at times could be all night vigils

² These are parties hosted exclusively for women before marriage or before the birth of a baby to give them advice on married life (kitchen parties) or advice on pregnancy, childbirth and child rearing (baby showers)

³ ZWLA is a non governmental organization operation in the country that seeks to promote women and children’s human rights by facilitating access to justice, providing legal aid and lobbying for policy and law reform

⁴ These were drawn from different quarters in the community and included teachers, police personnel, field officers and religious leaders amongst others.

girls would be sexually abused by their male counterparts who took turns to sleep with the girls. The other community peer educators confirmed these views.

When I was asked to come up with a research topic for the Master's in Women's Law Programme I decided to investigate the two practices. Incidentally in 2007 an article had appeared in the local newspaper in which a former Gule dancer confessed that young girls were being susceptible of sexual abuse by male Gule dancers⁵ and this sparked an outcry from different parts of the society. Later on in the same year another article appeared also discussing the initiation schools.⁶ My interest in researching these practices was borne out of the fact that these practices had been alleged to fuel early marriages. My experience in providing legal aid to indigent women had made me see the dilemma of women who continue to live in abusive relationships through being unable to exercise the choice to leave even when all the odds seemed to be against the continuation of such relationships. Oft these women were unemployed or employed in insecure forms of employment which rendered them financially dependant on their spouses. Hence my effort sought to unearth those obstacles that militate against the empowerment and emancipation of women in these two contexts.

1.2 . STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Zimbabwe has an estimated population of 12,5 million and an estimated 52% of this is female. 15,4% of this population is estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS. [Zimbabwe Demographic Health Survey: 2006]. The prevalence of the virus amongst women is estimated at 21% whereas it is 14,5% for men and the girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are the most vulnerable to infection. These figures are an indication of how the pandemic has disproportionately affected women and particularly teenage girls. It is against the backdrop of such statistics that explanations have been sought to unearth what some of the underlying causes are for these patterns. Amongst some of the explanations put forward include poverty, early sexual onset and early marriages for girls, harmful cultural practices such as wife inheritance and marrying off girls to appease avenging spirits,

⁵ The Herald, 24 March 2007, "Unmasking the Nyau"

⁶ The Herald 24 March 2007, "Chinamwari turning Girls into Women"

religious practices such as those of the apostolic faith sect that encourage early marriages, disparities in education and cross generational sex i.e. sugar daddies as some of the contributory factors. The overall effect is that gender inequalities still exist despite efforts that have been taken to promote women's emancipation and empowerment through Government and civic efforts.⁷ However despite such efforts there are still fewer women in decision making positions, women are still employed within the lower ranks of the labour sector with less pay or are employed in the informal sector. Within the private sphere women are still succumbing to domestic violence and it is estimated that one in every four women has been a victim of domestic violence. [Musasa Project: 1996]

This research seeks to make an investigation on female initiation ceremonies and Nyau dance vigils. These practices are detracting from the ideal of women's empowerment by fostering early marriages and school dropouts. It is common cause that early marriages host a range of side effects on the rights of women. Not only do they rob children of their childhood but also they have physical, emotional and psychological consequences for the young girls. Early marriages are usually followed by early pregnancies and childbirth and the latter put young mothers at greater risk of premature labour, complications during childbirth, low birth weight of babies and greater chances of infant mortality. [Kassan D: 2002:18]. The practices under investigation are often ignored and thus they continue to go on unnoticed perhaps because they are practiced by a minority community. Even for the majority of feminist activists they seem to be unaware of some of these problems or are even oblivious of the fact that the practices exist at all⁸. To the extent that the journey to equality between the sexes seems to be progressing rather slowly for women this study is aimed at investigating some of the pitfalls, potholes and obstacles that are militating against women's emancipation, empowerment and development using human rights standards and norms as the yard stick focusing on the right to education and sexual reproductive health of teenage girls.

⁷ For instance the Legal Age of Majority Act was enacted in 1982 to give majority status to women.

⁸ In particular Zimbabwean feminists are usually quick to dismiss the existence of fgm in the country whereas pulling of the labia minora is a prevalent practice and is Type IV FGM. They also are ignorant of the existence of female initiation the chinamwari exists amongst migrant populations

1.3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aims and objectives of this research were as follows -:

AIM

To assess the compatibility of female initiation ceremonies and dance vigils with the upholding of the rights of teenage girls to education and sexual reproductive health.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To understand the origins of the practices of female initiation and Nyau dance vigils and understand their relevance and continued existence and significance in modern day society.
2. To examine the content of knowledge imparted to teenage at female initiation ceremonies and assess whether it may predispose teenage girls to early sexuality.
3. To analyze the extent to which poverty propels migrant families to promote female initiation and early marriages respectively.
4. To evaluate the extent to which female initiation ceremonies and the Nyau dance vigils undermine women's capacity to self and community development, emancipation and empowerment by fostering early marriages, school drop outs and STI's including HIV/AIDS.
5. To examine whether the distortions that have occurred in relation to the traditional ceremonies of female initiation and Nyau dance vigils are fostering negative consequences for the rights of teenage girls.
6. To assess whether the practice of female initiation and Nyau dance vigils contain any positive aspects that can be retained.
7. To investigate the possibility of utilizing existing opportunities that can be invoked to curb the effects of the practices.

1.4. WHY A TWO TIERED RESEARCH

When I started this research I was under the impression that both practices I was investigating were part of the Nyau culture, but after I embarked on the research I

discovered that the practices were being undertaken by different social groups. Whereas the Nyau practiced both the dance vigils and the female initiation, there was a significant group of the Chewa/Muslim who also practiced the female initiation and I saw it fit to include the practice as part of this research.

CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES

A. METHODOLOGY

2.1 THE WOMEN'S LAW APPROACH

In carrying out this research I was greatly informed by the women's law approach. Dahl. T S [1987:17] states that the purpose of women's law is to describe, explain and understand the legal position of women with the aim of improving the position of women in law and in society. In particular, I made use of the feminist theories based on the premise that they all strive to give a partial and provisional answer to the woman question(s), each theory providing a unique perspective with its own methodological strengths and weaknesses and together they lament the ways in which women have been oppressed, repressed and suppressed. [Tong R.M 1989:1]. I applied the different strands of feminism because although all directions of feminist politics share the same ideals; equality, justice and freedom, they have different opinions about what is unequal, unjust, and oppressive. [Dahl T.S: 1987:19] Some of the feminist theories I applied include-

i) Liberal Feminism

When I looked at the existing legislation such as the Education Act [Chapter 25:04], s4 which makes education a right for every child⁹, the setting of the age of consent in s22 of the Marriage Act [Chapter 5:11] and the elimination of harmful cultural practices in s3 (1) (i) of the Domestic Violence Act [Chapter 9:16] I realized that all these pieces of legislation were based on the liberal feminist tenet of striving to achieve equality between men and women, boys and girls. Liberal feminists argue that to achieve equality between men and women, the elimination of practices, which deny women access to the public sphere of life and relegate them to the private sphere, must occur. The liberal feminists have achieved this by demanding the right to education, employment and admission to the professions. [Barnet H.: 1989]. Tong R, [1989:2] affirms further that,

“Gender justice insists liberal feminists requires us first to make the rules of the game fair and second to make certain that none of the runners for society goods and services are systematically disadvantaged”

⁹ This is however not an absolute right as in s5 the Act goes on to place the duty on the parent to ensure that every child attends primary school

When I looked at the legislation in force to target the practices that I was investigating I realized that they had only gone so far as the first level of what is propounded for by the liberal feminists, that is, having equality provisions put down on paper as legislative provisions. In so far as the second part was concerned with leveling the playing field, a lot more still has to be done to ensure that women and girls are not discouraged from entry into the public sphere by issues such as early marriages, due to initiation ceremonies or attendance at dance vigils which all detract from their attainment of the right to education, empowerment and development. Thus if the situation is to be addressed if real and substantial equality is to be realized we need to go further to ensure that these obstacles and setbacks are addressed.

ii) Radical Feminism

Radical feminism was also invoked during this research enabling me to interrogate the core structure of society and law by focusing on the patriarchal ordering of society and its representation of patriarchal nature and mores focusing primarily on patriarchy and how it oppresses women on the basis of their sexuality. Barnett H[1989] quotes McKinnon C on her arguments on how the constant and consistent oppression of women on the basis of their sex , cultural mores demand that women be circumcised, be burned at the funeral pyre of their husbands funeral and to this list I added initiation ceremonies as practices that are intent on maintaining male supremacy. McKinnon argues further that the male and socially constructed sexuality of women reduces them to their sexuality and women's reality is objectivised by male constructs for men's use.

In analyzing how sexuality is constructed at the female initiation I came to the conclusion that the primary aim of the initiation is to satisfy male libidos. The initiation processes and messages reduce women's role in marriage to being to serve and sexually satisfy her husband.

iii) Marxist Feminism

Marxist feminism is premised on the tenets that capitalism is the basis of women's oppression. For capitalism to thrive women must remain within the private sphere

carrying out unpaid labour in the form of caring for the home and producing children who will also sustain the capitalist system as the future workforce while the men provide labour in the public sphere. Taking this ideology in this research I realized that to the extent that women's roles were confined to the private sphere by messages imparted through the initiation schools and through early marriages they were sustaining male preferences and power in a manner similar to that of capitalist power structures.

2.2. THE GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH

The grounded theory approach was one of the critical methodologies that I employed as I carried out this research. After having formulated my research assumptions largely premised from information I had obtained from my work experience I went into the field with an open mind¹⁰. My initial assumptions were as follows -;

- Nyau Culture demands that teenage girls attend initiation ceremonies and dance vigils.
- Teenage Nyau girls absent themselves from school attending initiation ceremonies, compromising their right to education.
- The content of knowledge imparted to teenage girls at initiation ceremonies predisposes them to become sexually active and this impacts on their right to education negatively.
- Teenage Nyau are prone to early and child marriages because of initiation ceremonies.
- Nyau dance vigils may expose teenage girls to sexual abuse by males with the risk of contracting STI's HIV/AIDS and falling pregnant.
- In examining Nyau culture there may be positive aspects of the culture that may be identified and retained.

The value of using the grounded theory approach was to manifest itself immediately. The grounded theory approach as an iterative process enabled me to constantly engage with the data I had collected, sift and manage it, consider the complications and determine

¹⁰ Although I had formulated my assumptions I went into the field with a mind that was receptive to all possibilities. Bentzon A.W [1998: 179] refers to this as being aware of the basic assumptions and suppositions and not taking anything for granted

what to collect next. [Bentzon A.W: et al: 1998:18]. After I had been on the ground and had conducted a number of interviews it became apparent that some of my assumptions had to be revisited. When I started the research my impression was that the female initiation ceremonies and the dance vigils were both practices of the Nyau people and thus I sought to investigate the practices of that social group. However, after conducting a couple of preliminary interviews it emerged that although the Nyau practiced both the dance vigils and the female initiation there were other cultural groups that practiced female initiation quite extensively and these were Chewa (usually referred to as Muslims by the community members) and migrants from Zambia and others who were commercial initiators. Table 1 below summarizes the varieties of groups that practice female initiation in the Norton area and their main characteristics.

Table 1.

Nyau	Chewa/Muslim	Other Commercial/ Zambian ¹¹
Initiation Male and Female	Initiation Male and Female	Initiation Male and Female
Children and Adults	Children and Adults	Mostly Adults
Residential	Residential	Non Residential
Compulsory	Compulsory	Elective
Free	Free	For a fee
Dance Vigils Males and Females	N/A	N/A

I then had to make a choice of the most vulnerable groups and investigate those and I chose the Nyau and the Chewa as they dealt predominantly with children as opposed to the third group which is elective and focuses on adults who are willing to pay for the services rendered hence these make an informed decision to participate as opposed to the other groups that conscript children.

¹¹ A study of the Alangizi Marriage counsellors was carried out in Zambia by Mapala S.(2004) Traditional Marriage Counselors and HIV/AIDS, a Study of Alangizi National Association of Zambia In Lusaka, Dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the Masters in Women's Law , UZ.

