

THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

**THE APPROPRIATENESS OF THE GIRL-CHILD INITIATION TRAINING IN THE
ZAMBEZI REGION OF NAMIBIA**

A MASTERS THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT

OF THE DEGREE OF

MASTERS OF EDUCATION IN ADULT EDUCATION

OF

THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

BY

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MAY, 2021

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to investigate the appropriateness of the conditions during the girl-child initiation training that is hardly documented. This study was conducted in the Zambezi Region in Namibia as the practice of girl-child initiation training is common in that region.

This study was guided by the three objectives namely to (1) identify activities performed during girl-child initiation training-(2)-investigate the appropriateness of the conditions during the girl-child initiation training activities and (3) suggest measures that can help improve the conditions during the girl-child initiation training activities in the Zambezi Region of Namibia. The study adopted a qualitative approach methodology to enable the researcher to seek and explore diverse human experiences, feelings, views and subjective positions. That was done by using a combination of case studies or multiple cases and narrative research design. The multiple cases is a design known as collective case studies selected to provide insights into the issues or theme which in this study is the girl-child initiation training activities and conditions supported by exploratory research design. Case studies are very useful to explore topics where there is little knowledge or understanding.

The population of the study consisted of initiates (*Kumwale*), parents of the initiates, mentors and village headmen/women (*Induna*) from four constituencies in the Zambezi Region. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and then analysed using content analysis.

Study findings revealed that there are some common misconceptions about the activities that are done during the initiation trainings. The conditions for the period of the training are also negatively labelled and believed to be leading a girl-child to early girl marriage. The findings attested to the opposite. Instead it was found that girl-child initiation training activities aimed at moulding young girls into womanhood and to encourage them to marry at the appropriate age. The initiation activities involved, making traditional meals, home chores, weaving baskets, making clay pots and being oriented to the role of women in the society. In addition to women roles, they were introduced to the women taboos, local culture, and practices. The study further found out that the initiation training is highly valued by the locals. It is perceived that the girl-child that has not undergone the initiation training is lacking. Study findings alluded to the fact that initiates earn a great respect from the locals by being accepted in the community as women

after graduating. They are further perceived as having been equipped with survival skills as they would have learned to use their hands and even make a living by selling their handmade products. The skills imparted during the initiation training are very important for cultural practices and it is believed that they empower the girl-child for the new roles in the society.

The study recommends institutionalisation of the girl-child initiation training into the indigenous local education systems. It further recommends recognised formal structures to replace the informal and non-formal ways of initiation training. The study also suggests that the activities and conditions performed during the initiation trainings should be documented for replication and for improvement where necessary. Further studies were also recommended for comparative studies between other regional practices or impact evaluations of the initiation graduates.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank God Almighty for protecting and guiding in this academic journey. This journey has been challenging but with the Grace of God it was possible. I express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Prof. R. K. Shalyefu for guiding me through this study. The constructive suggestions she gave during this study made this journey easy, the study was conducted from May 2021 to October 2021, I will forever be indebted to her.

Very special thanks goes to my husband Mr Mutame Muchali, who has been supportive throughout my academic journey, not forgetting my children who gave moral support as well as prayers for this to be possible. I would also want to give my special thanks to the people of the Zambezi Region communities namely: Mafwe, Masubia and Mayeyi which dedicated their time despite busy schedules to participate in this study. The support they gave made this dream a reality. Thank you all for your support.

DEDICATION

This piece of academic paper is dedicated to my lovely parents Mr Alfred Kabala and Mrs Josephine Kabala. These people played a bigger role in my academic journey.

SUPERVISOR CERTIFICATION

I, Prof. R. K. Shalyefu, hereby certify that the research and writing of this study was carried out under my supervision.

Prof. R. K. Shalyefu

Date

DECLARATION

I, Mascot Bakunupi Muchali declare that the thesis, the appropriateness of the conditions girl-child initiation training in the Zambezi Region of Namibia is my own work, and that this work, has not been submitted to any other institution of higher education. This thesis is hereby submitted for the Master of Education in Adult Education at the University of Namibia. Furthermore, all sources contained herein have been duly acknowledged by way of complete referencing.

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Mascot Bakunupi Muchali

Date

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACHPR	African Commission on Human and People's Rights
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
HCP	Harmful Cultural Practices
ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting
LE	Labia Elongation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SADC	Southern African Development Committee
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The girl-child initiation training is a social-cultural activity located within the broader context of adult education, as an endeavour founded in the indigenous education systems (Shell-Duncan et al., 2017). It is also viewed as a rite of passage or ritual, a celebration where parents celebrate the passage of their daughter from girl-child to womanhood (Muashekeleh et al., 2018). It is used to prepare girls for their respectful adult roles (preparing meals, weaving baskets, making clay pots, attending cultural ceremonies, bearing children, getting married, owning a house or getting accepted into positions of community leadership) in the society (Munthali, 2018) During these activities, the initiates are guided and overseen by senior women or mentors within the communities (Brown, 2015). The content of the training is noted to include etiquette, comportment, sexuality, death, burial and sometimes history (Shalyefu, 2018). Generally, the girl-child initiation training is regarded as a license for individuals to be viewed as adults (Munthali, 2018). Though literature use the concept uniformly, over the years, different accounts in media and academic literature have emphasised different views about the practice (Ya Nangolo, 2014; Rasmeni, 2017) and therefore the understanding of the concept and the conditions surrounding the related social activities invite debate as this is a sensitive and controversial issue.

Further, literature indicates that the practice of girl-child initiation training is done in various countries like, Asia, South America, South Africa, Kenya, Somali (Muashekeleh, 2018). In addition, studies done by Rasmeni (2017), Muntali, (2018) Muashekeleh et al. (2018) affirm the perceived importance of girl-child initiation training. However, there are some irreconcilable perceptions of girl-child initiation training, which caused some communities to perform it in secrecy or in hiding for fear of excommunication from the religious groups (Muashekele et al., 2018)

Correspondingly, the practitioners are convinced that girl-child initiation provides valuable moral education to prepare girls for their adulthood journey. Meanwhile, other interest groups, churches and religious practitioners are querying the value of these practices (Muashekeleh et al., 2018). In fact, missionaries regarded it as a pagan activity (Hayes, 2003 as cited in Shalyefu, 2018).

Despite the fact that the Constitution of Namibia, particularly Chapter 3, Articles 10 and 19 respectively, which are concerned with the protection and promotion of national cultural pride and practices and in synchronicity with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and in particular SDG 4, which fully capture the new vision “Towards 2030” that advocates to: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” Such indigenous education and training are still rejected in some communities without realising that is within the commitment of lifelong learning approaches of non-formal and informal education.

Remarkably, the Zambezi Region in Namibia is one of the epic centres that perform girl-child initiation training. However, the concept of girl-child initiation training remains hazy and consequently there is very little documentation, if any, to justify the contribution of it as a lifelong learning endeavour. In fact, there is no written information on girl-child initiation training in Namibia, particularly in the Zambezi Region. From the researcher’ personal experiences, the concept of girl-child initiation training are alleged as a simple term and the conditions under which it is performed is unappreciated and perceived with no educational value, and therefore it provoked this study.

Given the above, it is vital to undertake a systematic inquiry into girl-child initiation training with a purpose to interrogate the understanding of the concept, activities performed and their purposes, as well as the appropriateness of the conditions during the training and its relevance to lifelong learning.

1.3 Statement of the problem

The literature (Rasmeni, 2017; Muntali, 2018; Muashekeleh, 2018; Makano, 2019) indicates that the practice of girl-child initiation training is done in various countries like, Somali, Asia, South

America, South Africa, Kenya, there is not enough written information and clear documents to provide a shared understanding of the concept and the appropriateness of the conditions during the girl-child initiation training. There is a gap in understanding the concept and the appropriateness of the activities performed during the girl-child initiation training. Some people do not consider initiation training as an important aspect in lifelong learning or in the African culture (Hayashi, 2017), neither do they note the relevance of the conditions performed during the girl-child initiation training in the life (Makono, 2019). The above gap in literature triggered the researcher to undertake a study with the aim to fill the literature knowledge gap since this is also a controversial issue in terms of social, cultural and sexual preferences.

1.4 Research questions

The study was guided by the main research question:

- How appropriate is the girl-child initiation training in the Zambezi Region of Namibia?

The study also sought answers to three sub-questions:

- What are the activities performed during girl-child initiation training in the Zambezi Region?
- What are the perceptions of initiates and initiators about health and sanitary conditions during the girl-child initiation training activities in the Zambezi Region?
- Which measures can help improve the conditions during the girl-child initiation training activities in the Zambezi Region of Namibia?

1.5 Significance of the study

The study may be of significance to the contribution of a conceptual understanding of girl-child initiation training. In addition, the study findings about the appropriateness of the conditions performed during girl-child initiation, may also chart a new path which aim at involving the communities to improve the practice and to find a framework that will be relevant to the peculiarities, interests and needs of the targeted communities. Perhaps this may extend our knowledge and thereby add to the body of knowledge of the girl-child initiation training schools. Additionally, it may be of relevance to future researchers and individuals who wish to study the

same subject in a similar context or elsewhere. Importantly, the study findings may raise awareness for protective interventions or legislations and policy that will address the claims of inappropriate conditions involving girl-child initiation training.

1.6 Limitations of the study

The major anticipated limitation for this study is the rapid increases in the number of cases of Coronavirus (COVID-19), which insist on social distancing, and this may hinder the willing participants to be part of the study. However, alternatives were arranged to hold online or remote interviews other than having face-to-face interactions with research participants. On that same note, some participants may not be willing to be interviewed on the phone or through online tools like skype, zoom or google meet, for ethical reasons of anonymity and confidentiality. Consequently, different alternatives were explored in consultation with the research participants. Such alternatives were conducive to both the researcher and participants in order to adhere to COVID-19 regulations.

1.7 Delimitations of the study

The scope of the study is confined to the population of participants from which the sample is drawn. The study covered three (3) ethnic groups in the Zambezi Region namely: *Mafwe*, *Masubia* and *Mayeyi* as they are known to subject girl-children to the initiation training before they get married. The Zambezi Region is the most appropriate place for this common practice. Therefore, the study findings are potentially generalisable to girl-child initiation trainings similar to those studied.

1.8 Definitions of key terms

Female Genital Mutilation: Refers to all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons (FGM) (United Nations Population Fund, 2020).

Initiation Ceremony: A form of rite of passage where individuals are transformed from one stage to another, experiencing some status change accompanied with a lot of drama and is characterised by various forms of symbols and rituals (Mutale, 2017).

Menarche: Used to describe the first menstrual period (United Nations Population Fund, 2020)

Moral norm: A behavioural rule motivated by personal values of right and wrong, which gives rise to feelings of righteousness for compliance and guilt for noncompliance. It is intrinsically motivated rather than extrinsically motivated by social rewards and sanctions (UNICEF, 2010).