Initially, my second assumption was that teenage girls were absconding school whilst attending initiation ceremonies. When I went into the field I established that this used to be the practice in the past but the community had been cautioned by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture about their practice infringing on the children's rights to education and thus the timing was revisited and the initiation now takes place over the school holidays. I also established that no reported cases i.e. at the police / hospital had been reported on sexual abuse at dance vigils and the girls themselves were not willing to talk about their experiences at the dance vigils thus I realized that I could not empirically verify the assumption from any of the sources I had anticipated.

There was a need for me to also formulate new assumptions based on some of the findings that had emerged during the course of the research. The grounded theory approach had directed me to new assumptions and new sources of data. It emerged during the research that over time and through other influences like urbanization and modernity and religion some distortions seemed to have occurred to the practices and this led me to formulate a new assumption to assess the impact of these distortions on the rights of teenage girls. Increasingly during the research poverty emerged as one of the factors that were sustaining the practices I was investigating and I proceeded to formulate an assumption to investigate its impact. It occurred to me that it was not enough to investigate the practices but I should also begin to think of the opportunities that existed in the community that could be used to curb or mitigate the effects of the practices and I formulated another assumption. In the end the following were my working assumptions.

1. Initiation ceremonies (Chinamwari) are part of a religious and cultural identity amongst migrant communities in Norton
2. Nyau culture demands that girls attend dance vigils exposing them to sexual abuse
3. The content of knowledge imparted to teenage girls at initiation ceremonies on sexuality predisposes them to become sexually active prematurely.
4. Poverty amongst Norton migrant communities propels families and girls to promote initiation ceremonies and early marriages.

5. Initiation ceremonies and dance vigils undermine women's capacity to self and community development and emancipation by fostering early marriages and pregnancies, school dropouts and Sexually Transmitted Infections including HIV/AIDS.
- 6 The distortions of the traditional initiation ceremonies and Nyau dance vigils over time have had negative repercussions on the rights of teenage girls.
- 7 The initiation culture and Nyau dance vigils may have positive aspects that can be identified and retained.
- 8 There are opportunities for interventions that exist and can be used to curb effects of the practices.

To be able to carry out the research I formulated the following research questions

1. Are initiation ceremonies part of a religious and cultural identity amongst migrant communities in Norton?
2. Does Nyau culture demand that teenage girls attend dance vigils thereby exposing them to sexual abuse?
3. Does the content of knowledge imparted to teenage girls at the initiation ceremonies on sexuality predispose them to become sexually active prematurely?
4. Does poverty amongst migrant communities in Norton propel families and girls to promote initiation ceremonies and early marriages?
5. Do initiation ceremonies and Nyau dance vigils undermine women's capacity to self and community development by fostering early marriages , school drop outs STI's including HIV/AIDS?
6. Have the distortions of the traditional initiation ceremonies and Nyau dance vigils over time led to negative repercussions on the rights of teenage girls?
7. Are there any positive aspects that exist in the initiation culture or the Nyau dance vigils that can be identified and retained?
8. Are there existing opportunities that exist in the community that can be used to curb the effects of the practices?

2.3. THE HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH

The research was investigating traditional practices and in many instances I was confronted with questions by people (including my husband and some workmates) as to

whether the work I was undertaking had any relationship with law or I had changed disciplines to study arts and culture. However, I explained to them that each and every fact of human life has a link or relationship with human rights including even one's culture. This research was investigating the identified cultural practices for their compatibility with human rights norms and standards as espoused in the Convention on the elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), or The Protocol To the African Charter on Human and people's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (The African Women's Protocol) as examples. I continuously had to ask myself some of the following questions; Is there a protected right that is being violated?

What is the nature of the violation?

Who is the violator?

Does the public understand the issues as a violation of human rights and does the public tolerate the existence of the abuse or simply does not know about it?¹²

Answering in part some of the above questions I concluded that some of the elements of the practices I was investigating constituted harmful cultural practices as defined in article 5 of CEDAW and article 5 of the African Women's Protocol, that violated teenage girls rights to education and sexual reproductive health¹³. I found that the practices I was investigating were impacting negatively on these rights and on other rights. For instance the virginity testing that takes place at the female initiation sessions violated the right to privacy and bodily integrity. Having established the human rights violations I realized that culture and human rights is highly contested terrain. I realized that in the recommendations that I had to come up with they had to be culturally sensitive whilst not derogating from the core of human rights. Culturally sensitive approaches have been described as

“...respecting people's culture and its expressions, honouring commitment to agreement and promoting universally recognized human rights in ways that

¹² Adapted from Schuler M (1997) Women's Human Rights Step by Step

¹³ The right to education is provided for In Article 10 CEDAW, Article 12 of the Women's Protocol, Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 11 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. It is also provided as Goal 2 of the Millenium Development Goals and article 7 of the Cairo Declaration on Population and Development.. The right to health is provided for as article 14 if CEDAW, Article 14 of the Women's protocol

enable communities to own these rights.” UNFPA [2004:31]

In this way I hoped that the recommendations I suggest can be successfully invoked to address the concerns raised in this paper.

2.4. THE SEMI AUTONOMOUS SOCIAL FIELDS

In carrying out this research it became apparent that although state law existed to regulate issues such as the age of consent to marriage, the provision of the right to education, the ban on virginity testing in reality the lives of teenage girls are not in consonance with what is provided for within the rights framework because in reality school drop outs, early marriages and pregnancies are taking place including virginity testing as well. . This then confirms that there are other normative orders that have rule making capacities that have the means to induce or coerce compliance other than what is provided for in statute law i.e. the semi autonomous social fields [Petersen H:151 and Bentzon A.W et al, 1998:41]. In carrying out this research I realized that culture had created a normative order that was able to ensure compliance by teenage girls to attending initiation ceremonies and the Nyau dance vigils. There exists within the community a value system that places prominence on marriage whilst undermining such issues as education for women. I found the Remarks by Saadawi N. E. [1980] in relation to Arab women below aptly describing this scenario,

“The woman’s world is limited to thinking of a man and dreaming of a husband. After a marriage , a woman is solely occupied with the art of keeping her husband.”

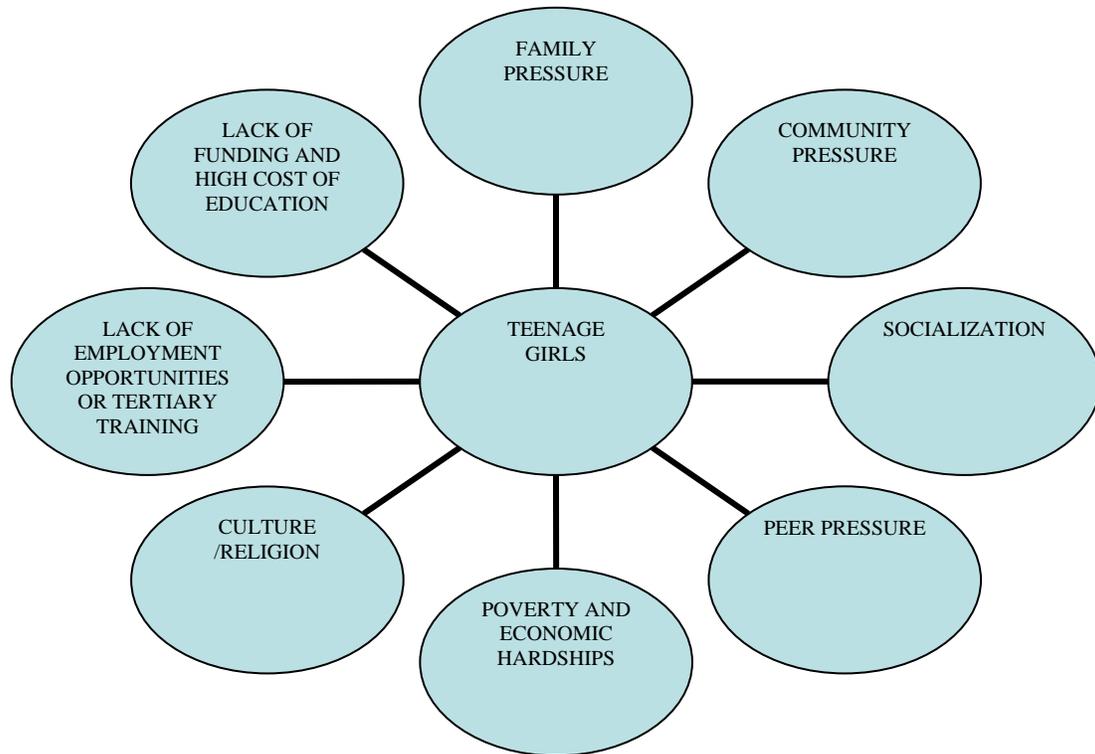
Thus the initiation and the dance vigils become the conduits that facilitate the realization and blissfulness of marriage. Marriage thus becomes a marker of personal achievement and it is no wonder that the customs have managed to withstand time. To sustain the cultures, both cultures are signifiers of one’s identity and entry and acceptance within the social groups that the practices are located. As regards the initiation it gives women a sense of being “full women.”¹⁴ With the Nyau on the other hand the culture instills a sense of identity to its members and this is sustained by myths and threats requiring non-disclosure and this has facilitated secrecy of what actually transpires within their culture.

¹⁴ See for instance Chapter 3

2.5. THE ACTORS AND STRUCTURES PERSPECTIVES

Having established the existence of the semi autonomous social field within the social group I was investigating I was keen to know how it is that the practices have managed to withstand the test of time. I was keen to explore who the gatekeepers were and what was their motivation, what other existing factors were influencing the continued existence of the practices. I thus turned to the actors and structures perspective to assess how the teenage girls experience in the process of life management were being influenced by normative structures that impact on her life and how her choice of action is limited by the social, family, legal, religious or economic structure in which she thinks and acts. [Bentzon AW et al: 1998:102] I came to the conclusion the practices of female initiation and dance vigils are existent because having had regard to the surrounding circumstances and influences it still makes logical sense to participate in these cultural activities and even further to contract an early marriage. In my assessment the initiation ceremony becomes the apprenticeship for “the job” that she must assume in marriage and the dance vigils become a convenient place to meet would be suitors for marriage. I analyzed some of the influences that make teenage girls participate in the practices and go on to contract early marriages as depicted below-:

Diagram.1



In view of the prevailing economic conditions in Zimbabwe where inflation is pegged at over 100 000%, unemployment over 80%, the prospect of pursuing an education is whittled down by lack of funding for such an endeavour and in any case it does not make logical sense to pursue it because there are bleak prospects ahead as employment opportunities in such communities are virtually non-existent. Families and communities find logic in having their daughters married off as it provides security rather than in pursuing education. In any event, socialization over the years and particularly through the process of female initiation has taught the teenage girl that a woman's place is in the home. Put together, it is no wonder that the teenage girls eventually settle on the choice of early marriage.

2.6. THE SEX/GENDER ANALYSIS

As I was carrying out the research I realized that the practices were part of a patriarchal system and their aim was to perpetuate patriarchal interests. The impression of gender identity is essential for the perpetuation of the system of patriarchy. In defining gender Bentzon A.W [1998: 82] makes a distinction of sex being the physical differences

between men and women and gender being social and cultural constructs of male and female behaviour. Thus, at birth once one is ascertained to be male or female this profoundly influences their subsequent experiences in adult life. Garret S [1987] states that

“she/he develops gender identity a term referring to an individual’s own feeling and consciousness on whether he/she is a woman or a man , girl or boy and learns a gender role- a set of expectations about the behaviour considered appropriate for that gender.”

Thus the practice of female initiation is primarily aimed at inscribing a gender identity to the teenage girls. I discovered that as part of the initiation the girls are taught about their place and position within the family and society, where the man is supposed to be the head of the house and that the women should submit to the husband. This will be discussed more fully in Chapter 3. In the same vein my assessment of the Gule dancers where men are the dancers and women sing, cheer and ululate for the men is also part and parcel of inscribing the gender identity where men take the lead and play a more active role not only at the dances but in society as well. To the extent that both practices result in early marriages they are facilitating the maintenance of the gender hierarchies of male hegemony and female dependency in patriarchal societies.

B. METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

2.7. LOCATION OF THE CASE STUDY

The research was located in Norton, a peri-urban area 40km outside Harare off the Harare Bulawayo highway. It has an estimated population of 44 054 [Zimbabwe City Population]. The area is divided into three parts Norton urban, Norton Rural and Manyame. This study was confined to Norton urban being the area comprising the Norton business center and the surrounding residential areas. The Business Centre comprises mainly of a paper and pulp processing industry a beverage company and grain marketing company and other smaller companies. The area is surrounded by three main dams being Hunyani, Manyame and Darwendale. This makes fishing and fish vending thriving businesses in the area. The area is also surrounded by commercial farms. Until the late 1990 BHP Platinum mine was operating in the area but it shut down and this increased unemployment in the area.

The choice of location of my study was informed by the significant presence

of persons of migrant origin within the area. In addition I considered the relative proximity of the area to Harare as I could easily drive myself to and from the area. It was also informed by the fact that it is this same area where ZWLA operates a mobile legal aid clinic at Tsungirirayi Centre¹⁵ and whilst ZWLA would be making its visits to the area I also used the convenience of their transport to the area and carry out my research. ZWLA's presence in the area also meant that most people in the community would allow me carry out my research without suspicion. I used the ZWLA good will to create relationships and save for the Nyau members who were not forthcoming with information about their practices, all the other informants were quite at ease to assist me knowing I was from ZWLA.

b) DESCRIPTION OF TARGET GROUP

There is a significant number of people within the Norton area of non Zimbabwean descent. These individuals came to Zimbabwe as migrant labourers or descendants of migrants who came into the Southern Rhodesia in search of employment on the farms and mines. These immigrants were from Zambia and Malawi (formally Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland) especially during the years of the federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland that comprised of modern day Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe¹⁶. The migrants came to the then Southern Rhodesia in search of employment on the farms and mines and whereas some maintained close links with their families back home others settled permanently only going back home for occasional visits. Notably, the community have maintained their cultural identity as signified by the traditional rites that they still adhere to and practice at such occasions as deaths, wedding parties, initiation ceremonies and other festivals. Another remnant signifier of their identity is language. During the research I realized that nearly all the informants of foreign descent though fluent in the indigenous language of the Zimbabwean people, that is, Shona and Ndebele are also very conversant with their own native languages like Nyanja, Bemba and Chewa as examples. I also discovered that they have established well organized social networks within the

¹⁵ The Centre is an AIDS Service Organization that provides orphan care and support, home based care, voluntary counseling and testing, post test counseling services and treatment for persons infected and affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic

¹⁶ The federation existed from the period 1953 to 1963.

community to support each other in times of grief, loss, illness and even joy. These networks are sustained through burial society meetings, cultural events such as Nyau dance festivals or the religious gatherings at the church or mosque¹⁷. Whereas there are a range of tribal groupings in the area, this research focused primarily on the practices of the Chewa/ Muslim who practice the chinamwari and Nyau people of Malawian descent. I realized that the Nyau are also of Chewa origin but the distinction made in this research is to distinguish them from the Chewa who do not practice the Nyau traditional religion. These groups are the main groups that practice female initiation and in addition the Nyau practice the dance vigils.

2.8. INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS

During the research I was able to conduct individual and group interviews with identified informants. Mrs. James of Tsungirirayi Centre and also a ZWLA peer educator assisted me in identifying the informants and scheduling appointments with the interviewees.

Individual interviews

My individual interviews mainly focused on interviewing women who were either trainers of the chinamwari women and girls that had undergone the training. I interviewed four Chewa initiators, one commercial initiator and seven women and girls who had attended the training. Although I tried to interview female members of the Nyau proved a futile exercise as none of them were willing to openly discuss the goings on at the Nyau dances. The two interviewees I managed to interview on the practices of the Nyau were both male and relatively young. I also interviewed a male initiator of Chewa origin. For purposes of discussing the findings the identities of all the persons I interviewed have been altered.

I also interviewed other key informants whom I distinguished on the basis of their work and their interaction with teenage girls for instance school officials, programme staff at Tsungirirayi Centre responsible for the Orphans and Vulnerable Children Support

¹⁷ The African Muslim Agency has established a Mosque in the area. Most members of the Muslim religion in the area are people of foreign descent who when they moved to the country also brought with them their religion

Programme, staff from Population Services International (PSI) and also staff from Norton Hospital. Below is a summary of the Respondents

Table 2

Name	Sex	Age	Designation
Rudo James	F	45	Counsellor,Population Services International (PSI)
Constable Chaponda	M	37	Victim Friendly Officer Zimbabwe Republic Police
Dr. Choto	M	34	Norton Hospital
Mr Tsangamwe	M	43	Health Information Officer, Norton Hospital
Mrs Sibanda	F	49	Counsellor, PSI
Joyce Chitemere	F	29	Programme Officer, Orphans and Vulnerable Children, Tsungirirayi Centre
Ms Sabanga	F	43	School Head, Vimbai Secondary School
Hillary Matera	F	18	Unemployed, Graduate trainee of Female initiation
Rose Changa	F	28	Unemployed, Graduate trainee
Mrs. Samson	F	58	Housewife and Initiator
Mrs. Phiri	F	48	House wife and Initiator
Mrs. Banda	F	54	Cook Tsungirirayi Centre and Initiator
Mrs. Mangoti	F	39	Home based Care Giver
Chiwa Wapera	M	74	Pensioner, male initiator
Collin Mafuta	M	21	Trainee Pastor , Former Nyau dancer
Silence Arumando	M	18	Unemployed, Former Nyau Dancer
Lilian Tom	F	16	Student, St Eric's High,
Sheikh Adam	M	44	Muslim leader, African Muslim Agency
Mrs. Chitsa	F	31	Housewife ,Commercial Initiator
Tawona Mubatagore	F	15	Student, St Eric's High
Christine Mandeya	F	31	Home based care giver
Mrs. Tom	F	51	Vegetable vendor and Initiator

Group Interviews

I was also able to conduct group interviews with various groups to solicit their attitudes, views and comments on the practices that I was researching. Some of the groups I interviewed were as follows.

i) Tsungirirayi Home based care givers¹⁸.

This group comprised of 19 women, three of whom were Muslim and had undergone the initiation and I subsequently had one on one interviews with them. The group had convened for a training workshop on the contents of the Domestic Violence Act organized by ZWLA and I took the opportunity to discuss my research questions with them.

ii) ZWLA Child Peer Educators.

This group comprised of 22 children from Vimbai and St Eric's School. The children provided insights on what they observed in the community and in the schools.

iii) Female Child Beneficiaries of the Tsungirirayi OVC Programme

The group consisted of 8 students who shared insights on their knowledge of the practices and what they had in the area.

2.9 OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES

My greatest challenge during the research was getting information about the Nyau culture as the informants were not willing to talk about their culture citing the reason that theirs was a secret cult. There were also other Chewa/Muslims who believed that discussing about issues of the female initiation was not allowed as I was not Muslim and the Quran did not allow that.

I also encountered difficulties at times in travelling to Norton as fuel was at times not readily available or the prices became extremely exorbitant and this affected the frequency of my visits to Norton especially at the beginning of 2008.

¹⁸ Home based care givers are community volunteers who provide care to persons succumbing to AIDS

I tried to follow up on cases of girls who were alleged to have fallen pregnant but some had since moved to other addresses and would not be located where they were of the Nyau culture they were not willing to disclose any information and this rendered me unable to get their own view points regarding their life situations, choices and circumstances which could have enriched this research.

CHAPTER THREE: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS : FEMALE INITIATION SCHOOLS

3.1. ORIGINS, NATURE AND PREVALENCE OF PRACTICE

The female initiation ceremony or what is called the chinamwari is a practice that is not indigenous to Zimbabwe. There is evidence that the practice existed in East Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries and it is here where the practice is said to have originated.[Fair L;1996, Mair L: 1951]. There is also evidence that it is still being practiced in present day Malawi. It is nevertheless practiced locally in Zimbabwe by minority groups particularly of migrant origin or descent such as the Nyau and The Chewa. The practice is prevalent in areas where there is a higher concentration of persons of migrant origin such as farming and mining areas like Shamva, Bindura, Nyabira and Norton.¹⁹ The social groups that practice the female initiation have all imported the practice from their native communities in Zambia and Malawi and there is evidence that these practices are still practiced locally in their native countries. [Janssen D.F; 2004] In the past and even in some rural areas in present day societies, the parents would build a makeshift shelter for the children in the forest and for a month long period they would be living at that shelter. At the age of 11 upwards as young girls are approaching puberty biologically, it is at this stage incidentally when they also become eligible to undergo the female initiation.

In Norton, what is currently taking place amongst the Chewa and Nyau community is that it is the girl's mother or other female guardian for instance a grandmother, aunt or sister who makes arrangements for the girl to undergo initiation. The same arrangement is also undertaken for boys of the same age. The initiation which is usually carried out over the August school holidays (seldom it is carried out over the December holidays) entails a three to four week seclusion period for the young girls and boys as they undergo training. The parents or guardians collectively make arrangements for accommodation, food and tutelage of the children over the training period. Each parent/guardian will contribute

¹⁹ For instance the Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe [2007] has identified the practice as undermining efforts to curb the spread HIV/AIDS in the farming communities where it operates

foodstuffs for the initiation, which the women prepare and take to the initiates. A member of the network then offers their house as the training ground for the duration of the training. Such networks derive either from the mosque or from membership of the Nyau secret society. (For instance the community's perceptions and understanding of the women themselves are that the chinamwari is part of the Muslim religion). At each training session there are between of fifteen to thirty participants. One can also attend repeat session the training thus at times you have older women who are even married coming to attend the sessions

3.2. DESCRIPTION AND APPRAISAL OF THE PRACTICES

So what exactly does this training entail? Many myths have circulated about what takes place at the "chinamwari". Mbulawa Moyo [2004], in a weekly newspaper, had this to say about the practice,

"...a rigorous training to enable girls to give a man so much pleasure when he slept with them that he would never bear the thought of losing her less much leaving her, because, wherever he might happen to be, throughout the day, the thought of going back to spend the night with her would be uppermost his mind. After their training, those women were able to make a man literally scream with pleasure in bed"

However those who engage in the practice underplay the sexuality component of the training. For instance Mrs. Samson aged 58, a Chewa initiator and a housewife says,

"We teach the children about life skills, good manners, how to respect elders, menstruation and other issues to do with adolescence."

In carrying out the interviews I found that at first most interviewees were reluctant to reveal the sexually explicit details of what happens at the Chinamwari but on probing further they would reveal the details, for instance Mrs. Phiri, also a Chewa initiator aged 48 and a housewife said,

"If you have a child who is being unruly or behaving badly you can bring the child to the school for panel beating. When the child leaves the child would have reformed."

These remarks would at first glance make the process innocent, forthright and an unsuspecting outsider would not pursue the enquiry any further. But I knew from the remarks that are made by community members about the practices that there was more to the practice than this so I probed further and some of the processes that I managed to confirm taking place at the initial schools are as follows:-

3.2.1. Pulling of the labia minora.

According to Mrs. Banda aged 54, a cook at Tsungirirayi Centre and an initiator this is the first thing that the girls do when they get to the initiation school. The older women gather the oil of the “pfuta” tree (castor bean tree), which is supposed to act as a lubricant. At the initiation girls are then instructed to take the oil and apply it to their labia minora whilst stretching them. This is supposed to make the labia swell a little but when the swelling subsides the labia minora will look longer. The elongation is according to Mrs. Samson, supposed to be about the length of a matchstick. The initiates have code named it “number 11” because when the elongated labia stand out they look like the number 11. Mrs. Phiri also adds that for girls who would have missed chinamwari they are given a different type of lubricant which itches, the itchiness causes the labia to extend but she cautions that they only use it on fast track cases usually when a girl is about to get married and she had not attended the initiation.

According to Mrs. Banda, the extended labia are supposed to serve a two-fold purpose of preventing air from entering the vagina during sexual intercourse. They are also supposed to be used during foreplay by the husband. It seems both purposes duly exist to serve men’s selfish interests but no part of the equation seems to be benefitting women.

As regards the rationale for extending the labia minora, Mrs. Samson was very explicit on the subject matter,

“You can not call yourself a woman when you do not possess the qualities that make you a woman. Without “number 11” you are not a woman. It is no wonder you see when women go for camping at church groups or other social groupings you find women who bath with their panties on. They are ashamed of not having what other women have and not being real women.”

Echoing sentiments also in support of the practice was Mrs. Phiri, who remarked,

“If you are a woman and you do not have them (i.e. the elongated labia) you should strive to address that inadequacy. You see if your husband then meets a woman with them he will not come back to you.”