Ritual: Refers to the means to negotiate a responsible relationship in the human community, with the ancestors, spirits, divinities, and cosmos. African rituals establish identity; elicit revelation, access divinity to foster empowerment, and effect transformation (Bongmba & Olupona, 2012).

Resilience: the ability of something to return to its original shape after it has been bent, stretched or pressed. In this study, resilience means the ability of initiation ritual to survive despite some changes in the Zambezi people's life due to the influences of education, religion and technology (Mutale, 2017).

Social Change: Any significant alteration over time in behaviour patterns and cultural values and norms. In this study social change means the alterations in the way of life of the Zambezi people due to influences of modernity through the *Sikenge* initiation ceremony (Mutale, 2017).

Social norm: A social rule of behaviour that members of a community follow in the belief that others expect them to follow suit. Compliance with a social rule is motivated by expectations of social rewards for adherence to the rule and social sanctions for non-adherence (UNICEF, 2010).

Virginity testing: The practice of determining whether a hymen is intact and consequently attributing or removing virginity status; does not consider other ways of hymenal perforation (United Nations Population Fund, 2020).

1.9 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the orientation to the whole study. This chapter explained the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions and significance to the study. The chapter also discussed limitations and delimitations of the study. Operational definitions of terms ended the chapter. The next chapter presents the review of literature relevant to the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the review of selected literature that is related to the appropriateness of the girl-child initiation training in international world and in Namibia. First, the theoretical framework that informed the study will be explained. Secondly, a perspective on the appropriateness of girl-child initiation training the literatures gives an in-depth discussion from a global, continental, and Namibian perspective. The chapter ends with discussions on the activities performed during girl-child initiation training, perceptions of initiates and initiators about health and sanitary conditions during the girl-child initiation training and measures can help improve the conditions during the girl-child initiation training activities.

The literature focuses on initiation training as the rite of passage, usually performed during puberty (Shell-Duncan et al., 2017). Rasmeni (2017) further expands the definition to being a tribal and community practice or ritual which is symbolic of an entry point to which a young woman is allowed to become an active and fully-fledged member of the community. It is a cultural tradition that is practiced in most communities in Africa. It marks the entrance or acceptance into a group or society. It could also be a formal admission to adulthood in a community or one of its formal components. It can also signify a transformation in which the initiate is reborn into a new role, which is supposedly accompanied by training and preparations (UNFPA, 2020).

2.2 Theoretical framework

The study is informed by the Social Learning theory of Albert Bandura (1977) Socio-Cultural Theory of Vygotsky (1978) and the Social Identity Theory of Tajfel (1979). The three theories guide the study on conditions affecting the appropriateness of activities during the girl-child initiation trainings in the Zambezi Region of Namibia.

2.2.1 The Socio-Cultural Learning Theory

According to Mwamwenda (2004) socio-cultural learning theory, learning is socially and culturally situated in contexts of everyday living and is based on what a child learns in his/her

environment as he or she interacts and observes others. It further guides a person's behaviour so that it is in accordance with societal norms, values and beliefs. Vygotsky (1978, p.90) "maintains that learning for individuals always takes place in a social context where learners seek support from more able peers or teachers and/or technical tools or artefacts in their "zones of proximal development." (Vygotsky, 1978) proposes that new behaviours can be acquired by observing and imitating others. Bandura (1977) puts emphasis on observing, modelling, and imitating the behaviours, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. Thus, the socio-cultural learning theory, considers how environmental- cultural and cognitive factors interact to influence human learning and behaviour. Bandura (1977) echoes that learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context and can occur purely through observation or direct instruction, even in the absence of motor reproduction or direct reinforcement. The theory expands on traditional behavioural theories, in which behaviour is governed solely by reinforcements, by placing emphasis on the important roles of various internal processes in the learning. This process of learning is also referred to as the observation/model or imitation learning (McLeod, 2011). The theoretical framework on which this study is anchored thus focusses on understanding the process of initiation in building capacity of a girl-child into their womanhood from their communities as part of the conformity to their culture, values and descent (Brown, 2015).

2.2.2 Social Identity Theory

The study was also guided by the social identity theory, whose focus is on the understanding of the self (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Social identity theory focuses on the causes and consequences of identifying with a social group or category. The core of an identity is the categorisation of the self as an occupant of the role and the incorporation into the self, of the meaning and its importance. These expectations form a set of standards that guide the behaviour. In addition, individuals view themselves in terms of meaning imparted by a structured society. Munsaka (2009) points out that individuals identify with others in the in-group and see things from the perspective of the group. Since they have a role in society, they act to fulfil the expectations of the role. Extant literature reveals that as individuals know that they belong to a particular group, their behaviour equally changes to suit the expectations of such a group. In-group-based identities, the uniformity reveals itself in so many ways which may be categorised along cognitive, attitudinal and behavioural lines (Munthali, Kok & Kakal, 2018).

Individuals who identify with the group feel a strong attraction to the group as a whole; free from individual connections within the group. This in itself may provide an understanding why the newly initiated girls behave in a particular way; they feel they have a duty and responsibility to serve that group they belong to (Rasing, 2004).

This theory fits in this study in that, the girls that go through *Sikenge* end up forming social groups among themselves as in-groups where they discuss their acquired skills on how to handle a man during love making. In contrast, the uninitiated girls, as they are perceived to be ignorant of so many cultural values imparted during *Sikenge*, they are looked down upon as they are considered to be immature culturally and not worth marrying. The above section considered the two theories that informed the study. The next section dwells on the global perspective regarding girl-child initiation happening world over.

2.3 Girl-child initiation rites: A global perspective

Anthropologist worldwide have commended initiation rituals as being a study tool which has often played an important role in transferring cultural norms of appropriate sexuality across generation and making individual transition to sexual maturity (Magesa et al., 2014). Other scholars added an icing in the cake by reporting that the rituals provide young people with instructions on gender roles and family life, including the details of sexual activities and reproduction. According to Musole (2015), virtually all human societies use ceremonial rites to mark significant transition in the social status of individuals. Ceremonial rites are rites of passage that mark a young person's movement from childhood into adulthood. Cosmological ideas are passed on to the initiates during the initiation rite (Rasing, 2001). These rites highlight and validate changes in a person's status, especially on the occasion of such life transforming events such as birth, puberty, among others.

Lincoln's (1991, as cited in Musole, 2015), offers a detailed treatment of women's initiation rites among five cultures, which included the Tiyyar of South India, and the Tukuna of North West Amazon. In these cultures, women's initiation rites did not only involve a transformation of the self but also of the cosmos. Lincoln further argues that women and girls' pattern of initiation involves enclosure, metamorphosis, and emergence. According to Lincoln, women and girls are enclosed during initiation; they undergo transformation when they menstruate and emerge to

unite with the entire family again during the celebration that culminates the whole process of the rite. Lincoln draws his analogy from the cocoon where the changes happen inside, in privacy and only experienced by the initiate and those very close to the initiate after undergoing change; the initiate emerges from her cocoon for everyone to see her change into a sort of newness. She has become a butterfly for everyone to witness (Musole, 2015).

The views of Lincoln (1991) were supported by Janssen (2002), who observed that the onset of puberty was traditionally viewed in terms of the girl's emergent sexuality and prospective motherhood. During the seclusion, the young woman was given a detailed ritual bath, after a kneading with a perennial herb called turmeric and vermilion (i.e. a bright red pigment) in order to stimulate and beautify her as she emerged from the seclusion to reunite with the entire family. According to Musole (2015), the Modoc of California celebrated a girl's first menses with a dance of notification, which was in essence a way of announcing publicly the fact that the girl was now ready for wedding. Additionally, the festival provided a period of social happiness, love making, and sexual experimentation for young men and women, particularly the unmarried. This function was also observed among the Gabrielino of California. The observation made by Ray somehow seems to indicate that the woman's maturity is not only announced to the public so that they know that she is now grown up and that now she belongs to the group of female elders, but also serves the purpose of bringing people together for merry making and enjoyment. In addition, the young woman is no longer a girl but a woman who is ready for marriage (Musole, 2015).

In Japan, puberty, during which menarche occurred at ages 12-14 years, like in most parts of the world, was marked by a change of dress (genpuku) (Herold, 1985). Herold states that the change of dress signified that the initiate was now grown up and needed to behave as a mature person. Sexual education, which accompanied the teachings that were given to the initiate, was provided by the grandparents, not the parents; it largely consisted of the introduction to prostitution after the genpuku (Herold, 1985). In a related study conducted by Eder (1977) among the Batak of Palawan Island in the Philippines, a small Negrito society, the ceremony and related practices were celebrated to represent a rite of passage for boys and girls (aged about 14 years) from childhood to adolescence, in which there was a mock sexual intercourse scene between the initiate and the already initiated partner of the opposite sex. Here, it may be argued that the

ceremony ushers the newly initiated men and women into another stage of life that of pairing with the opposite sex and that it has been legalised and therefore, they should enjoy themselves. The simulation performed has a bearing on the mind of the young ladies who begin to think that they can only have sex with men who are older to them not of their age.

2.3.1 International commitments

There are treaties and protocols that aim to address gender inequality among all nations globally. These included the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against All Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) which have all been ratified by Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe and other Southerners (Ambunda & Klerk, 2008). These governments have agreed to implement in terms of achieving gender equality for the girl-child and the woman.

The CEDAW was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 18 December 1979 and became active as an international treaty on 3 September 1981 (UN Women, 2009). By the year 1989, approximately one hundred nations agreed to be bound by its provisions (UN Women, 2009). This convention plays an important role in advocating for the empowerment of women as well as bringing women into the focus of human rights concerns (UN Women, 2009). The Convention aims to create a greater understanding of the concept of human rights as well as the influence of culture and tradition on women's rights (UN Women, 2009). Cultures across the world have entrenched gender roles and expectations of men and women to the extent that women's rights are not recognised. Culture in the form of norms and values, as well as gender stereotypes, encompasses all spheres of life, therefore, placing political, economic and legal constraints on women (UN Women, 2009). The Convention states that "a change in the traditional role of men as well as the roles of women in society and in the family is needed to achieve full equality of men and women" (UN Women, 2009). The convention strives for gender equality in all spheres of life.