During the research I established that this practice was also prevalent amongst the indigenous Shona people although it is not institutionalized, widespread and adhered to as much as amongst the social groups I was researching.

Appraisal of the Practice

The World Health Organization [2001] in the fight against female genital mutilation has under Type IV FGM listed pulling of the labia minora as a form of female genital mutilation and thus it constitutes FGM and qualifies as a harmful cultural practice under article 5 of CEDAW and Art 5 of the African Women's Protocol. The Domestic Violence Act outlaws FGM under s3 (1)(ii) and could be interpreted to include pulling of the labia minora. Debate however has been raging on whether the practice qualifies as a form of fgm or not. The side effects of elongated labia minora have been identified as being that they become painful during exercise or sexual intercourse or when women just wear tighter fitting clothes such as jeans. [Medical Tourism in India: 2007] However, a different school of thought is emerging and this latter group argues that mutilation carries negative connotations. This is therefore problematic because mutilations have the effect of affecting pleasure and violating women's integrity and rights and prefer that the practice be referred to as genital modification. Their conclusion was reached after study of Rwandese women who alleged that the elongation facilitated ejaculation and orgasm. [Alpha Galileo Foundation : 2003] The World Health Organization is said to be releasing an amendment that will treat the practice differently but until then the position remains that it is a harmful cultural practice.

3.2.2. Training On Managing Menstruation, Chastity and Virginity Testing

A component of the training is directed at training the girls on menstruation management. Speaking on the subject matter Rose Changa a graduate initiate who is aged 28 and is now married states,

“The girls are taught about the onset of menstruation, managing menstruation, for instance that they have to change their sanitary ware regularly, how to dispose of used sanitary ware discreetly and the importance of hygiene, making sure that one bathes and in the case of cloth being used as sanitary ware to ensure that it is always kept clean.”

I also discovered that the community holds taboo about what women ought or ought not to do during menstruation and these conditions must be strictly adhered to. Firstly a woman / girl is required to wear red when she is menstruating. No plausible explanation was given for this but my own deductions were that perhaps in the event of an accident the colour red would more easily cover for the colour of blood. The second taboo is that a

woman / girl must not add salt to food she cooks when she is menstruating. In this way the woman/ girl communicates that she is having her period indirectly and in the event that she is married the husband would know that he has to refrain from having sexual intercourse with the woman as there are also taboos about this²⁰.

With the onset of menstruation girls are taught about abstinence, Mrs. Tom a vegetable vendor aged 51 and a Chewa of Muslim religion described how they teach the girls that as their bodies are undergoing biological changes, that is, they have or may soon begin to experience their menstrual periods and develop breasts among other changes they must now watch how they interact with boys as any improper associations will result in pregnancy. Mrs. Phiri adds further,

“ We teach the girls that they must not be in private places with person’s of the opposite sex such as visiting your boyfriend at his house or walking in the woods alone or at night. We also tell them that they must not allow boys or men to touch their bodies”

The girls are encouraged to be chaste and to preserve themselves for marriage. Thus at the end of each initiation training session the girls are subjected to virginity testing. The different initiators carry out the virginity testing differently. Mrs. Phiri said that she carries out the examination through physical inspection with the eye. She stated that when a girl is a virgin the vagina looks white and clean and that of a non virgin the flesh looks reddish. Mrs. Samson and Mrs. Banda said they use sponges, which are marked with lines. The sponge must penetrate the vagina only up to a certain point if the girl is a virgin. If they can’t get sponges they use eggs or leaves. In each case where objects are used the women professed that the testing object is used one for every child. Whatever the method used all the women agreed that their methods were full proof. In all cases where they have identified a girl as a non-virgin she has subsequently confessed to sexual activity.

The initiators undertake the virginity testing at home or at the Makukutse River in Norton. After the virginity testing the non-virgins are given red beads and the virgins are given white beads. Thereafter the graduate initiates are given a *chinu* (a jar of oil), a

²⁰ Mr Wapera a male initiator aged 74 highlighted that having sex with a woman who is menstruating would cause the man to become insane

doek, a zambia cloth²¹ and a pair of canvas shoes. These are the traditional items that are given to a woman when she is being sent off to her husband's home. In addition the girl is given a set of beads which she will have to sew up together in rows that she must wear around her waist. Mrs. Mangoti a Chewa Muslim aged 39 said that the beads can be worn permanently or at night but should be seen by the husband only although this is no longer the case. She remarked,

“ Nowadays you will see young women who walk about in town wearing clothes that expose the beads but that is uncultural. Usually those women are indecent and are trying to entice men. The beads are supposed to be seen by the husband only and their purpose is to stimulate him during sexual intercourse.”

When I asked the women initiators and the graduate initiates whether the beads had any effect on them they all professed that the beads had no effect on them but on the men there was an effect.

After the initiation the teenage girls have a procession in the suburbs to a central venue where the parents together with the children host a party celebrating their transition from girls to women. At this juncture the parents are notified of the girls sexuality status, that is whether the girl is a virgin or not. If the child is a virgin the parents may even endow her with more presents if they can afford it like buying a new dress or shoes for her.

Appraisal of the practices

i) Information on Managing Menstruation

Most women including myself, will confess that when they had their first period they had a very vague appreciation of what was happening to them and let alone how to manage the condition. This is because no one had openly discussed the issue with them, as it is regarded as a cultural taboo. The initiation ceremony thus offers a platform where discussions with teenagers on issues that are considered taboo and cannot be easily be talked about with parents can be discussed. Whilst traditionally in most local and regional cultures, the paternal aunt has the responsibility of discussing such issues with her nieces this platform has been eroded by urbanization (and in the case of the community by migration) that has led to the disintegration of the extended family ties.

²¹ A doek is a headscarf and the zambia cloth is a piece of cloth wrapped around from the waist and is supposed to cover the legs right down to the ankles.

This platform is essential in creating a platform where teenagers learn and discuss topical issues, menstruation being one of the issues and to the list could be added issues like dating, sex, pregnancy, STI's including HIV/AIDS and preventative methods like using condoms and other contraceptives.

ii) Virginitv Testing

All the initiators I asked and some of the women interviewees all confessed to having heard about the Domestic Violence Act and least had some vague knowledge of what it provided for. But all of them professed ignorance of the fact that the law prohibited forced Virginitv testing. In fact, they pointed to the fact that they were not the only ones carrying out the virginitv testing and that the Apostolic Faith Sect openly and frequently conducted the practice at the Makukutse River banks. Some of the women also argued that the practice ought not to have been outlawed because it was a preventative measure in the fight against HIV/AIDS as the teenage girls would abstain from engaging in sexual activity due to the threat posed by the anticipation of being subjected to virginitv testing. Even the teenage girls I interviewed seemed not to have qualms about the practice. However, the practice was outlawed in s3 (1)(i) the Domestic Violence Act that came into force on 25 October 2007 and the logic behind legislating against the practice was that it violates the girls right to bodily integrity as articulated article 4 of the African Women's Protocol. The inspection and the eventual announcement of the girls sexuality status violates the girls right to privacy.²² The practice is also discriminatory as it only applies to teenage girls only and teenage boys do not succumb to the same procedure. The community must be made to see how female chastity alone does not guarantee the eradication of HIV/AIDS transmission as the virgins could easily be infected by being married off to much older men who are infected with the HIV/AIDS virus and could also become prey to men who believe in the virgin cure²³ and be victims of rape. Therefore the campaign to fight HIV/AIDS should impress upon abstinence and other alternative strategies such as promoting premarital voluntary counseling and testing. I realized that

²² The right to privacy is enshrined in Article 19 of the ICCPR

²³ Some traditional healers would allegedly instruct their HIV positive clients that if they had sexual intercourse with a virgin they would be cured of HIV.

dissemination of the contents of the Domestic Violence Act has not reached all intended beneficiaries and stakeholders and Government and civil society need to direct more energy in that respect for instance, ZWLA is already working in the area and could easily include the issue as part of its public education awareness campaigns clearly stating why the practice must be shunned. Whilst abstinence must and should be promoted this must be through ways which do not violate other human rights.

iii). The Giving of Traditional Items for Marriage

Traditionally when a woman is getting married she takes with her a jar of oil²⁴, a Zambia cloth so she can wrap around her body for decency especially when she is around her in laws, canvas shoes and in some cultures like the one I was researching she would take with her the beads. These items per se are not harmful. I do not intend to make an attack in that respect. However, what I contest is the giving of these items to children who attend initiation schools who for the most part are below the age of 18 years. In my opinion the items seem to suggest that the girls have been given a license to marry. It seems to me that the community seems to suggest that the attainment of puberty coincides with the age of marriage. I am also of the view that the practices give contradictory messages. In one breath the children are being taught about abstinence and chastity but in another they are communicating that the girls are free to marry by giving them the items associated with marriage. The practice gets worse when they begin to give information on how to conduct sexual activities which will be discussed below. In my view the initiation ceremony must communicate clear messages about abstinence and chastity for the avoidance of doubt or confusion.

3.2.3. TRAINING ON SEXUAL PERFORMANCE

For the month long seclusion the initiates I established are exposed to training on how sexual acts must be undertaken. For the period that the women and the girls are undergoing the training they are all naked except for the elderly women who can wear their bras and panties. The older women then take turns to teach the girls on how they

²⁴ When she gets to her husbands home she gives the in laws a pail of water to wash themselves and the jar of oil. They will return the pail of water and oil with money or a gift inside for the new bride

move their bodies during sexual intercourse. To facilitate the smooth flow of the sessions music is made available in the form of drums or bottles that are played in different rhythms. Hillary Matera graduate initiate who is aged 18 and is divorcee describes the proceedings as follows,

“At first the music played and an elder woman/ Initiation trainer dances to the rhythm of the music. All the trainees must then imitate her movements. In the evenings the sessions become more intensive as the trainers have one on one sessions”

Where one’s movements are stiff the trainers say they take the initiate aside for intensive training Mrs. Samsom says the dances depend on the rhythm of the music, as there are different rhythms and also on the positions. She adds,

“ A woman must know how to move her body in the different sexual positions, that is lying down standing, kneeling and many others. As for me I teach 12 styles so these are the paces that I take the initiates through.”

Lilian Tom another graduate initiate aged 16 and a ZWLA child peer educator says,

“ The focus is on how one moves the waist. You are taught to be very flexible. For instance the women can put a dish with beads in front of you and ask you to sit with your feet apart at a 180 degree angle. They will then ask you to pick the beads with your mouth with your hands behind your back. This exercise is aimed at strengthening your back”.

According to Hillary throughout these sessions the music will be played rhythmically sometimes slowly and sometimes fast. The children sing songs also and one song that Mrs. Mangoti divulged that the children sing is

“ A fatuma a fatuma , a fatuma a fatuma ”

When I asked her what these lyrics meant she indicated that they meant that the children are being taught about how to live in the home²⁵.

As part of the training the girls are also taught that one must not deny her husband sexual intercourse as this will cause him to engage in extra marital affairs. Mrs. Phiri’s remarks on the matter were as follows

“The reason men have extra marital affairs is because women deny them. Every morning the man should leave the home satisfied (sexually) so that during the day his mind does not wander too much.”

At this juncture I thought it prudent to investigate the possibility of marital rape under these circumstances. She added

²⁵ However when I asked some Muslim colleagues we had on the course they were of the opinion that the words had no particular meaning and that Fatuma was Prophets Mohammed’s daughter. In my opinion I concluded that is her name could be used to denote the desire for appropriate femininity.

“ A woman must not unreasonably deny her husband access to sexual intercourse except perhaps in the case of disease like STI’s . But you see especially modern women they will complain of headaches and other petty reasons . This causes a man to go outside.”(to have extra marital affairs)

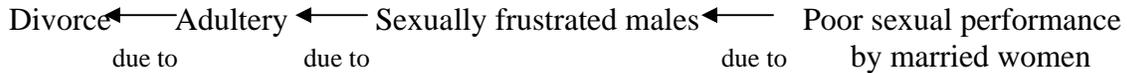
I inquired why there was such an effort put to satisfying men sexually, Mrs. Banda stated,

“When men get married the wife is usually not the first woman that he has had sexual intercourse with . He will start comparing his other experiences with other previous sexual partners and if the relationship with his wife is sexually frustrating he will be forced to engage in extra marital affairs.”

Mrs. Samson’s justification also bore the same logic,

“ You see when men come together at the bar or some other place they share their experiences about their sexual exploits . So a men will hear a colleague saying that he made love to a woman who flies like an aeroplane (in Shona, anobhururuka sendege meaning she does not let her back touch the ground which is what is taught at the initiation) The other guy will vouch not to stop looking until he also lives that fantasy and this is what we try to avoid because this is what leads to disease.’

When I followed these explanations I came up with my sequence of how the female initiation becomes valorized. The sequence is as follows



So the female initiation becomes for the initiators, the means of addressing the root cause of divorce and therefore it is not surprising that women in troubled relationships even those not belonging to these social groups have sought assistance from these initiators. At a group discussion I held with female home based care givers in the area they acknowledged that the training was beneficial and Mrs. Chitsa, a commercial initiator of Zambian origin boasted of having assisted clientele that ranged from teachers, nurses and other professionals who approach her to assist them in salvaging their troubled relationships and alleges that her advice has helped salvage some of the marriages. Mrs. Sibanda a counsellor with Population Services International underplayed the value of sex in marriage and explained that even women who have undergone the training also get

divorced²⁶ . Her attitude was that there are other factors that make a marriage work like communication and compromise and these should be given more emphasis.

Appraisal of the Practice

Sex Education

The initiation needs to discuss issues with children about the risks of engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse. I concluded in my assessment that the information given at the initiation school predisposes teenage girls to premature sexuality. Other like Mrs. Banda refuted such an assertion and remarked,

“ It depends on the child, there are children who lack discipline generally and thus it does not matter whether they go to the initiation or not they will just indulge in sexual activity. In any event what of the influences that are caused by images of naked people shown by television for example or the messages contained in songs played on the radio”

I do not want to deny the fact that early sexual activity is happening anyway despite the existence of the “chinamwari” but my point is that the chinamwari serves to whet the curiosity of teenagers to experiment sexually. There is evidence to the fact that girls have dropped out of school after attending the initiation. Joyce Chitemere, a programme officer with the OVC Programme at Tsungirirayi shared a case study of a child beneficiary Angela (not her real name) they had on the programme who was aged 13 and in Grade 6 at Chiedza Primary school who was sent for the initiation by her grandmother who was her guardian, during the August holidays. The following school term she refused to continue going to school. She was shortly thereafter married and got pregnant but she lost the baby²⁷. Mrs. Sabanga the School headmistress at Vimbai Secondary School gave an account of an incident of a child who had dropped out of school in Form 2 at the beginning of the third term in September 2007. She too was alleged to have attended the initiation over the August holidays and was now married to a man who Mrs. Sabanga said looked to be way over his fifties. In both cases no police reports were filed for the men to be prosecuted for having sexual relations with persons under the age of 16

²⁶ In fact Hillary Matera is testimony that attending the initiation does not make a marriage immune to divorce as she was actually a client of ZWLA seeking divorce and sharing of property.

²⁷ A follow up on this case revealed that the girl had since moved to Nharira Hills with her grandmother and their exact location could not be established. It is alleged that when she lost the baby the man who impregnated her also left her.

as provided for by s70 of the Criminal Codification and Reform Act [Chapter 9:16] and in Angela's case it would have constituted rape as she was below the age of 14. In both cases the interviewees argued that they saw it as a futile endeavour since the girls' families approved of the marriages. Another case that was shared by some OVC programme beneficiaries at Tsungirirayi Centre included a case where Miranda who was doing Form 2 was sent for the initiation by her mother as she was being mischievous in August of 2006 at the time she was now married to her boyfriend James and they had a child together. Dr. Choto of Norton Hospital said the worst case he had handled was of a 13 year old girl who had been made pregnant by a 14 year old boy. He indicated that the case was so striking to him he interrogated them as to how that had come to be and he learnt that both children had been to the initiation schools. I gathered from the group discussion with home based care givers that the red light district in the area has prostitutes who boast of being graduates of the female initiation and some of them are actually minors. For the most part I realized that the chinamwari was more harmful when coupled with being a member of the Nyau and they would be singing for the Nyau dancers which will be discussed later in Chapter 4.

Hillary Matera, a graduate initiate aged 18 who says she attended the initiation in 2005 had come to ZWLA to seek a divorce order and sharing of property. She had subsequently been married after the initiation but at the time in October 2007 she had separated from her husband. She indicated that when she went for the initiation they were 22 girls in all and by the time of the interview she confirmed that nine of them were married and others had been impregnated. Rose Changa aged 28 refuted that girls who attended the initiation married early but when I asked her at what age she had her first child she said 17. Inadvertently she had contradicted herself. These are but just a few examples of how the initiation has resulted in school dropouts early marriage or pregnancy amongst the Chewa and Nyau community in Norton.

The problem of teenage pregnancies and early marriages has made people realize the need to give teenagers sex education the argument being that teenagers will want to experiment with sex as they experience hormonal changes in their bodies despite all the

talk about abstinence. It is also essential to give children information as this is a basic fundamental human right under article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. I subscribe to this line of thinking but I disagree with the manner in which the current sex education is taking place at the initiation ceremonies in Norton. The aims of sex education have been identified as follows -;

- a. It must provide accurate information on all aspects of human sexuality, including gender
- b. It must assist people to consciously explore, consider, question, affirm and develop their own feelings, attitudes and attitudes on the various dimensions of sexuality
- c. It must enhance self esteem and social skills for developing mutually satisfying, supportive equitable and loving intimate and for the self determination in the experience of one's sexuality including the expression of one's gender and control of one's reproduction
- d. It must enable men and women to act responsibly in the expression of their sexuality, in their reproductive behaviour and in their intimate social relationships [Ozalp. S : 2001]

Some of the characteristics that have been identified for effective sex education that it must :

- 1 Offer age and culturally appropriate sexual health information in a safe environment for the participants
2. Be developed in co-operation with members of the community especially young people.
3. Assist youth to clarify their individual, family and community values.
4. Assist youth to develop skills in communication, refusal and negotiation.
- 5 Provide medically accurate information about both abstinence and also contraception including condoms.
6. Have clear goals for preventing HIV, other STI's and /or teen pregnancy.
7. Focus on specific health behaviours related to these goals, with clear messages about these behaviours.

8. Address psychological risk and protective factors with activities to change each targeted risk and to promote each protective factor.
9. Respect community values and respond to community needs.
10. Rely on participatory teaching methods, implemented by trained educators. [McKeon B: 2006]

Applying these criteria to the knowledge on sexuality that is imparted at the initiation school I concluded that the knowledge imparted falls short of many of the criteria above.

i) Knowledge about STI's and contraceptives

I asked some of the initiators whether they talked to the children about the risks in relation to sexual activity and Mrs. Samson remarked,

“ I tell the girls that AIDS is out there and it kills. I also tell them that in the event that one has had sexual contact they should not feel any discomfort or itchiness of their private parts nor should they have any discharges. Many women come to when to say gogo²⁸ look at what is happening to me then I refer them to the clinic or hospital for treatment”

All the initiators I interviewed professed to having knowledge about HIV/AIDS and how it spread primarily through vaginal intercourse. However, when I asked them whether they could relate to the particular signs and symptoms of specific sexually transmitted infections they all professed ignorance on such detail. I also enquired on whether they discussed issues of contraceptives with the teenage girls and what their views were on abortion. On the former they said that they that they did not discuss issues of contraceptives with girls as they assume that they must not be sexually active and on the latter they all abhorred abortion as being equivalent to murder. Rose Mbanga herself a Moslem narrated how on one occasion the International Organization for Migration visited their congregation at the mosque and started talking about HIV/AIDS and in that they talked about condom use and other preventative methods. After the discussion she alleges that members of the congregation all lambasted the officers who had come for indiscriminately discussing issues of sexuality with adults and children. Whilst the training is essential, perhaps if the discussion had been taken to the initiation school it would have been more appropriate and would have been beneficial. There is need to discuss issues about sex, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and family planning with teenagers to empower them to make informed choices. The Cairo Declaration on

²⁸ Gogo is the colloquial term for grandmother

Population and Development in Article 5 directs States parties to ensure accessibility of family planning services, information and education. Thus despite cultural or religious taboos there must be efforts to discuss all the above stated issues with teenagers.

ii) Child Participation

Part of the recommendations suggest that the development of the sex education curriculae must involve community members including the youth themselves. This is in line with what is required by article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The female initiation in Norton in its present form does not conform to this ideal as only the adult initiators are responsible for determining what information must be part of the sex education. Following the right based approach where rights holders should participate in the formulation of programme meant to benefit them, I recommend that the children's views be sought in the future on what they would like to know about sexuality, love, relationships and also about disease and family planning.

iii) Enhancing Self Esteem and Gender Awareness

Sex education should be aimed at empowering the girls to make informed choices and exercise those choices. Self-esteem is then required to empower the girls to be assertive and confident. However the current messages being conveyed to teenage girls at the female initiation schools gives inappropriate messages on gender equality as shall be discussed below.

3.2.4 TRAINING ON RESPECT, GOOD MORALS AND A WOMAN'S PLACE IN SOCIETY.

A component of the training is also dedicated to instilling moral values and as I soon discovered, inscribing a gender identity on the teenage girls, that is, what femininity entails. I gathered from the information that I obtained during the research that children are seconded to attend the initiation on two accounts, firstly, that they have attained the age of puberty or about to attain that age and the parent (specifically the mother or other female guardian) makes arrangements for the child to undergo training, or for children who though having attained puberty are not well disciplined and they are sent for the initiation to instill good morals, values and discipline. Mrs. Mbeva a home based caregiver aged 35 from the Chewa community stated that when a child who is

undisciplined is sent for the training when the child comes back she would be reformed. At the group discussion I held with child beneficiaries of Tsungirirayi OVC program, according to the information they have heard the trainers there (the elderly grandmothers) are so strict and they actually beat the children into line. Mrs. Samson remarked that

“We teach the children to respect elders and to obey their parents. We teach them not just to respect their parents alone but anyone else who is older than them in the community. We teach them to be polite, courteous and help others,”

But in addition I realized that they also teach them about their position in life and society especially when they talk about manners. Mrs. Samson stated that,

“We teach the girl that when she is married she must respect her in laws, she must not answer back at them in conversation. When she is around them she must wear decent clothing preferably a Zambia or long skirt. At the village she must wake up early and do the chores around the house. With her husband she must not answer back at him when talking and yes, we teach them that the man is the head of the house.”

I confirmed this last assertion with the other three initiators and some of the women and girls that indeed the messages imparted stress that the man is the head of the house.

Christine Mandeya a home based care giver aged 31, elaborated and added,

“We are taught how one must take care of the husband, for instance to cook for him and to wash for him. If for example he comes back from work you take his coat and shoes, offer him something to eat and ask how the day was, in the morning you also wake up early to make him something to eat before he goes to work.”

In all this it occurred to me that there was a stereotyping of the “woman”. The woman being talked about in this context would be a housewife because in other instances a woman might be formally or informally employed and in such cases could come home later than the spouse or be away and circumstances could just interfere with the routine and even just have work fatigue. In any event this latter woman may have a maid to execute some of these duties for her.

Appraisal of the Practice

i) Gender

In my assessment the initiation school serves a useful purpose in so far as it teaches good behaviour. To the extent that they reinforce gender stereotypes and roles then the institution detracts from efforts to transform the gender relations in society. My examination of the teachings revealed that at best the woman’s place is in the home and that men fend for families in the public sphere of life. The information imparted to teenage girls at the initiation ceremonies is fraught with messages aimed at ensuring that the patriarchal society is maintained. The gender roles are clearly articulated in the

sessions. The Millennium Development Goals that are aimed at reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development have Goal 3 articulating the need to promote gender equality and empower women. In addition gender equality has been identified as important for the achievement of all of the MDG's from improving health and fighting disease, reducing poverty and mitigating hunger, to expanding education and lowering child mortality, to increasing access to safe water, to ensuring environmental sustainability. [UNIFEM: 2003]. Gender equality has been described as

“The promotion of equality must not be confused with the simple objective of balancing the statistics: it is a question of promoting long-lasting changes in parental roles, family structures, institutional practices, the organization of work and time, their personal development and independence, but also concerns men and the whole of society, in which it can encourage progress and be a token of democracy and pluralism.”²⁹

By carrying messages that continue to define women as actors within the private sphere the initiation school is detracting from the attainment of gender equality and hence the MDG's. There is a need to challenge the stereotypes that are inculcated at the initiation ceremonies and therefore gender awareness is critical for the community. The rights organizations in the area like ZWLA could conduct strategic training aimed at creating gender awareness.