All nations that have ratified the Convention and these treaties are obliged to honour the agreements contained in the Convention. There are articles that are specific to this study in terms of gender inequality and harmful cultural practices which are the following: In Article 1 the Convention defines the term discrimination against women as: any distinction, exclusion or

restriction on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field” (UN Women, 2009). This definition covers substantive forms of discrimination against women. The Convention seeks to curb all forms of discrimination as per the definition stated to increase the equality of women and men in all spheres of life, be it in the home, in business or in education. In Article 2 the Convention states that the countries that have ratified the Convention should adopt appropriate means to eliminate discrimination against women. The states need to “embody the principle of the equality of men and women in their national constitutions” (CEDAW Article 2 s. (b)). Additionally, changes will need to be made in the legislature, including sanctions where appropriate and the establishment of legal protection through national tribunals and other public institutions (CEDAW Article 2 s. (f)). The state’s public authorities, institutions, private enterprises, and organisations are also recommended to refrain from any acts or practices that discriminate against women (CEDAW Article 2 s. (g)). In Article 5 s. (a) the Convention places special mention of cultural activities stating that states should take all necessary steps to alter social, cultural and customary practices that lead to gender inequalities and prejudices.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has also been ratified by Namibia. The CRC seeks to address the issues of children’s rights. The ones who are most affected by discriminatory cultural practices besides women are children, more specifically the girl-child. The final version of the CRC was adopted in November 1989. By 2 September 1990 twenty states ratified the CRC (Viljoen, 1998). Both South Africa and Zimbabwe ratified the CRC on 16 June 1995 and 11 September 1990 respectively (United Nations Treaty Collection, 2018). Article 1 of the CRC (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989) defines a child as one who is under the age of eighteen years. The article that is applicable to this thesis is article 30 which refers to culture. Article 30 states that “in those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or to use his or her own languages” (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). This is the only article that mentions the

importance of culture but does not include harmful cultural practices and their elimination. There were arguments from the African community that the CRC did not include an African perspective on issues that children have to face on the African continent.

In order to ensure that there was compatibility between Human Rights and Culture, the concept of human rights was expressed in the Charter of the United Nations of 1945 and later developed into the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Throughout the years the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been elaborated in many multilateral treaties and other international instruments (An-Na'im & Hammond, 2002). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been adopted in constitutions across the world and is being implemented on the domestic level by the judicial and the executive organs of the state (An-Na'im & Hammond, 2002). Universal human rights have been created to ensure that there is some form of international supervision of domestic human rights protection for every state that submits to and abides by it (An-Na'im & Hammond, 2002). According to Du Toit (2014, p.48), "the notion of human rights was born under very particular, material and symbolic conditions at a particular point in the history of Western Europe." The word 'universal' has a pleasant ring to it but this utopian concept did not always recognise women fully. The 'human' in human rights, according to Du Toit (2014, p.50), "used to be doubly alien to women's sexuality because it was simultaneously viewed in Western metaphysics as disembodied (thus sexless) and masculine." As a result of this masculine focus on who was 'human,' women were left out of the equation leading to gender inequality in both Western (global North) countries and countries in the global South. Despite the lack of focus on women from the inception of human rights, there has been some commendable progress over the years in terms of increasing gender equality, recognising women in the private and public sector as well as addressing violations of human rights towards women in the West (UN Women, 2018). Similarly, progress has been made on the African continent but the conflict between human rights and culture still remains.

Through the recognition of culture, gender inequality has been perpetuated as well as the conflict between culture and human rights in countries that consider themselves democratic such as Zimbabwe and South Africa. Human rights are embedded in liberal ideology and therefore focus on the individual. However, culture sees the group as the primary unit, not the individual and

therefore the application of human rights within cultures has been problematic, leading to gender inequalities. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states in Article 1 that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and in Article 2 it states that “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion (UN General Assembly, 1948). From Article 1, it is evident that gender equality is one of the values promoted by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Gender equality is defined as the “the process of being fair to men and women” (UNESCO, 2003). With differences between cultural values and human rights, human right and culture are often in conflict and this conflict needs to be addressed so progress is made in achieving gender equality and prohibiting customs that go against the rights of the women. It is important to note that culture is not just the customs that the people practice; it is also part of their identity making it increasingly difficult to balance Western and African ideals which are founded on different ideologies.

The above section considered the global perspective regarding girl-child initiation. The next section dwells on the continental perspective regarding girl-child initiations happening across African nations.

2.4 Girl-child initiation rites: An African perspective

Different states across the African continent seek to protect human rights in their constitutions. However, due to the codification of African customs under colonialism into customary law, certain cultural practices that are harmful and discriminatory towards women continue being observed, making culture somewhat static and difficult to change. This has led to culture and human rights being treated as a binary with human rights and culture being seen as concepts that oppose each other (Gouws & Stasiulis, 2013). The majority of African nations despite having new Constitutions, they embrace and respect their cultures; although at times it comes into conflict with human rights. Culture, although an ambiguous term, is important across the world, especially in the African context. Culture has been looked at from many different angles. Bennett (2004) states that culture is a people’s store of knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, and customs, everything that humans acquire by virtue of being members of society. While Ncube (2018) considers culture as historically transmitted patterns of meanings embodied in symbols, a

system of inherited conceptions, expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men and women communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about attitudes towards life. Therefore, one can see from the two definitions that culture ultimately unites people. It gives order to society and it informs what values and morals members should uphold and these values and morals are translated into behavioural patterns.

Although culture has positive aspects to it, there are negative aspects that clash with matters of human rights as a result of the codification of customary law. Customary law according to Ndulo (2011) is “the indigenous law of the various groups in Africa.” The codifications of African customs, across the continent, have led to the somewhat static nature of cultures today. This has made it difficult for cultures to gradually change with time, therefore, making it increasingly challenging to wholly embrace human rights, more specifically the rights of women because patriarchy is reinforced (Ndulo, 2011). Gouws and Stasiulis (2013) agree that the codification of customary law has led to the reinforcement of “misogynistic and static interpretations of African culture.” According to Ndulo (2011), the application of customary law has been discriminatory towards women in areas such as bride price, guardianship, inheritance, appointment to traditional offices and exercise of traditional authority. Due to the seemingly static nature of culture because of customary law, African cultures continue to be discriminatory towards women in some respects, as they seek to control women’s sexual and reproductive lives (Gouws & Stasiulis, 2013). African customary law is not a single uniform set of customs for any given African country or ethnic group, but it is a law that covers broad principles in all various systems allowing for micromanagement and change (Ndulo, 2011). Therefore, not all practices are coded into customary law; however, the general codification of an ethnic group’s customs gives the ethnic group the ability to continue to live according to both written and unwritten or “lived” customary law. This has left room for cultural practices that are deemed discriminatory and harmful to be practised today in ethnic communities. According to Ndulo (2011), the broad principles of African customs that were codified into customary law by colonial powers were customs that did not challenge Western laws before a time of liberal constitutions. Therefore, today the continuations of customs that are deemed harmful are seen and are supported and defended using the argument that they are “part of one’s culture” (Ikwuagwu, 2005). This has

had a large effect on the rights of women and girls and these harmful practices are usually directed at them through policing their sexuality.

Harmful Cultural Practices (HCP) is practices that are at times violent and/or discriminatory towards women and girls and are seen as accepted within a culture (Ncube, 2018). The Protocol of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol, defines harmful practices as all behaviour, attitudes, and/or practices which negatively affect the fundamental rights of women and girls, such as their right to life, dignity, education and physical integrity (African Commission on Human and People's Rights [ACHPR], 2018). Harmful practices are a result of gender inequality and discrimination towards women played out in social cultural and religious norms (UN Division for the Advancement of Women, 2009). These practices relate to the position women have in the family, community and the society at large (p6). In 1995 the United Nations (UN) issued the Fact Sheet no.23 which listed a number of cultural practices that are considered as harmful. Female genital mutilation, female infanticide, early marriage, and dowry are just a few examples *lobola* (Ncube, 2018).

Extant literature from the West has highlighted customs and practices that are evidently harmful, for example, Female Genital Mutilation FGM (UNFPA, 20218). The World Health Organisation observed that in some parts of Africa the FGM was still being practiced. Like other female initiation rites, the idea of practicing FGM was to serve the male folk who assumed the position of supremacy (Musole, 2015). Due to colonialists and international organisation such as the UN recognising how young girls' lives are at risk due to FGM, progress has been made through advocacy and educating local populations of caused harm to young girls (UNFPA, 2018). This has resulted in the practice being banned in several countries such as Burkina Faso (1996), Central African Republic (1996, 2006), Kenya (2001, 2011), Togo (1998), Zambia (2005, 2011), just to mention a few, showing progress in the fight to protect women and girls from customs and practices that are harmful (UNFPA, 2018). Therefore, it is clear that there are some practices that should be tackled due to their evident harmful nature and others upon further research and consultation can be recognised as harmful.

It is safe to say that despite the unifying force that culture has, it has also fostered the allowance of harmful practices that go against universal human rights. African countries who deem

themselves democratic or that are rather in the process of democratisation struggle with having a double standard. This double standard wants to uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights while wanting to recognise the different cultures which still observe harmful practices within their territory. Today, African countries and their people have to juggle what aspects of their culture to let go of, without losing their African or ethnic identity. It is important to look at culture and its clash with human rights not only for the persistence of practices that are deemed harmful but also for the perpetuation of patriarchy which leads to increased gender inequality.

One cultural practice that has been labelled harmful is that of initiation rites. Adolescent rites of passage exist in and are valued by virtually every community in every African country (United Nations Population Fund, 2020). The rites, which can differ from community to community and country to country, are designed to mark the transition from childhood to adulthood. This is most commonly done by offering a ceremony, ritual or other experience that is intended to either prepare young people for the roles and responsibilities of adulthood or simply officially declare that the young person is now an adult (Mutunda, 2020). These rites of passage are valued deeply by the cultures observing them and are key to passing down cultural, social, and sometimes religious teachings and traditions – including about gender, relationships and sexuality (Rasing, 2004). Most societies use biological markers such as menarche and spermarche to signal readiness to participate in adolescent initiation; rites of passage. In these situations, completion of initiation ceremonies is also considered an indicator of readiness for marriage, regardless of the initiate's age (United Nations Population Fund, 2020).

UNPFA (2020) indicated that adolescent initiation rites in the Eastern and Southern Africa region share similar traits, particularly in the southern and western parts. Adolescents receive strong pressure to go through initiation rites, and there can be serious social consequences for those who do not. Adolescent initiates are separated by gender, based on the sex they were assigned at birth (UNPFA, 2020). Gender role-stereotypical expectations are emphasized and reinforced. Initiates are secluded from the rest of the community in single-gender groups (Siweya et al., 2018). Lessons about sex and sexuality are an important part of most of the rituals, including lessons about how to please a partner within the context of marriage. Since it is

generally considered taboo to speak about sexuality, the ceremonies create a space in which sexuality can be spoken about freely.

At the same time, girls are subjected to virginity testing, which can include a physical examination to determine whether the girl's hymen is intact, or intense questioning every month during menses. Shaving of the arms, legs, genitals, regardless of gender, is common but not universal (Mutunda, 2020). Either a single adult or group of adults is charged with the initiation ceremony or their specific roles are to maintain the cultural traditions. Food, dress, dance and song are part of the rituals and are used as teachings to girls. Secrecy is encouraged and expected (Mutunda, 2020). It is considered taboo/inappropriate to discuss the ceremonies (United Nations Population Fund, 2020).