3.3 SUSTAINING THE PRACTICES

The question I asked myself continuously throughout this research was why women would go to such lengths to ensure that they satisfy their husbands sexually. Was sex the omnipotent ingredient for a healthy and happy marriage that so much effort could be directed at getting it right? Were the men also putting in as much effort to sexually satisfy their wives/partners? What benefit accrued to the gatekeepers if any? I then asked myself even further why it was that the practice had managed to exist through all odds and to the extent that there were now some commercial initiators coming onto the scene it appeared as if the practice was actually gaining legitimacy. Some of the explanations I came up with were as follows-;

²⁹ Gender Mainstreaming http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equ_opp/gms_en.html

i) The Poverty Push Factor

Eventually, I realized that I was interrogating the practice from an outsider perspective and I tried to imagine what decision I would make if I were a parent or child in that community. Bunting A: [2005:17] in trying to explain the causes of early marriages alludes to the fact that the countries that have the lowest average age at first marriage for girls also have extremely low levels of socio- economic development. She also argues further that stereotypical gender roles that remain in most cultures hold that women are to be mothers and wives and the men are to be providers for the family. UNICEF [2001] report on early Marriages identifies poverty as one factor that is fuelling early marriages as the girls marriage is seen as lifting the families economic burden. In the same vein debating on the age of consent to marriage in Uganda, Tamale S [2001] argues that even the setting of the age of consent law is class centric because it seeks to protect the interests of middle class parents who have children in school and ignores poverty stricken families of the rural masses where funding education is not possible due to limited resources. When I looked at most of the people I interviewed in relation to the practice either as initiators, or those who had undergone the initiation, none of the women were employed. The major activities in Norton were farming and mining before the year 2000. The mine closed down and the activities on the farms was affected by the Government Agrarian Land Reform Program, coupled with the effects of the Economic Structural Adjustment Program and the general economic recession that began in the late 1990's and is still affecting the country. Employment opportunities have dwindled and the unemployment rate is estimated at 80%. The area has seven primary schools but only has two secondary schools and one High school, which only enrolls 40 students. This means that the schools in the area cannot totally absorb the turn over of students from primary to secondary and from secondary to high school. There is no vocational training centre or any other tertiary institution in the area. Employment opportunities are limited to the few factories and companies in the area and in the fish industry. When I looked at the factors cumulatively I concluded that:

The continued funding of education for girls is a financial burden to low income families as such an endeavor bears no prospect of alleviating their circumstances.

Pursuing an education becomes worthwhile when you are motivated by other role models within the community employed as professionals or completing their professional qualifications. Under the current prevailing circumstances in Norton the prospect of succeeding and exceeding beyond an Ordinary level are bleak hence there is no motivation for teenagers to pursue education. Mrs. James a counselor with PSI and Tsungirirayi Centre lamented the lack of “role models” in the community that could inspire the children to work hard.

Marriage is therefore the only form of security that exists that families can give to their daughters and it also holds the prospect of obtaining lobola/bride price to the girls’ families.

Following on this logic, I asked a group of home based care givers as to what was the appropriate age for marriage the majority of responses indicated between 17 and 19 years and when I interrogated them as to why they preferred that particular age the reasoning was that the child would have completed her studies and that is Ordinary level studies. However it means that beyond Ordinary Level qualification which the girl possesses, she possesses no other skill or professional qualification and the completion of the ordinary level studies does not necessarily eventuate with attainment of passes at that level. When I asked what sort of employment the girl would take up one participant interjected and said that the appropriate age for marriage was 22. I asked her why and she said she had realized that at that age the girl would have completed her studies. She indicated that by that time the child could have done A Level studies and gone for some tertiary education like teacher training or university. After this explanation it appeared there was a consensus to raise the age of consent to marriage as they all agreed that what was desirable was to have their female children educated and financially independent.

However what is currently pertaining on the ground is contrary to this. In one incident where a girl child dropped out of school who was a member of the Nyau, Mrs. Sabanga the school headmistress at Vimbai Secondary school stated that the girl though aged 15 and doing Form 2 was married off with the approval of her family to a much older man.

She tried to counsel the child but to no avail and in her analysis the bait in all this was that the man had a house and that might have provided the sense of security for the girl. A group of teenage girls from The OVC support programme at Tsungirirayi interviewed, shared with me some of the cases where their peers had dropped out of school said that not only were they uncomfortable talking about school issues but that they would at times even mock and jeer at them as to why they were wasting time pursuing education. (Even when I asked the girls to direct me to where the girls live they would be squatting at the back of my car for the fear of the backlash that could ensue after I had left).

The initiation is aimed at preparing the girl for the job that she must take up in marriage and perfection and excellence must be achieved. Marriage in a sense becomes “a career” and in part this answered my question as to why so much effort is dedicated on pleasing the man in marriage. The man is defined as the head of household, the breadwinner and it is no wonder that the training also incorporates messages that the wife must be submissive, must not answer back to her husband and must endure in silence.

These messages in my analysis are aimed at ensuring that the “dependent” (who in this case is the woman) is never at loggerheads with the breadwinner (the husband) or the lifeline can be cut through the withdrawal of benefits and privileges by the breadwinner. .in other words, “You must not bite the hand that feeds you.” This particular logic is for me what causes women to live in abusive relationships. Many a time I have assisted women who though exposed to all forms of abuse that is, the husband could be physically abusive, could be engaged in extra marital affairs and at times the woman is actually infected with HIV/AIDS but when you interrogate them about the choice of action they will undertake they would not mention divorce as an option. Even where you try to make them realize that the marriage has irretrievably broken down they will then confront you with the reality of their situations, that is, that they are dependant on the husband for their own and their children’s survival and that they have no alternative source of living apart from that. As for me what irks me most is to realize the limitations of options women can exercise in such circumstances. Pickup F. [2001] argues that promoting women’s income generation projects will lessen their vulnerability by increasing their role in

income generation and changing their status within households as it gives them autonomy and empowers them to make decisions. She also supports women's education and training as this will contribute to women's self worth and confidence, raise awareness of oppression and increase their capacity to question norms of male oppression. It is through this way that I believe women can be truly be emancipated and empowered.

ii) Identity and Networks

The indigenous community when referring to the immigrants, I realized were quite condescending as there is a constant reference of "them and us" and even the use of the names like "mabwidi" and "maNyasaland" which are derogatory. Being a minority I realized that the migrants had formulated their own coping and surviving tactics. Part of the coping mechanics are achieved by creating their own elaborate identity and maintaining networks that are useful to them. The initiation ceremony is therefore part of defining their identity. The remarks by Mrs. Samson of what constitutes a "full woman" are evidence of this and thus they become an indicator of one's identity from childhood to adulthood. At the initiation ceremonies I established that the women and girls establish friendships and bonds that lasted through a lifetime. The initiators become mentors and counselors to the young girls. For instance Mrs. Tom gave evidence of how women infected or who suspect infection with STI's come to her for advice. Christine Mandeya added that even when the women have other marital problems they approach the initiators for advice. In a community where they constitute a minority and where family ties have been broken by migration, the absence of the extended family links are compensated for by the networks.

These networks are also particularly useful for other social occasions and events such as weddings parties, funerals and even in times of illness. For instance according to their customary and religion rites bereavement lasts for 40 days and during that period the others come and keep the grieving family company. In this way the initiation serves to cement networks by cementing relationships.

iii) Status

I tried to figure out what the motivation was for the gatekeepers. Unlike the commercial initiators who actually charge a fee for the service rendered either in cash or in kind (In fact Mrs. Chitsa during the interview even suggested that if I was interested in personal training she could arrange for that and we could negotiate the fee). However, Mrs. Banda confirmed that some of the parents would give them gifts in kind for assisting their children. These gifts could take the form of a cock or plates, a Zambia cloth just as examples. However I realized that more than anything the initiators obtained status and power and recognition in the community. All the initiators though being housewives enjoyed status based on the precepts of gerontocracy which is enjoyed by everyone else of their age but in addition as icons of traditional knowledge they have earned respect in the community.

3.4. THE EMERGING DISTORTIONS OVER TIME

Religion or Tradition

When I began this research Mrs. James an employee of PSI and ZWLA Peer Educator who was assisting me with identifying respondents for the research arranged for a group discussion for me with some children who had attended the initiation training. These children were Moslems and also Chewa. On the day I went for the interview I found one of parents of the children Mrs. Makion waiting for me at Tsungirirayi Centre where the interviews were scheduled to take place. She then indicated to me that according to their religion they did not allow their children to openly discuss issues about what takes place at the initiation ceremonies and I could only be privy to that information if I converted to being Muslim. Faced with this dilemma I felt I could no longer proceed with the dissertation topic because simultaneously I had visited a Nyau practicing family in the area and they had indicated that theirs was a secret society and therefore they were not able to divulge any of the goings on of their activities³⁰. I approached my supervisor and

³⁰ The same excuse on Muslim religion could be used by other Muslim to deny me information on the contrary others of the same religion could divulge information without bounds.

wanted to change my dissertation topic but she urged me to be patient as she was sure that something would materialize.

Two weeks later I had gone for a mobile legal aid clinic visit at Tsungirirayi and during the course of discussion with one client Hillary Matera she confirmed being a Muslim and having attended the initiation ceremony. Without any regard to taboos or other constraints she proceeded to disclose what transpired at the initiation ceremonies and she was later arranged for me to meet two of the initiators, Mrs. Banda and Mrs. Tom. Incidentally Mrs James also recalled that one of their workmates at the centre was a Muslim and she would have known about the practices. I managed to interview 4 Chewa/Muslim initiators and all 4 of them were of the opinion that the practice was part of the Moslem religion. All the other interviewees I interviewed be they Muslim or generally members of the community believed that the initiation was part of Muslim religion. There is a marked difference in the community of “them and us” in the community. All the Shona speaking people I would interview would almost invariably state,

“We don’t know much about these practices, they are practiced by the foreigners (mabwidi) especially the Muslims.”

I decided to then investigate whether the practice was indeed part of Muslim religion or not. The first to shed light on this was Rose Changa. She stated that whilst the practice was part of Chewa Culture it was not part of Muslim religion. She explained that perhaps the confusion arose because most Chewa who incidentally also practice the “male and female initiation” are Muslim. Therefore it would not be clear to some whether the practice arises from culture or not. The local Sheikh from the mosque at the African Muslim Agency, Sheikh Adam remarked as follows,

“The practice is haram (which means it is forbidden by our Prophet that is Prophet Mohammed.) Things that are allowed are halala and the initiation is not one of them. The Quran only sanction the carrying out of male circumcision only.”

I realized from observing the community that although there was a significant Moslem community they are not very strict Muslims. Mostly you could only see their presence when they changed their garb and travelled to the mosque for prayers. For instance under Muslim Law women must always cover their heads and hands but during interviews that I had with Moslems they appeared like any ordinary persons. The reason I established

why the practice is haram is that not only does it contain sexually explicit discussions but also for the entire period of confinement the women would be naked and this is what makes the practice haram. The women however are said to arrange for the initiators behind the Sheikh's knowledge. Rose Changa likens this to people who though being Christians still pay tribute to the spirit mediums. I tried to understand why ordinary people could not ascertain for themselves the actual status of the practice from the Quran and I discovered that the Quran was for a long time available only in Arabic hence local people could not of themselves acquaint with the contents of the Quran. Only in recent years was it then translated into Shona but it would appear that the confusion will persist for some time as low levels of literacy were another challenge.

Effects of Urbanization

From the discussions I had with the initiators I established that originally the initiation was supposed to take place in three phases as follows:

Phase 1 Pre Menstruation

Girls from the age of 10 to about 13 years of age would undergo training on menstruation management and pulling of the labia minora, morals and chastity.

Phase 2 Pre Marriage

Girls who are about to get married, traditionally this would be at the age of 15 to about 18 would be taught about sexual activity, taking care of the home and relationships with in laws.

Phase 3 Post Marriage

This initiation could be carried out after marriage. This would include issues about household management, pregnancy and childbirth. Part of it would include the husband being present and the couple would be counselled together.

Mrs. Mangoti added that at that time issues like education were not there so women were eligible for marriage at the attainment of puberty. This is however no longer the case as I established that only one training session takes place and most of the information given to initiates has been condensed into that one training. The reason for this I discovered was that it was not possible due to economic hardships and other community roles hence it

was not always possible to convene and have the different initiations. For instance initially a training session had been scheduled for December but it failed to materialize as logistical arrangements for food could not be arranged due to prevailing food shortages at the time.

The result therefore has been that the training has been condensed with the negative effect that information even topics such as sexuality is now being divulged to children at an inappropriate stage of their lives. From the interviews I conducted it was clear that the women did not want a whole ban of the initiation practice and a compromise would have to be reached. I would be inclined to conclude that the initiators should revisit their course content and provide age appropriate information to its target group as was originally conceptualized. In addition though the second phase premarital phase of the training coincided with puberty I would conclude that the information on sexual activity be delayed and be only discussed with persons above the age of 18 years. Joyce Chitemere remarks were that,

“The initiation culture has failed to a new era of women’s emancipation and empowerment.”

I believe it is the changes mentioned above can facilitate the adaptation and compatibility of the practice.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS: NYAU DANCE VIGILS

4.1. ORIGINS, NATURE AND PREVALENCE OF PRACTICE

The Nyau culture is alien to Zimbabwe. The Nyau is a secret society and is the primary spiritual practice of the Chewa people of Malawi. According to Chewa religion, men and women and all living animals and things were created by God. (Chiuta / Chauta). The spirits of men and the wild animals were in constant communication at the great dance (Gule wamkulu) where masked forms represented wild animals, human beings and the spirits of the dead. [Kecia's World, Philtar] This constant communication takes place through dances that take place at initiation, funerals and funeral remembrances.

The Nyau dancers represent the spirits of animals and the ancestors brought back from the spirit world to attempt a temporary reconciliation with mankind in the village [Curran D : 1999]. The Nyau masks are worn by the men who would have undergone initiation. The masks represent wild animals, human beings and the spirits of the dead and are worn at the dances. The rationale for the Nyau brotherhood apart from being part of a cultural religion was that while the Chewa are a matrilineal society, the Nyau brotherhood offered men a means to establish a counterweight and solidarity among men of various villages. (UNESCO 1995-2006)

During the days of the federation when labour migration occurred the practice spread to Zambia and Zimbabwe and exists into this present day particularly in farming and mining in communities where migrant populations are concentrated like Norton. Often when you are in the area you come across the raised flags of red, black or green where they will be performing or you meet them in the suburbs of Norton running around in their regalia.

4.2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

In Norton, the Nyau Dance Vigils take place in the community at such occasions as funerals, wedding parties, and beer brewing ceremonies for the appeasement of spirits. On these occasions the Nyau first raise a flag at the place where the dances are to be held. The women will proceed to converge at the specified location whilst the male dancers go

to a secluded place like a make shift hut or to the cemetery to change into their dance regalia. The reason for this I gathered from Collin Mafuta, a 21 year old man who is now a Christian convert but was previously a Nyau dancer is that:

“the gules strive to remain anonymous thus they change into their masks at secluded places where ordinary people cannot see them. When they reappear no one can identify who is who when the dancers are now clad in their masks.”

For the above reason many a times the complaints that the community brought forward were that the Gule would beat up people especially children in the community and know that reports could not be followed up as their identities as perpetrators of the offence would be concealed. However, Constable Chaponda of the ZRP confirmed that at one time they had arrested them and this had served as a deterrent for some time. Depending on the occasion the dancers may first go round the township parading their dancers with the women following or they simply proceed to a central venue where they will carry out their dances. However, it would appear that the dancers are also being lured by economic gain and in Norton you can find them dancing at Katanga bus terminus or Ngoni Shopping Centre and people throw money at them.

Depending on the occasion, the dances can start during the day and continue until the wee hours of the morning. There are times like bereavement where mourning is said to last for a week and the dances will routinely be carried out during that period including weekdays. Beer is brewed for seven days and on the seventh day the beer is then drunk to mark the end of the mourning. Silence a former dancer aged 18 and now a Christian convert also confirmed from the community that they have practice sessions especially on Friday evening where the dancers and singers come together and practice their dance and music routines.

From interviews that I carried out in the community; I found that the young children find the dances entertaining. The ZWLA child peer educators I had a group interview with confirmed that the watching the dances as outsiders was entertaining. I then gathered that part of the fascination of why they find the dances entertaining was because some lyrics of the songs sung at the dances are obscene and there is a particular act where the dancers

dance nude with only white powder smeared over their bodies. And to the teenagers this was quite amusing.

In all instances where young people attend the dances it is with full approval of their parents or guardians. For instance Collin narrated how he started attending the dances when he was in Grade Four living with his grandfather who was also a member of the Nyau. Pauline aged 15 who is now married is a singer of the Nyau and her parents are members of the Nyau and a red flag is usually raised at their home that I saw it there for myself. Thus even where the dances go into the wee hours of the morning the attendance of the children is never questioned and has the full blessing of the parents.

Appraisal of the practice

i) Impact on the Rights of Girls

I had occasion to watch the dances during the research and I can confirm that the dances are quite entertaining. However, what appeared problematic for me was the timing of the dances and the consequences thereof. The dances can coincide with school hours, that is, they can be carried out during weekdays. There are also occasions when the dances are carried out overnight as vigils. What seems to be happening at the vigils however is that the vigils are becoming a convenient meeting place for boys and girls to start dating and falling in love and getting married. There are allegations that sexual encounters occur at the dances between the girls and the boys and that the girls are made to sleep with the male dancers taking turns to have sexual intercourse with them³¹ This was originally one of my assumptions but as they were no reported cases of rape or sexual abuse reported at the Police Station as I learnt from Constable Chaponda it was impossible to verify the truth of such allegations since the girls themselves were reluctant to discuss the goings on at the initiation ceremonies . What I was nevertheless able to verify is that the teenage girls who attend the dance vigils are contracting early marriages with the male Nyau dancers. Some of the cases I verified were as follows:

³¹ See for instance the confessions in the Herald of 24 March 2007 where allegations were made that the wife of a fellow member could be made to have sexual intercourse with the other members with husband watching.

Sheila aged 16 was pregnant at the time of the research. Her husband Peter is unemployed and he is a Nyau dancer. She stopped going to school in Form 2 in 2007

Patience stopped going to school in Grade 7 in 2006. She is married to Stephen who is unemployed and is a Nyau dancer

Pauline aged 15 also stopped going to school in Grade 7 at Chiedza Primary School. Her parents are staunch Nyau members. She is married to Frank. She conceived but had a miscarriage

Fortune aged 17 is married and has a child with Robert another Nyau dancer. Robert pushes carts carrying people's goods for a living in the area.

Esnath aged 15 at the time stopped going to school in Grade 2 when she was an orphan She is now married to John who is aged 19

In all the above instances the girls had also undergone the female initiation training according to Nyau rite (chinamwari chezvigure) which practice I established is similar to the practice discussed in Chapter 3 herein. In all the cases stated above the girls are all under the age of 18 years yet some had been married, other had babies or were pregnant and Pauline had actually had a miscarriage. In all these instances the girls also stopped going to school. The effects of the factors combined on the rights of the teenage girls education and to sexual and reproductive health are obviously disappointing. The girls all have no careers as they all failed to complete secondary and in some cases primary education. The effects of early marriages are well established. Early sexual onset also predisposes girl to the risk of contracting STI's including HIV /AIDS. In my assessment the incidence of intermarriage between the dancers and the singers is proof that the dances are a convenient meeting place for the lovers to meet and one cannot rule out the possibility of sexual encounters taking place at the dance vigils. In all instances the parents seemed to approve of the marriages. It may well be that it is not that the parents encourage the early marriages but by exposing their children to these dance vigils they are indirectly facilitating these early marriages and condoning the practice. Recognizing the right of a people to a culture and the right to positive cultural values as enshrined in the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights in articles 22 and 29(7) respectively, I recommend that the children should only be allowed to attend the dances during the day

when their attendance does not interfere with school attendance and where they have to attend the all night vigils this must only be made when arrangements for strict adult supervision have been put into place and preferably this should be during vacations.

ii) Impact on the Rights of Boys

During the research I also came across an unintended outcome which I thought could not be ignored. During an interview that I had with the beneficiaries of the OVC programme at Tsungirirayi Centre one student, Tawona Mubatagore in Form 3 at St Eric's High School posed a question to me. This was after I had been asking them about female members of the Nyau dropping out of school and she interjected and asked why it was that I was only interested in females only who had dropped out of school as there were also boys who had dropped out of school and was this inconsequential? I realized that this had been an oversight on my part as I had never imagined what the outcomes of the practice could be for teenage boys. The children disclosed knowing of Silence, Aleck , Lloyd, Bright and Justin who all had dropped out of school to be Nyau dancers full time. Silence, now aged 18 was a beneficiary of the Tsungirirayi OVC programme and had dropped out of school in Form 2. I was able to locate him during the research and he was able to hold a discussion with me since he was now a Christian convert with the Apostolic sect. He recounted how initially he started missing school a few days a week but later he stopped going altogether. His explanation for absconding school was -:

“ When the drums are playing it is as if they are beckoning you to come. You then find yourself failing to resist the urge to attend the dances. In time you realize you have missed so much of school it becomes pointless for you to even continue going because you cannot catch up”

I attribute fault to the adult dancers for this because if they were responsible they would direct the children to pursue their studies and go back to school Joyce Chitemere's argument on the matter was that,

“No one there cares about school The adults there are not educated as much so there is a total lack of appreciation of the benefits of the value of education by all the parties involved.”

Joyce made these remarks as she was trying to explain the frustration she had when Silence dropped out of the OVC school bursary programme that is funded by Tsungirirayi Centre. She recalls how she realized that even his guardians were not impressing upon him to go back to school; so hers became a lone voice and regrettably at

that time no one took heed of it. Today Silence and all the other boys discussed to above did not complete their secondary education. The effects may not be realized immediately but they will surely reveal themselves when they struggle to find any formal employment and cannot establish a career.

iii) Gender Roles

The dancers of the Nyau are male whereas the singers are female. This made me wonder whether there was a gender dimension to it. No valid explanation was given for this but my own conclusion was that despite the Chewa originally being a matrilineal society that aspect of their culture seems to have fallen away by their presence in patriarchal societies like Zimbabwe. In any event even where the matrilineal societies existed the “man” had the responsibility of looking after the family whilst the woman’s place would be in the home and in reality the so-called matrilineal societies do not represent the antithesis of patriarchy. I concluded that the dancers also departed the same skewed messages about gender roles with man actively taking part in society and women taking a more passive and subservient role.

4.3. SUSTAINING THE PRACTICES

(a) Secrecy

The Nyau are a very closed society and I realized this is one way they have been able to ensure that their practices sustain themselves. There are serious threats about disclosing any of the details of the Nyau to outsiders. During the research I only managed to interview Collin and Silence who are young men who had since left the Nyau group and were practising Christians. Some threats included that one could become insane if they divulged the secrets of the Nyau and that one’s mouth could move to the side or you could get an incurable ailment. Both Collin and Silence confirmed receiving threats from the members who pursued them for some time threatening them to rejoin the Nyau. This veil of secrecy about what happens at the Nyau has facilitated secrecy hence their practices continue to go on unnoticed. The secrecy thus facilitates silence even in the case of abuse³².

³² For instance Silence is said to have contracted an STI when he was a member of the Gule. He only

b) Identity and Networks

As I pointed out earlier in relation to the initiation the Nyau offers a sense of identity to its members. There are particular rituals that one must perform to be accepted as a member of the Nyau. Collins for instance narrated how he was made to kill a cock by inserting a stick through its anus and having the stick come out through the mouth while drinking the blood³³. Thereafter he was made to eat the chicken raw. One is also required to spend a night in the graveyard as a sign of bravery. I gathered that through these rituals bonds are created as the members identify with one another. They have also established networks that are useful for community support at events such as funerals where in solidarity the Nyau come and mourn one of their members and the deceased, if she or he was a member, must be buried in accordance with Nyau burial rites.

c) Benefits of Religion

The Nyau is a traditional religion and hence its members I gathered believe that the Creator (Chauta) and the ancestors are a source of good luck and inspiration for them in their lives. To the outsider however the Nyau are treated with suspicion. Mr. Wapera aged 74 a Chewa himself but is a Christian said of the Nyau,

“ They use bad portions. ” (vanobata mishonga yakaipa).