Magesa et al. (2014) argue that, African initiation ceremonies or rites extend from simple words of wisdom from mature women, to infliction of extreme pain on women in the form of genital mutilation and sometimes it involves extreme tattooing, sexual intercourse, pregnancy, childbirth, and responsibilities of a good wife and mother. Thus, in African cultures, women and girls tend to be stereotypically socialised such that, in the end, they become wives and mothers that will obey their husbands (Musole, 2015).

A study conducted by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), (2005) confirms that initiation rites strengthen gender stereotypes, encouraging men to assume dominance and young women to be submissive. Among the Tswana people of Botswana, as Munsaka (2009) notes, boys are viewed as the epithet of authority in the tribe; hence the girl-child is expected to serve as a wife and mother and to accomplish other household tasks. In order to impart the patriarchal requirements in the minds of the young people, a number of African cultures hold initiation rites. Milubi (2000) observes that among the Tsonga tribe of South Africa, the *Musevhetho* initiation ceremony is performed to signify a girl's entry into puberty. The *Musevhetho* initiation includes the elongation of the girls' labia minora, to prepare her for providing sexual gratification to her future husband. According to Janssen (2002), the most important lesson of the initiation schools practised by the Venda or Bawenda of South Africa was the instruction about the institutions and responsibilities of motherhood, fatherhood, and marriage. Therefore, if a girl became pregnant during initiation, she received no praise at all for

not following the seeming teachings that the school was imparting into her. According to Musole (2015), the girl was humiliated and thrown out. Again, here one learns that the main purpose for these teachings is to stereotype the girls so that they serve men as wives and mothers.

A study conducted by the Malawi Human Rights Commission (2012), revealed that the Malawians celebrate traditional rituals known as *Chinamwali* for girls to mark the transition between childhood and adulthood. This is done to give the girl's sexual partner maximum pleasure during coitus. To support the act of pulling the labia, they have a saying which states that, a woman without the labia minora does not offer a man good sexual satisfaction as the man will have nothing to fondle in the sexual act. In a related study conducted by Munthali and Zulu (2007) in Malawi, girls who have gone through the rites of passage feel more elevated than those who have not, and are actually encouraged to avoid associating with non-initiates as they are now adults.

Apart from providing individual counselling to a girl who attains puberty, most parts of Africa organise big initiation ceremonies for the initiates. In Tanzania, initiation rituals are offered once girls had reached puberty. Girls were taught about male physiology. Among the Wa-Luguru in Tanzania, Hamdani (2012) has also described that sexuality, with its role for the group to perpetuate itself, had special priority. In many places vaginal practices like labia elongation have been the norm and continue today, although transformed especially in urban settings.

Hilber et al. (2012) across the ethnic groups mentioned in the examined literature, vaginal practices are tools that girls and women are trained to utilise to negotiate their reproductive lives and marital duties. During the life course, social, gender and sexual norms are learnt and enculturated in order to ensure a successful sexual life and marriage. For example, the Baushi of Democratic Republic of the Congo “the sexual life in the marriage appears as the end of a long and careful preparation.” Before menarche, between 8 and 12 years, Baushi girls begin the practice of elongating their labia minora. This practice is often done among girls of the same age so that they can become “complete women” (Hilber et al., 2012).

In Zambia, most ethnic groups practice initiation rites for girls. Rasing (2001) argue that during initiation a range of vaginal practices is taught: herbs to warm and tighten the vagina, washing,

cleansing, menstrual pain control, etc. Labial elongation (which started at 8 years) is checked for correct length. Womanhood is achieved through training and performance of specific practices. The Tonga call the novice or girls 'mooya', the Bemba call her 'Nachisungu', the *chewa* call her 'Namwali', while the *Lozi* call her 'Mwalanjo.' During initiation training, the girl is instructed by some elderly women who are well vested in the society's culture. Emphasis is placed on gender roles within marriage. These include domestics and agricultural duties, respect for elders and future husbands, sexual and food preparation (Makono, 2019).

Similarly, among the Baganda of Uganda and the Nyanja of Tete, Mozambique, as described by Tamale (2006) respectively, girls would 'visit the bush' accompanied by the paternal aunt or Ssenga (Baganda) or other female elder (Nyungwe) to elongate their labia as part of a process to initiate a girl in the knowledge and practices of female sexuality. Tamale (2006) notes that now it may no longer be obligatory, but it remains a well-entrenched practice even among the Baganda elite and other non-Baganda women. Additionally, in Mozambique, initiation rites and rituals are perceived as a symbolic rebirth into womanhood and a preparation for sexual life and reproduction as practiced in two provinces of northern Mozambique, Cabo Delgado and Niassa (Van Bavel et al., 2017).

2.4.1 Continental commitments

Countries in Africa have ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. Scholars argue that, due to the minimal representation and the omission of African specific issues from the CRC, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) was created (Viljoen, 1998). According to Viljoen (1998), the specific issues pertaining to the African context that were not mentioned in the Convention were inter alia children living under apartheid, socio-economic conditions such as low education levels and sanitary conditions, children being used as soldiers and a minimum age requirement for military service (Viljoen, 1998). The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (The Charter) was adopted on 01 July 1990 (African Union, 2016). It is important to note that the ACRWC makes special mention of children and cultural practices. Firstly, the Charter in Article 1 s. (3) states that "any custom, tradition, cultural or religious practice that is inconsistent with

the rights, duties, and obligations contained in the present charter shall to the extent of such inconsistency be discouraged” (African Union, 2016, p.46). Article 21 takes a closer look at harmful cultural practices. The article states that States are to take all appropriate measures to eliminate any harmful social and cultural practices affecting the welfare, dignity, normal growth and development of the child” (African Union, 2016). Article 21 s.1 ss. (a) and ss. (b) state that the States need to eliminate any practices that impact the health or life of the child negatively and customs that discriminate on the grounds of sex or another status (African Union, 2016). Article 21 s.2 further states that child marriage should be outlawed and the minimum age for marriage should be set at 18 years (African Union, 2016). Harmful Cultural Practices (HCP) is a subject that is not touched on in the Convention (CEDAW). Despite the focus of the charter on the African context and its issues, it did not have as much popularity as the Convention on the Rights of the Child CRC. South Africa and Zimbabwe have signed and ratified the CRC and the ACWRC and this shows that both these countries recognise the importance of the rights of the child.

Another important milestone was the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol). The Maputo was endorsed in June 1995 by the countries in the African Union (AU) showing that there was a need to pay attention to the issue of gender inequality and discrimination against women on the African continent (African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR), 2018). The Maputo Protocol mentions provisions made for advocacy against gender inequality in other documents by drawing on treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, CEDAW, and its optional protocol, to mention a few (ACHPR, 2018). However, the Maputo Protocol places specific emphasis on issues of harmful cultural practices in Article 5 (ACHPR, 2018). The Protocol defines harmful practices in Article 1 s. (g) as “all behaviour, attitudes, and/or practices which negatively affect the fundamental rights of women and girls, such as their right to life, health, dignity, education, and physical integrity” (ACHPR, 2018). Article 5 states that there is a need to create public awareness in all sectors of society regarding harmful practices through the spread of information, through formal and informal education and outreach programmes (ACHPR, 2018). The article also stresses the importance of putting

legislative measures in place to prohibit harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and other practices that are harmful (ACHPR, 2018). States should provide necessary support to victims of harmful practices through the provision of health services, legal and judicial support, emotional and psychological counselling including teaching women skills so that they are able to support themselves financially (ACHPR, 2018). There are similarities between CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol as both states the importance of governments making necessary changes on all levels of society to move towards promoting gender equality and eliminating discrimination against women. The Convention and the Maputo Protocol also look at the importance of monitoring whether progress is being made in states and request that reports are issued with solutions where problems are evident in applying the Convention or the Maputo protocol (ACHPR, 2018). Namibia has both ratified the Maputo Protocol and therefore has a duty to ensure that solutions are implemented to promote gender equality and eliminate gender discrimination and harmful cultural practice.

Their efforts of African states are also seen in the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development which was signed on 8 September 1997, where SADC heads of states have agreed on the importance of women's rights and gender equality (SADC Declaration on Gender and Development, 1997). The above section considered the continental perspective regarding girl-child initiation. The next section dwells on the Namibian perspective regarding girl-child initiation happening in the country.

2.5 Girl-child initiation rites: A Namibian perspective

In the tradition of the North East of Namibia, rituals are performed for young girls to initiate them into womanhood. When a girl gets her first menstruation, a ceremony is arranged, to prepare her for the reality of a cultural woman (Andima & Tjiramanga, 2010). The girl is regarded as matured enough and can therefore get married. The girl is confined to a hut for days, where she is not allowed to have contact with anyone, except the older women that would come to feed her and give her lessons and instructions on how to handle a man. A man in this context refers to her future husband. She has no right to object any of the instructions, as it is socially or culturally unacceptable. Instructions given include lessons on how to behave around the husband and how to have sex with him. Practically, the young girl is beaten with sticks by these older

women, to test or ensure that she is strong enough to stand the toughness of her husband. The psychological and physical effects of this practice are often traumatising. They are given instructions on womanhood, including how to have sex with a man. As part of this ritual, the family also ensures that a male relative, who should be older than the girl is arranged to have sexual intercourse with the young girl. It is part of the initiation, to ensure that the girl is well-prepared as a woman, to dance well in bed during sexual intercourse. Since it is what the culture compels, the girl cannot refuse this action (Andima & Tjiramanga, 2010). Such cultural practices put women and young girls in difficult positions where they feel powerless. Their rights over their bodies are not determined by themselves, it is the culture that determines and dictates on what is to be done on them. Although this is a cultural practice that is fully accepted, it is a pure act of rape of a girl-child. The male relatives delegated to have sexual intercourse are older and, in many cases, may have multiple sexual partners. The rite is dangerous and it increases the risk of diseases in young girls as many problems and complications can arise from this act. Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), HIV and AIDS, teenage pregnancies and infant mortality are some of the problems that a young girl may suffer. Most of the women who go through these rituals suffer in silence since if they speak out, they will be socially condemned and bring shame onto themselves and their own families (Andima & Tjiramanga, 2010).

In northern Namibia, the *Olufuko* ritual is where the girls would crawl into adulthood and transform into women (Kuoppala, 2018). *Olufuko* is a girls' initiation ritual, practised in the *Ovambo* society in north Namibia. The ritual leader is called Namunganga. Regardless of the missionaries' attempt to dispose of the traditional practise of *Olufuko*, the ritual is still being practised in different parts of northern Namibia. In 2012, the town of Outapi in the Omusati region arranged the first *Olufuko* Festival. Since then, the festival has been arranged annually and the number of attendants has increased. The initiation leaders taught the girls to be good wives. This educational aspect and how to be good and respectful adults is part of the curriculum of the *Olufuko* Festivals. The supporters see the practise as upholding the Ovambo tradition and culture, whereas the opposition see it as a harmful practise that should not be followed in contemporary Namibia. In 2014, former president Hifikepunye Pohamba opened the festival by emphasising that the desire to re-enact cultural traditions and the country's history should not interfere with the girls' futures (United Nations Population Fund, 2020). Specifically, Kuoppala,

(2018) emphasised that the girls should a) complete their education; b) should not consider participating in the adolescent initiation rites as encouragement to engage in shared sexual behaviours; and c) that adolescents should not mistake the adult-like enactments of the initiation to result in the initiates participating in more adult-like behaviours.

The *Olufuko* has also seen rejection in contemporary Namibia. Some people and organisations such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) and National Society for Human Rights of Namibia (Nam Rights) have strongly opposed the practice of *Olufuko*. In support, Kuoppala (2018) adds that the girls' initiation ritual was a form of controlling them and therefore the rite revolves around ritual cleanliness and community health.

In Namibia, in the Zambezi Region in particular '*Sikenge*' is an initiation ceremony, or rite of passage, practiced in some communities in the Zambezi region. Girls are isolated from society and taught how to be women. The process can take up to a month, and a girl is taught everything from how to be a good submissive wife who does not challenge her husband or elders (Titus, 2017). Musole (2015) argues that *Sikenge* was meant to celebrate the first menses which were seen as a miraculous divine event when the girl received the gift of her sexuality and parenthood from her fore fathers. The girl, during the seclusion, received lessons on endurance such as lifting up a plate from one place to another with her teeth or by picking up beads with her foot. This task entailed that during the seclusion the girl was to suffer since she was leaving childhood and preparing for marriage. Extant literature reveals that on the first day of seclusion, the girl was given a symbolic beating, pinched, and teased by the principal tutor locally known as *chilombola* to signify the authority of elders to the girl despite her attainment of maturity. The principal tutor is carefully chosen among the close relatives and should be one whose first born is alive and of good standing so that the girl can receive similar blessings like hers. On the second day of the seclusion, a ritual locally known as *kulumisa* was performed. In this ritual the girl was made to bite a small lump of *nshima* from the potsherd and spit it into all directions. The principal tutor afterwards tapped the chest and back of the initiate with the broken potsherd while the initiate clapped. In this ritual, the potsherd symbolised heavy heart one that keeps secrets and the spitting of food particles symbolised evoking the ancestral spirits to intervene into the happenings of the initiate. On the night prior to her coming out, the girl initiate was taken to a

stream and washed and in some cases punished by immersing her into the stream for some time while some powerful woman was on top. Thereafter, she was taken back home on the back of her 'mother.' The following day, she was shaved, dressed in new clothes and perfumed as she was to appear before the expectant audience. She was later taken into the central place for all to see. All sorts of gifts were given to her and finally, she was made to dance to a special dance. Thereafter, she chose a name that signified her newly acquired status. To ensure that the young woman did not only acquire a new status, but a new role as well, she was involved into a dramatic play where she followed a staggering woman while balancing a cup of water on her head. The balancing of the cup of water entailed that the girl mastered the facts of life while the staggering woman signified her parents and any other elderly woman. Thus, she had a responsibility to look after her parents as they were growing old. So, *Sikenge* is not only about caring for the future husband but also the aged (Musole, 2015)

2.5.1 National commitments

According to Frank (2015), laws and policies protecting the rights of women in Namibia provide robust protections for women through the Constitution and other laws. The constitutional right to equality forbids discrimination on grounds of sex. The right to family provides for equality within monogamous marriage and at its dissolution. The right to dignity forbids torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Freedom from violence is a central component of the right to dignity.

Similarly, the Combating of Rape Act forbids sexual acts committed under all "coercive circumstances." It proscribes sex with persons below fourteen years of age, and prohibits rape in marriage. The Combating of Domestic Violence Act prohibits not only physical violence, but also psychological, verbal, emotional and economic abuse. In the same vein, the Married Persons Equality Act regulates civil marriage and repeals the legal presumption that a husband is the "head of the household" with the unilateral power to make decisions for both husband and wife. While the right to culture is protected under the Constitution, this is qualified by the other protections provided and may not impinge on the rights of others. Both customary law and the common law of Namibia in force at Independence remain valid only to the extent to which they do not conflict with the Constitution or any other statutory law (Ambunda & Klerk, 2008).

Namibia has ratified the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, which specifically calls for the elimination of all harmful cultural practices through legislation accompanied by sanctions. The National Gender Policy of 1998 stated that customary and traditional practices should not contradict the promotion and protection of women's rights and gender equality. It called for the alignment of Customary Law with the Namibian Constitution by removing all components that discriminate against women. The policy called for research to establish the magnitude of violence and cultural discrimination against girls, and promoted campaigns that focus on educating the public on the importance of girls' health as well as the need to eliminate harmful cultural practices against the girl-child (Tsoubaloko, 2010). The policy further promoted equality and justice for women in customary and traditional courts.

The recently revised National Gender Policy 2010 – 2020 states that there is a need to reform the law on marriage and divorce and register customary marriage, to provide better protection for women's property rights in civil and customary marriage, and to remove outdated or discriminatory grounds and procedures for divorce. It further states that factors impacting women's health include harmful traditional practices such as early marriages and dry sex; there is a need to conduct research to establish the magnitude of violence and cultural discrimination against the girl-child; a need to address the dual mode of customary and constitutional laws by aligning customary law with the Namibian Constitution and removing all components that discriminate against women, and to ensure equality in the treatment of women in judicial and quasi-judicial proceedings, including customary and traditional courts (MGECW, 2019). The National Policy on HIV and Aids states that "Traditional leaders shall be sensitised on the dangers of customary practices like death cleansing, forced sex for young girls and boys coming of age, and dry sex, which may lead to HIV infection; Traditional initiation counsellors shall incorporate sound and appropriate sexual and reproductive health education into traditional and cultural rites of passage and initiation processes; Traditional leaders shall stop or modify unsafe customary practices in order to prevent HIV transmission, or shall promote alternative practices which do not place people at risk of HIV infection." Taken together, these laws and policies afford women a wide array of protections against assaults on their dignity and personhood (Tsoubaloko, 2010). Yet in Namibia, more than 25 years after Independence, the rights of rural women living under customary law remain unprotected, while the exposure of women, young

women and girls to harmful cultural practices that violate their human rights, exposing them to all forms of violence as well as HIV and AIDS remain silenced and ignored.

In summary, each of the practices described above pose risks to the physical and mental health and well-being of rural women in Namibia. When taken together, they encourage and sustain cultural views of women as subordinate to men and as objects to be used for men's sexual pleasure. They undermine women's autonomy and violate their human rights to life, dignity, personal security, health, and freedom from violence (MGECW, 2019). They also place women at extremely high risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. Thus, in Namibia, women remain under the control of traditional (feudal) patriarchal family structures which are governed by customary law and ruled over by traditional authorities. The power of men over women is firmly entrenched in these three institutions. While the civil law guarantees fundamental rights for all citizens, recognising customary law only to the extent that it does not infringe on individual rights, customary law emphasises restoration of balance among patriarchal family groups, rather than protection of individual rights, especially for women. The Namibian state has failed to comprehensively review customary law to ensure that it is in compliance with Namibian civil law (MGECW, 2019).

2.6 Activities during the girls' child initiation ceremonies and rituals

Mugambi (2013) gives detailed account on what transpires during initiation ceremonies in the African traditional religion except that the main focus was on the psychological and religious teachings which had an influence on the behaviour of the initiate. In the account, it is stated that adolescence marked outwardly by the physical changes of puberty, was another stage at which a rite of passage would be conducted psychologically and religiously for preparation for the next stage of growth in the life of the community - adulthood. During initiation into adulthood the girl-child would be guided through a series of experiences contrived for that purpose, to learn the implications of the puberty changes, one was expected by the community to conduct oneself responsibly, without degrading oneself and one's family. The rite would include a physical ordeal which the adolescent was expected to go through courageously as proof of readiness to leave childhood behind and enter adulthood. In some communities, for instance, circumcision was practiced as part of the initiation rite. Mugambi further argued that the traditional education

which was given was vital for the community maintenance of its self-understanding and for providing every individual with an opportunity to learn. Therefore, in the African cultural heritage, initiation was an inevitable stage for the social development of an individual. Mugambi's study endeavoured to show the significance of initiation without paying much attention to its resilience. Studies conducted by Brown (2015) and Munthali (2018) found that female initiation rites consist of a number of prescribed ceremonial events that are mandatory for all girls in a particular society, and normally occur when they are between 8 and 20 years in age. This assertion is also supported by Hughes (2018); Droy et al., (2018) who pointed out that there are established initiation schools in place. However, Munthali (2018) observed that ceremonies could be structured to loosely organised events, have the involvement of groups of young females or can focus purely on single individuals. Nevertheless, the duration of these ceremonies is found to range from a few hours, few weeks, or months but highly dependent on the region and females involved (Shalyefu, 2018).

Further, it has been asserted that during the rites, the young people are in a transition phase, characterised by abnormality, non-co-operation and inversion of behaviour (Shalyefu, 2018). On one hand, it is found that most young people attend initiation ceremonies as a crucial aspect of their culture and signifies their transition from childhood into adulthood with limited choice as they are subjected to attend by their parents (Zulu, 2010; Skinner et al., 2013). On the other hand, it has been revealed that those who attended these ceremonies felt elevated from youths who had not been initiated (Hayashi, 2017) and thus encouraged to avoid associating with those who had not been initiated as they are now adults (Zulu, 2010; Ahmadu, 2017).

Carsten (1982) focused on the initiation ceremony rites of the Nama people of Namibia and South Africa on the onset of the girls' first menstruation. She is secluded in a small enclosure constructed by the mother with the help of her kinswomen inside the family mud-house. The girl is protected both for her own physical and psychological welfare as well as for the benefit of the group because the Nama regard the occasion as potentially dangerous for everyone. Once inside the enclosure, the girl must observe an elaborate system of taboos while preparations are being made for her ritual feast of meat and milk in her honour. In Carsten's view, the onset of initiation was in line with all other traditions which follow the three aspects of seclusion, liminality and

reintegration. From his point of view, it is clear that Carsten's emphasis on the observance of taboos indicated that the girl undergoes certain teachings which enable her to observe certain elaborate taboos which were mostly common in most African traditions. In addition, Carsten's work focused on comparing the Khoi-san and the Nama tradition on initiation in relation to the socio-economic milieu of the southern at present and in the past. While it is believed that the trend in initiation was to provide sex education in terms of how to satisfy men in marriage, Rooyen et al. (2006) argued that initiation schools prepare children socially making them ready for communal life. The social education provided was aimed at conformity, indoctrination, and integration of the adolescent into the tribal group's values and societal behavioural norms. Initiation rites were therefore, preserved as the most important channel through which culture was preserved and transferred. The social education provided in initiation rites prepared the initiate for citizenship in the tribe by enabling her to take social responsibilities and obligations.