However, Collins confirmed that you could get a lucky charm to help you find employment or to help ward off other evil spirits that could be haunting you. I then gathered that to the members perhaps it is such benefits and prospects which draw them to membership perhaps in the same way all people are drawn to different religions for the guidance of the creator be it God, Allah or Jah depending on the religion. If one is alleged to have aggrieved the spirits then a beer brewing ceremony could be undertaken to appease them.

came to Joyce the OVC Programme Officer so he could get medical assistance but refused to disclose exactly what happened.

³³ The same ritual was confirmed in the story Unmasking the Nyau The Herald 24 March 2007.

4.4. THE EMERGING DISTORTIONS OVER TIME

The Nyau culture has over time been adulterated. Initially the Nyau brotherhood was meant for boys who had undergone initiation but presently even boys below the age of puberty that are now attending Nyau dances as well. Other observers in community like Mr. Wapera and Mrs. Rudo James confirmed that they grew up seeing the Nyau but they never joined. However, from what they observed it appeared that it was mostly adults past child bearing age who would become members as they were taboos about engaging in sexual encounters because they are charms and other portions used these were said not to work where a person would have indulged in sexual relations. So young people and sexually active people shunned the Nyau culture. According to their recollection of the past issues the girl child, abuse never arose in those days. What they are witnessing now is different as teenagers and even young children are being conscripted to become members of the Nyau. It is therefore possible that abuse could occur under such circumstances.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Analysis and Recommendations

This research enabled me to assess the impact of the practice of female initiation ceremonies and Nyau dance vigils for their compatibility with human rights. In the final analysis I was able to conclude that female initiation inherently violate the rights of teenage girls as follows:

The elongation of the labia minora constitutes Type IV, FGM and constitutes a harmful cultural practice.

Virginity testing violates children's right to privacy and their right to bodily integrity.

The messages given to teenage girls on their role and place in the family and society

The content of knowledge imparted to teenagers at initiation school predisposes teenage girls to early sexuality.

There is evidence that teenage girls who have attended initiation schools have dropped out of school as they contract early marriages or teenage pregnancies.

Of the dance vigils I was able to conclude the following -:

The attendance of teenage girls at Nyau dance vigils is facilitating their contraction of early marriages and or pregnancies resulting in school dropouts. This problem is exacerbated in situations where the teenage girls have also attended the female initiation ceremonies.

On the whole both practices have this in common, they are detracting from the realization of girls rights to education by fostering early marriages and pregnancies. Hellum A. and Knudsen A.L.S. [2007:350] assert that a girls capacity to protect herself from unwanted pregnancies and HIV is closely linked to the right to education and adds further that

comprehensive sex education delays the onset of sexual activity and provides life skills needed for safe sexual behaviour. By failing to achieve this, the practices are impacting on the realization of women's empowerment and emancipation ideals as well as their self-development as provided for in Article 19 of the African Women's Protocol, community and national development. There is confirmation from trends in the community that the rate of girl child dropout and early marriage is significant enough to warrant attention. I inspected the school and hospital records and a cursory inspection of the rate of teenage pregnancies at Norton Hospital revealed that in 2005 and 2006 the hospital had 98 and 157 cases respectively of births by mothers below the age of 18.³⁴ The UNICEF Report [2001] on early marriages stress the adverse consequences that early marriages and pregnancies have on teenage girls such as psychosocial disadvantage, complications and low birth weight and higher chances of vesico vaginal fistulae and the teenage girls in Norton are no exception. Some of the complications that they had witnessed in 2006 included the following.

Table 2

Condition	No. of women below 18 affected
Spontaneous abortion	5
Haemorrhage pregnancy	1
Obstructed labour	6
Breech	3
Other	10
STI's	1
Purepernum Complications (after birth complications)	6

These effects of these trends were worrying to me particularly when I tried to think of the effects that this was having on the lives of these teenage girls having regard to the psychological and physical impact of early marriages. Complications related to

³⁴ The statistics for 2007 were not yet available at the time of the research. The ages of girls who are stated here ranges from 14 to 17 and those who gave birth after they had attained the age of 18 years are excluded

pregnancy are not the only problem that is faced by these girls but in addition Clark B.[et al 2004] argues that girls who contract early marriages are at higher risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. Whilst not all cases could be attributed to the female initiation ceremonies and dance vigils they are responsible for a portion thereof.

Vimbai Secondary School which has a total school enrolment of 1689 comprising of 836 boys and 843 girls in 2007, also had the following rates of dropouts.³⁵

Table 3

Reason for drop out	Male	Female
School fees	11	5
Expulsion		1
Pregnancy		7
Marriage		10
Illness		1
Death	3	
Other ³⁶	18	21
Total	32	45

In the above table Mrs. Sabanga the school headmistress explained that marriage was treated differently from pregnancy as marriage referred to girls who opted to get married but were not pregnant. Mrs. Sabanga explained that from her assessment the girls who had attended the chinamwari were more likely to become pregnant than other children. Against this context it becomes imperative to try and address those factors that could be indirectly or directly fuelling these trends and phenomena and some such practice include the female initiation and the dance vigils. The Chewa/ Muslim and Nyau communities must be sensitized on the value of education explaining in detail that the community itself stands to benefit from educating the girl child and delaying early marriages. Stressing the need for female education, Tackie N.O.et al [2005:127] asserts that although African

³⁵ The figures for the other St Eric's Secondary School were not available at the time of the research

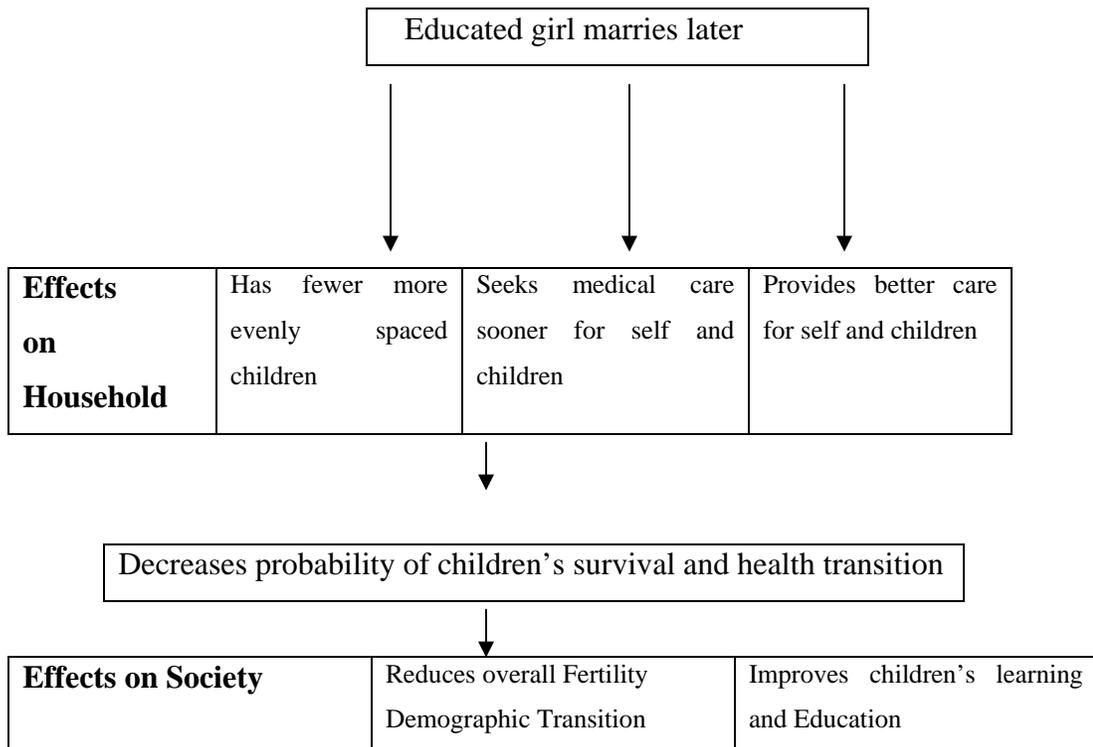
³⁶ These are cases where verification of the actual reason for the drop out could not be established

women have made some progress, economic, social and legal barriers continue to hamper their productivity and prevent them from achieving their full potential. In relation to education Tackie N.O. adds,

“Unequal access to education is the genesis of a vicious cycle of poverty for women However, female education has several benefits. Among them are better employment, reduced poverty, better health and nutrition for children, better health for women, reduced fertility rates , improved community health and mproved national welfare and economic development”

Also stressing the value of education Asiedu E. [et al: 2005:136] asserts that a better-educated mother is more productive at home and in the workplace. She argues further that there is a positive relationship between female education and a country’s economic and social well-being as measured by the gross national product, infant mortality rates and fertility rates. These sentiments are succinctly illustrated in the European Community [2004] as follows

Diagram 2.



The above diagram serves to show that the education of women has an impact firstly at a personal level where the woman herself is empowered to make choices and this manifests

itself in the choices she makes for her family and household. She will for instance be able to evenly space her children, give them better health care and provide for herself and the children. This then translates to the wider society where demographic transition takes place and there is an improvement in learning and education. Thus, if we are intent on realizing both women's and community development we must address all the factors that detract from girl child's education like the female initiation and Nyau dance vigils.

However a very cautious approach must be taken in dealing with the practices under research. As the practices I was investigating are cultural practices there is need therefore for culturally sensitive approaches bearing the right of people to a culture and to positive cultural values. To address these practices there is need to decipher the positive aspects of these practices. In dealing with female genital mutilation in Kenya the alternative rites of passage program collects the traditional wisdom imparted to girls when they are circumcised adapts these messages to encourage positive female traditional values without the physical damage caused by fgm. The new training content includes topics such as self-esteem, personal hygiene, dating and courtship, pregnancy STI's including HIV/AIDS, contraception, respect for elders in the community among others. [Abandoning FGC: 2001]. In inspecting both practices I concluded the practices contain the following positive aspects that can be retained and built upon -:

The initiation school offers valuable information about menstruation management, personal hygiene, good morals abstinence and chastity.

The initiation offers an already existing platform for engaging with teenagers. There is a need to utilize the platform to give teenagers proper advice on sexuality, safe sex practices, gender sensitization family planning and about STI's including HIV/AIDS. Experts must be called upon to facilitate these discussions so that accurate and appropriate information is provided.

The Nyau dance vigils are entertaining but there must be either, restrictions on the times that children should attend that do not interfere with normal school hours and where dances are held overnight, attendance of teenage girls and boys must be upon arrangements that strict adult supervision has been put in place preferably during school holidays .

There are possible points of entry that could be used to target these practices. HIV/AIDS though it has negative repercussions, offers an entry point for discussions on sexuality with communities that never existed previously. Communities are thus willing to learn more about the disease and this can be used as an entry point to discuss other issues about for instance sexuality, gender and women's empowerment. In the long term comprehensive sex education should be made part of the school curriculae so that teenagers are empowered with information on their reproductive health rights. The civil society organizations working in the area like ZWLA, PSI and Tsungirirayi need to take more active steps to address these issues, For instance ZWLA could provide training on gender sensitivity, domestic violence and human rights being the areas it bears expertise on, whereas PSI and Tsungirirayi could give information on sexual reproductive health and choices. Their entry points could be liaising with the initiators when the training is being conducted so that the training could include their information. There is a need also for the trainers to be specifically targeted for training in the first place as they are the gate keepers and it critical to get their buy in if any change is to take place. The foreseeable difficulty is targeting the Nyau community as they are very closed and any intervention may be hampered by their reluctance to change or engage with outsiders.

There is also a need for the revision of the age of consent for girls to be raised to 18 years to ensure that Zimbabwe complies with the minimum standards as set out in the various human rights instruments. Another strategy could be to have role models mentoring the teenage girls especially women who have been successful in the different professions. In the suggested ways it is anticipated that the promotion and upholding of teenage girls rights to education will be realized by communities in Norton and that this will trickle down to impact on community and even national development

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