Rooyen et al. (2006) further assert that during the phase of preparation for restoration, while in seclusion and waiting on threshold of life, the young girl undergoes her restoration. She was mainly tutored on the secrets of womanhood. These teachings included aspects such as the rules of hygiene and privacy, advice with regard to sexuality, childbirth, health, married life, on how to be a good and loving mother, and the best honoured wife. Self-respect, self-discipline and submissiveness are highly valued and expected of girls. She also learns the appropriate feminine behaviour. Moreover, Rooyen et al. (2006) further acknowledged the socialisation that the home environment provided as they state that although a child grows up within the group and as such becomes familiar with traditions of his or her particular tribe, it is nevertheless important to realise that during initiation, the typical traditional behaviour is specified and instructed in great detail and is strictly demanded from every member of the group.

From the above discussion, one can deduce that some kind of initiation is present in every tradition in almost all African culture, initiation is meant to educate on issues of hygiene, practical skills, respect for elders and generally accepted behaviour. It can also be stated that initiation is meant to uphold, transmit and preserve the cultural values of a given society.

Another common practice done during initiation of girls is that of genital mutilation. Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) is a traditional practice, most prevalent in Africa and the

Middle East, which involves the partial or total removal or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons (Berg & Denison, 2013). FGM/C comes in many forms, but four general types are described: clitoridectomy, excision, infibulation, and others, with infibulation being the most invasive. Although it is difficult to estimate the magnitude of the phenomenon, available estimates vary from 70 million to 140 million girls and women who have undergone some form of female genital mutilation (FMG)F or female genital cutting (FMC) (UNICEF, 2010). It is a phenomenon practised in many countries in Africa, in some countries in Asia and the Middle East, and to a lesser extent within some immigrant communities in Europe, and in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States of America. In communities where it is practised, FGM/C is not viewed as a dangerous act and a violation of rights, but as a necessary step to raise a girl 'properly', to protect her and, in many instances, to make her eligible for marriage. Parents have their daughters cut so as to secure the best possible future for them. Family honour and social expectations play a powerful role in perpetuating FGM/C, making it extremely difficult for individual families, as well as individual girls and women, to stop the practice on their own. Even when parents recognise that FGM/C can cause serious harm, the practice persists as they fear moral judgements and social sanctions should they decide to break with society's expectations? The principal motivating force behind the practice is often the desire to protect girls and to give them the best possible chance to have a future that will ensure social acceptance and economic security. Nonetheless, FGM/C is an infringement of the human rights of girls and women. It violates their right to health, security and physical integrity; the right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; and the right to life when the procedure results in death. The practice of FGM/C is de facto violent and discriminatory in nature, and assigns girls and women an inferior position in the family and society. It causes physical and psychological harm that can be extremely severe and often irreversible throughout the girls' lives.

According to Frank (2015) (WHO) in accordance with the following WHO criteria, Namibia is aware of numerous forms of genital mutilation/modification of girls' and women's genitals. First, during initiation, there is stretching the labia minora. In some Zambezi communities' girls are taught from around nine to ten years of age to stretch their labia minora, using sticks, string, stones and their hands to pull on their flesh, thereby causing swelling and sores. This can be a

life-long practice that women are expected to endure as long as they are sexually active, based on the belief that long labia are more sexually appealing and satisfying to a male partner, and a man will not stay with a woman who has not submitted to it. Second, there is enlargement of the vagina. Research has shown that in the past, girls in some Kavango communities were taught to enlarge their vagina at the onset of their menses to prepare them for early sex and marriage (Ipinge, 2003; Talavera, 2007). Both practices serve to sexualise the bodies of girls and young women, preparing them to perform sexually at a young age, often with men who are much older than them who claim a right to their bodies. Besides the physical discomfort and pain these practices may cause girls as they approach or begin menstruation, there is the psychological impact resulting from the violation of their right to privacy, bodily integrity, sexual autonomy and choice (Frank, 2015).

Another common practice is the tightening the vagina for 'dry sex'. In many communities across Namibia, including Zambezi and Ovaherero communities, young women are taught to use herbs to dry out and tighten their vagina before sexual intercourse, as their male partners prefer sex with women who do not lubricate but instead are 'warm' and have 'tight' vaginas (LeBeau 2004). This practice often leads to increased friction and tearing of the vagina wall, increasing women's risk of infection with STDs including HIV. For example, a study in Zambezi Region found that 66% of women reported practicing dry sex, 46% reported experiencing pain during the sexual act, and 37% reported experiencing injuries (bruises, lacerations) immediately after the sex act (Vanegas et al., 2006). Many scholars suggested that these herbs used for dry sex should be analysed for their health effects on women and men, and that people should receive sexuality education including the importance of the natural function of lubrication in women.

Rasing (2001) indicate that in many Zambezi communities, from the beginning of their first menstrual cycle girls are kept in isolation over a period of time and forced to work excessively hard pounding maize for their female elders, whose aim is to teach them endurance as well as submission and subservience to their future husbands and in-laws. Fatigue or protest is met with severe beating and other forms of violence. The message given to girls is that their future husbands have the right to beat and abuse them, and that they should endure this in silence. Should they wish to leave a violent and abusive marriage the bride wealth (*malobolo*) would

have to be returned to the husband's family (Rasing, 2021). The isolation and forced submissiveness of girls during this practice is also a form of psychological violence, aiming to break the self-esteem of young women and construct them as persons without rights (Masule 1999; Frank, 2015).

In many Zambezi communities, a major focus of the initiation process is to teach girls how to sexually please their future husbands. They learn how to move their bodies in a 'sex dance' through singing and dancing as well as the having to lie naked under an older woman and show they can make the right moves. Their female family members can be present and add to their humiliation and embarrassment (Musole, 2015). Girls at this young age are taught how to provide their arm as a pillow for their husband, how to clean him after sex, and that they must always provide him with sex when so desires (Masule, 1999). After the initiation period, young Zambezi women are sometimes tested for sexual readiness by male relatives, who have sex with them to determine whether they can 'dance' well. No condoms or contraceptives are used during this practice, which makes girls' and women's bodies accessible and available for men's sexual pleasure (Frank, 2015). As in the case of the Ovaherero and Ovahimba, the Zambezi girls have no choice in this matter and it is not viewed as incest and rape. A form of witchcraft called mulaleka is sometimes used in Zambezi communities to put young women into a 'dream state' while a male family member has sex with them. They are semi-conscious and cannot put up any resistance. If a girl does recall that her grandfather or uncle had sex with her, it will be legitimised as a form of sexual readiness testing (Mushaukwa, 2011).

In Zambezi region, they also have practices involving the 'cleansing' of women's 'impure' bodies through casting women's reproductive capacities as impure and dangerous to men. At the onset of their menses, girls in the Zambezi are taught that their bodies, and especially their blood, are dirty and diseased and therefore dangerous to men. During the period of isolation, they are kept hidden from men, and are served food on special plates used only by them. Yet their own physical health and well-being are not respected: they are not allowed to wash themselves during this time, which may lead to health problems for the girls as well as the psychological identification with being 'impure' (Masule 1999). Traditional medicine teaches that a man can become ill through exposure to a woman who is menstruating, has recently given birth, or has

miscarried or aborted. Thus, women's bodily functions relating to reproduction are cast as 'impure', while the status of 'motherhood' is ostensibly revered. The 'impurity' of women during the various biological processes of reproduction is considered to be so dangerous that merely touching something handled by a woman in one of the above conditions, for example sharing the same plate or chair, could make men ill. One such disease is called *kahomo*, which is described as having the same symptoms as HIV/AIDS - with the difference that it can be cured by traditional healers. The prevention of such illnesses is through physically isolating women and girls in separate huts and washing them with herbs. The belief in *kahomo* may prevent men from seeking appropriate treatment for HIV, since many believe that they are suffering from *kahomo* and not HIV or AIDS. It also places the blame for men's illness on women (Masule, 1999).

Another key activity is the marking young women's bodies through incisions and scars. As part of their initiation, many young women in Zambezi communities have incisions made around their waists, on their back, their arms, or sometimes all over their bodies. A mixture of herbs and ash is rubbed into these cuts to induce the formation of scars that are believed to be sexually arousing for men (Frank, 2015). This is sometimes called "flower cutting." The young women are led to believe that some of these scars will cause their boyfriends and husbands to be more attracted to them, and will prevent their husbands from leaving them for other women. Other scars are believed to provide protection to the woman against ill will from other women who are competing with them for a particular man. This involuntary scarification of young women, usually done by their grandmothers under an oath of secrecy, appears to be a rather desperate measure to provide their granddaughters with some kind of power and equality in their relationships in a cultural environment that allows men to practice polygyny and/or have multiple girlfriends. There is often a lack of hygiene exposing young women to the risk of HIV infection through using the same blade used on different people, while the grandmothers performing these incisions may have open sores on their hands. Their lack of knowledge regarding human anatomy may also lead to serious injuries (Masule, 1999).

2.7 The perceptions of initiates and initiators about health and sanitary conditions during the girl-child initiation training activities

Andima and Tjiramanga (2010) argue that, young girls in some African settings go through painful rites when they grow into matured women. The transition from childhood to womanhood in some cultures puts these young women at risk, leaving them too traumatised and marginalised. For this reason, United Nations Population Fund (2020) holds that sexual initiation rites are seen by some as hazardous to girls' and women's overall health and well-being, and a violation of girls' and women's rights to choose a sexual partner, and to say whether and when someone may touch their bodies. It also communicates to boys and men that they have the right to touch a girl or woman or to expect sex based on their own desires, rather than taking into consideration their partners/wives' needs. Practices that force girls to have sex with adult men violate those girls' consent and self-determination, particularly in the context of power inequalities that restrict girls from being able to choose whether they want to participate in these rites. Considering the young age of initiates, some consider the practice of female genital mutilation and other sexual initiation rites to be statutory rape (Leary, 2016).

The long-term emotional consequences of rape and sexual abuse are well-documented around the world (Hillis et al., 2016). In addition, labial pulling is included in the World Health Organisation's definition of female genital mutilation. According to Esho (2018), the act of genital mutilation is contrary to various human rights principles. The practice is considered to be discriminatory, as it propagates violence against women. It is classified as a harmful cultural practice that negates the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and is against the best interests of the child. It denies girls and women individual autonomy over their own bodies, with negative physical, psychological and sexual consequences. The practice of fisi (a man who must sleep with initiates) is considered to be discriminatory, as it propagates violence against women. It is classified as a harmful cultural practice that negates the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and is against the best interests of the child (Esho, 2018). It denies girls and women individual autonomy over their own bodies, with negative physical, psychological and sexual consequences. In the wake of the human rights push, there was a realisation that cultural tolerance does not apply to harmful forms of cultural practices (Munthali et al., 2018).

According to UNICEF (2010), FGM/C practice is rooted in cultural understandings of gender, sexuality, marriage and family. These understandings influence how it is viewed and tolerated in different contexts. For example, the social rewards and sanctions associated with FGM/C are a powerful determinant of both the continuation and the abandonment of the practice. Failure to conform to FGM/C can affect not only a girl's marriageability; it can also lead to social exclusion, ostracism or even violence. Non-conformity may also affect the standing of a girl's family within the community. Conformity, on the other hand, meets with social approval, brings respect and admiration and maintains social standing in the community.

There are many negative health sequelae of FGM/C include: immediate complications include severe pain, bleeding and infection, long-term consequences are recurrent bladder and urinary tract infections, infertility, attenuation of sexual functioning,⁴ and an increased risk of childbirth complications. According to Frank (2015), FGM has no health benefits, and it harms girls and women in many ways. It involves removing and damaging healthy and normal female genital tissue, and interferes with the natural functions of girls' and women's bodies. Immediate complications can include severe pain, shock, bleeding, tetanus or sepsis (bacterial infection), urine retention, open sores in the genital region and injury to nearby genital tissue. Given the increased risk of harm and its violation of human rights, and consistent with international condemnation of FGM/ C, the practice is discouraged through preventative interventions (Berg & Denison, 2013). Thus, a number of international, regional and national laws and policies exist to prohibit FGM.

Labia elongation (LE) process takes several years and begins when the girl is six or seven years old or around menarche, the onset of menstruation. LE is introduced through a sexual socialisation process in which the girl's mother, grandmother, caregivers or sisters impart the knowledge and skill of manually manipulating the genital organs (Esho, 2018). This involves stretching the inner labia minora and often also the clitoris. Coerced to comply with the ritual by being (mis)informed that it will benefit their reproductive capacities, these girls may not understand the sexual significance and dangers of this procedure. In most communities, herbal substances and oils, which are not scientifically certified, are used to help stretch and retain the labia in position. Girls experience discomfort, irritation, oedema and secondary infections. Often

the pain is excruciating! LE is mandatory for girls and women in these communities; anyone who fails or refuses to comply is stigmatised and ridiculed for being “less of a woman”. She is considered to be incapable of satisfying a man sexually and thus unmarriageable, or, if married, she is held responsible for her husband’s infidelity. A study in Zimbabwe found out that, the practice of LE is accompanied by the insertion of herbal substances into the vagina to tighten it for the enhancement of male sexual pleasure. This may result in serious medical consequences such as irritation of the vaginal wall, causing painful intercourse and infections. The burden of marital sexual success is purely, and unfairly, placed on the woman (Ncube, 2018).

Although the ultimate goal of LE is to manipulate women’s sexuality for male pleasure and the preservation of patriarchal structures, clinical practice argues that, the disfigurement of female genitals results in some cases in lesions, the formation of keloids, and extensive destruction of nerve endings due to continual manipulation of the clitoris. This curtails libido and sexual pleasure, the exact opposite of the desired effect. Within the human rights framework, the mandatory nature of LE and its patriarchal roots deny girls and women autonomy over their own bodies and bond them to early marriage and premature parenthood (Esho, 2018).

In spite of its usefulness in society, the same rituals are criticised by different intellectuals as being a reason for girls’ dropout from school as they are reported to be unfit for academic cycle since the rituals only prepares them to become better wives and mothers (Mrotto, 2011; Mtewe, 2012). According to Hari (2009) these rituals are further blamed to be a cause of girl dropout since they are none educative and are often held during the school term and result in girls missing a considerable amount of school time. Additionally, Abankwah, (2017) participation in these rituals generally affect girls’ participation in education in two major perspectives namely attendance and performance. This happens due to the fact that time spent at these rites is at the expense of precious school time. When these girls eventually return to school, teachers find it difficult to find the time to give them the individual attention required to help them catch up with the others. Another reason is that these rituals encourage girls who are initiated to regard themselves as adults and ready for marriage hence they no longer concentrate on their school endeavours since they feel that it would be of little use to them in their future roles as mothers and wives (Abankwah, 2017).

In a study by Hamdani (2012) in Tanzania, it was found out that adolescents pointed out once initiated, their parents look at their daughters as young girls and essentially leave them to make decisions without parental guidance. The young initiates will think of themselves as adults and end up taking wrong decisions which destroy their future. In the same study, it was discovered that, boys and girls who have not gone through the ceremony are looked upon as outcasts and erstwhile friends refuse to associate with the uninitiated as they are still considered children and not yet a full member of her /his society. Thus, the consequences of not being initiated are grievous.

Magesa et al. (2018) in a study in Kenya, observed that the girls who attend the ceremonies encounter mistreatments, abuse and sometimes they miss their precious school time. The reason being that, after the ceremonies, girl's change their behaviour and thus some of them feel they cannot cope with formal education. As a result of the change of behaviour the girls reported dropping out of school to pursue other womanly responsibilities of getting married and having families. In a study done by Hakielimu (2010) it was discovered that, when a girl passes through different traditional rites her sexual arousal increases and thus psychologically a girl develops a strong sex urge and the girl no longer wants to continue with studies". In another argument, Mteweale (2012) accentuates this argument by stating that the root cause of girl drop-out from school includes truancy and early pregnancy which are associated with initiation ceremonies.

According to United Nations Population Fund (2020) adolescent initiation rites have physical, psychological, emotional and social impacts on the initiates. Puberty is a time of significant physical growth; what an adolescent experience physically can affect their development process. There is also a challenge of forced and early sexual initiation. Early sexual onset is linked repeatedly in the literature worldwide to negative health outcomes, such as a greater number of sex partners and higher risk for STIs, including HIV, and unintended pregnancy (Shrestha et al., 2016). Girls, including very young girls, are often required to have sex with a much older man as part of their initiations. In addition to the lack of consent and emotional trauma of this, as a girl's body is developing, she may be more susceptible to certain infections, such as the Human Papilloma Virus. Having an STI puts one at greater risk for contracting other STIs, including HIV.

Initiation rites involving sexual activity can lead to early pregnancies. Younger mothers tend to have more complicated pregnancies and deliveries, and are at higher risk for miscarriage, obstetric fistula, or even dying (United Nations Population Fund, 2020).

Unmarried mothers are stigmatised and lack social standing in many communities, which makes it difficult or impossible for them to return to school. Fear and guilt are aimed at girls who do not participate in Labia Elongation (LE) by their classmates and, in particular, by their potential spouses. LE is intrinsically connected to femininity if one does not have elongated labia, they are not considered feminine, and therefore desirable and worthy. While the fear of being judged may have social and emotional consequences, it can also negatively impact on physical health (United Nations Population Fund, 2020). Discomfort, fear of judgment and stigma can inhibit girls and women from seeking routine or even emergency gynaecological care.

Kalunde (2015) did an investigation of the initiation ceremony's teaching and attitudes of women towards them that contribute to the spread of HIV and AIDS. The study revealed that some of the teachings were seen as channels through which attitudes influencing risk behaviour are born and could enhance the spread of HIV and AIDS. The conclusion was that some teachings given on sex may result in regrettable consequences. Kalunde focused on teachings and attitudes of tutors in initiation ceremonies which would lead to the spread of HIV and AIDS. Contrary to the foregoing study, Maambo (2011) argues that initiated women tend to portray a good behaviour which is acceptable in the traditional society unlike the uninitiated women. Maambo further states that the educational purpose of initiation was one that had been stressed by ethnographers, who saw in these ceremonies the equivalent of schooling received in Western societies. A very large number of rites did indeed contain periods of instructions and tests of competence for the initiates and this fact certainly tended to support the idea that the purpose of these ceremonies was educational. In support of Maambo's idea, Ngabwa (2015) indicated that rites are a tool for acquisition and learning of habits based on harmony with the spouse, parents, in-laws and other older people in general and mastering of conflict resolution mechanisms.

Zubieta (2010) supports Breugel's idea that there are several activities such as sexual activity, sexual fluids particularly menstruation which makes someone 'hot' which are considered to be potent and mysterious and thus dangerous. On the other hand, people who do not engage in

sexual activities (the elderly and children) and people who abstain from sexual intercourse are regarded as 'cool.' Sexual abstinence was therefore a prerequisite for attending initiation ceremonies since any person who was hot would spoil and put to danger the rituals. The gravity of the taboos concerning blood and sexual fluids is further explained by Oluwatosi (2013) who states that, it was common belief among the adherents of African traditional religion that there was a mysterious power in every blood as a result of its close connection with the vital life force which permeates all things both animate and inanimate.

Adolescent initiation rites have beneficial social and emotional effects that help shape young people's identities and provide them social standing in their communities. Social and emotional impacts are related to self-esteem, and self-esteem is related to positive sexual decision-making and health outcomes (van de Bongardt et al., 2016). Some girls say they enjoy going through the rites of passage and feel empowered by being regarded as women and by learning about sex and sexuality. Some Zambian women who had undergone initiation rites said they felt they were more accepted by their partners, relatives, and their community at large. They reported a sense of pride in fulfilling cultural traditions and, as a result, being perceived as ready to take care of their husbands and homes. Related to this was the overall sense of happiness that came from having fulfilled cultural expectations, thereby preserving their country's history and identity (United Nations Population Fund, 2020).

In a study by Mutale (2017) in Zambia, it was found out that, *Chinamwali* initiation ceremony plays a major role in the Chewa tradition to transmit values and traditions of the culture from generation to generation. *Chinamwali* is also believed to help girls in their moral behaviour in the sense that the girls learn to respect elders and how to behave in the community. The study also confirms that *Chinamwali* initiation has survived in the midst of social changes as it is part of the Chewa cultural heritage and it is a way of preserving social cohesion and remained the key mode of transiting cultural values from generation to generation.

Women, and increasingly men, practice body modification the world over. When women modifications procedures performed on the body in order to alter physical appearance are done voluntarily, they can be seen as expressions of personal agency. A woman's autonomy over her own body and her ability to make free choices about her sexual and reproductive functions and

her physical appearance are essential to the realisation of her sexual and reproductive health and rights. Feminisms affirm and claim the right for women's bodily autonomy, sexual liberation and personal dignity (Esho, 2018) in reality, modern and traditional societies' view of women's sexuality and feminine appearance is founded in patriarchy. The feminine form is an object of beauty, sexual attraction, reproduction, sustenance and prestige. Male status is often depicted through the female forms that surround him. Thus, prevalent definitions of beauty and sexual attractiveness heavily inform bodily modification practices.

2.8 The measures to improve the conditions during the girl-child initiation training activities

The UNFPA strategic plan 2018-2025 to “achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health, realize reproductive rights, and reduce maternal mortality to...improve the lives of women, adolescents and youth, enabled by population dynamics, human rights and gender equality.” They are also informed by the key principles of the 2030 Agenda 6 including: (a) the protection and promotion of human rights; (b) the prioritisation of leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first; (c) strengthening cooperation and complementarity among development, humanitarian action and sustaining peace; (d) reducing risks and vulnerabilities and building resilience; (e) ensuring gender-responsive approaches at all levels of programming; and (f) a commitment to improving accountability, transparency and efficiency. Any changes to programmes, policies and practices need to be done at the country, state and local levels. These principles can be used to inform those practices (United Nations Population Fund, 2020).

Many efforts have also been made towards addressing the issue of harmful cultural practices on the African continent (African Union [AU], 2011). The AU has paid close attention to the alleviation of harmful cultural practices including but not limited to, female genital mutilation and child marriages, recognising that there is a clash between human rights and culture (AU, 2011). The AU has also paid special attention to gender inequality and has sought to rectify and redress the issue of gender inequality on the African continent. Countries across the continent have implemented measures to ensure that the different ways in which gender inequality manifests itself are rectified. Despite the progress that has been made there is still ample room to grow in achieving gender equality. The Namibian government have made changes through policy implementation and law amendments to try and reduce gender inequality as well as

outlawing Harmful Cultural Practices (HCPs) by ratifying international conventions and protocols.

According to Droy et al. (2018), the Alternative Rites of Passage (ARP), known colloquially as a ‘ritual without cutting’ or ‘circumcision by words’, was developed by NGOs as part of strategies aimed at eradicating FGM/C. Sometimes, much more rarely, alternatives to FGM/C have been developed by other players such as communities, faith leaders and churches acting without external intervention (M’Raiji, 2015).

Alternative rites of passage are touted by the NGOs that organise them, and by other stakeholders including development agencies and donors, as a viable alternative to girls’ initiation but without FGM/C. Droy et al. (2018) argue that ARP forms a central part of contemporary efforts aimed at FGM/C abandonment in Africa, in communities where girls traditionally undergo FGM/C in puberty, and where community ceremonies traditionally marked the rite of passage from child to adult, before FGM/C was outlawed. ARP aims not only to divert girls from FGM/C but also early marriage, which invariably follows FGM/C and forces girls to drop out of school. ARP is not practised, so far as we know, in communities where FGM/C is performed on younger girls, or on women. There is evidence of increasing medicalisation, with medical practitioners illegally performing FGM/C in clinics, hospitals and people’s homes (Droy et al., 2018).

Cultures and societies feel strongly about their identities as a group, and want to both teach their cultural values to the youth and keep their cultural traditions alive from generation to generation. Any kind of cultural shift is challenging, and questioning rules and traditions is often considered taboo. With this in mind, there are still numerous ways to uphold and respect cultural traditions while eliminating any harmful, social, emotional and physical practices. In some cases, the potential social, emotional and physical harm of the adolescent rites of passage are severe enough that they merit elimination. Other cultural traditions and practices may be continued, but with adjustments made to eliminate the social, emotional and/or physical damage that can accompany them.

Apply a rights-based lens to the revision or elimination of adolescent initiation rites. Applying a rights-based framework means giving young people, especially girls, input into whether and to what extent they participate in various rites. Informed by this, parents should involve more women in decision-making processes. Rites of passage have the most frequent and dramatic impact on girls and young women. Communities and countries will be unable to make meaningful changes in gender and power inequities unless they look at how gender stereotypes and gendered power imbalances are being reinforced through the initiation rites (UNDP, 2020). Considering the male power dominance in these countries, it is likely that any practices that benefit male members of the community are likely to continue to be supported, or at the very least, are not as likely to be contradicted. If the majority of communities throughout African countries are led by men, it will be important to demonstrate how making changes to cultural rites of passage practices benefit people of all genders. Ensuring stronger female representation in programmatic and policy decisions will increase the likelihood that a gender equality lens is maintained (UNPFA, 2020).

Lastly, UNDP (2020) recommends the full involvement of youth in decision-making processes. It is strongly encouraged that youth be involved from the beginning in any programme or initiative that affects them. This includes the decision-making process relating to initiation rites.

2.9 Chapter summary

The chapter presented the review of selected literature that is related to the appropriateness of the girl-child initiation training in international world and in Namibia. First, the theoretical framework that guided the study was explained. Second, it presented the global, continental and Namibian perspective on the appropriateness of the girl-child initiation training. The chapter ended with discussions on the activities performed during girl-child initiation training, perceptions of initiates and initiators about health and sanitary conditions during the girl-child initiation training and measures can help improve the conditions during the girl-child initiation training activities. The next chapter presents the research methodology adopted in the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology of the study. It explains the research paradigm, research approach and design. The target population, sampling procedure, data collection instruments and data collection procedures are also discussed. The chapter ends by explaining data analysis, trustworthiness and ethical issues considered in the study.

3.2 Research approach

Qualitative research is often associated with an interpretive philosophy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The qualitative research approach was employed to answer the research questions. In qualitative research studies, participants' meanings and the relationships between them, using a variety of data collection techniques and analytical procedures, are used to develop a conceptual framework and theoretical contribution (Saunders et al., 2016). The approach employs different philosophical assumptions, strategies of enquiry and methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2017). The study was qualitative since it sought to gain an understanding of the concepts, the underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations of initiations training in the Zambezi Region of Namibia.

3.3 Research design

The study embraced a case ethnographic research design. Ethnography entails preparing a written account of an ethnic group of people by studying the culture or social world of a group (Saunders et al., 2016). According to Saunders et al. (2016), ethnographic design involves researchers living among those whom they studied, to observe and talk to them in order to produce detailed cultural accounts of their shared beliefs, behaviours, interactions, language, rituals and the events that shaped their lives. The researcher used the language of those being studied in writing up cultural accounts. This design was deemed the most appropriate as it enabled the researcher to explore first-hand information on use of the girl-child initiation training in Zambezi Region.

3.4 Population of study

The study's target population covered four categories of the population of interest. The first category was the key participants or initiates (*Kamwale*) from the girl-child initiation trainings. The second category was the parents of the initiates who are usually the one who subject them to the process. The third category was the mentors or senior women, who are the initiation leaders, and the fourth category was the village headmen/women (Induna) who host the ceremonies in the Zambezi Region. The criterion for the inclusion of this population was their participation and involvement in organising the initiation trainings.

3.5 Sample size and sampling procedure

The sample for this study consisted of 33 participants. The participants were made up of 15 key participants (initiates), the researcher targeted at least 5 from each the three ethnic groups in Zambezi Region, 6 parents of the initiates (at least 2 from each ethnic group), 6 initiation leaders (2 senior women from each ethnic group) as well as 6 head women (who host initiation trainings), 2 from each ethnic groups in the Zambezi Region. This part of the sample (initiates) comprised of girls between 10 and 18 years who were considered as minors by virtue of their age and a vulnerable group that cannot legally give consent for their participation in a study hence permission to interview them was requested from their parents/guardians and the interviews took place in the presents of these parents/guardians.

The study being qualitative, adopted a non-probability sampling techniques. First, purposive sampling was used based on the judgement of the researcher regarding the characteristics of the representative sample. Second, snowball (recommendation) sampling, where existing participants recruit future participants from among their acquaintances, was used to achieve the number of research participants as planned. Each sampled person was asked to identify other potential participants with the inclusion characteristic until the sufficient number was reached (Christensen et al., 2015; Wellington, 2015).

3.6 Research instruments

Research instruments to collect data consisted of four sets of interview guides targeting the four categories in the sample of the research study. The questions may be similar, but each interview

guide was contextualised to the participants' role in the girl-child initiation training. These instruments had main questions and probing questions to move the responses into in-depth interviews. Rasmeni (2017) affirms that in-depth interviews are the best technique for digging deeper into a problem with a researcher controlling the conversations with the research participants.

3.7 Data collection procedures

Permission was sought from the three traditional authorities to access the various research sites (villages). After gaining permission to access the research sites, a purposeful sampling procedure was followed by setting initial appointments with the identified headwomen who are known to be involved in the hosting of the girl-child initiation training. Subsequently, a purposeful snowball sampling technique was used for initial participants to identify and refer the researcher to the next key participants.

Consent from the initiates' parents or guardians, the senior women and the parents taking part in the study was sought before collecting the data. A pseudonym was used for identifying participants to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. Special precautions were taken for the vulnerable group (initiates) by making sure that a social worker was on standby throughout the interviews for any possible emotional harm as the recalling of the initiation training may cause discomfort for children.

All the in-depth interviews with the proposed research participants took place at agreed meeting points and set times subjective to prior arrangements with them and after they had consented to participate. The data was digitally recorded and categorised according to the specified sample groups. Each interview guide carried an identification number on the top right corner of the cover page so that the respondents could be identified in case it became necessary to carry out a follow-up activity.

3.8 Data Analysis

This study used content analysis to analyse the collected data. Qualitative content analysis is a process of coding by which patterns, words and meanings in the data are identified, coded and categorised (Creswell, 2017). The data analysis followed the general procedure of data

transcription, data organisation for retrieval, code identification of themes and the development of categories.

3.9 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness ensures authenticity of qualitative data. In this study, trustworthiness was ensured through four criteria of Lincoln and Guba (2016): credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Dependability refers to the flow and linkage of internal processes in the study and how changing conditions in the studied variables are catered for by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 2016). To ensure dependability the researcher recorded all the changes done during the research process in order to produce reliable or dependable results that make meaning to readers. The researcher ensured the research focus gets modified as the research progresses.

Credibility refers to the adequate representation of the research participants' socially constructed views matches what they intended to say (Lincoln & Guba, 2016). The researcher ensured the match is obtained by lengthening their involvement in the field of study to build rapport and trust and allow collection of adequate in-depth information, using research experts to reflect on discussed ideas and test findings, allow participants to check data analysis and interpretations and avoid subjective reporting.

Transferability refers to the extent to which the working hypothesis can be applicable to other similar contexts or settings (Lincoln & Guba, 2016). To ensure transferability the researcher provided a full description of the research design, content, questions, interpretations and findings. The researcher provided readers with rich data sets and descriptions so that readers are able to make judgements about the findings' transferability of the study to another similar setting of interest.

The researcher also ensured confirmability of qualitative data. Confirmability refers to the extent to which the characteristics of data as recorded by the researcher can be confirmed by readers (Lincoln & Guba, 2016). The researcher ensured confirmability by carrying out thorough audits of the research activities, and existing coherence of the final project.

3.10 Research ethics

The researcher was given the ethical clearance from UNAM Research Ethics Committee. Thereafter, permission was sought from Postgraduate Studies. Permission was also sought from the three traditional authorities (*Mafwe*, *Masubia* and *Mayeyi* traditional authorities) in the Zambezi Region to access the various research sites. After the ethical clearance and permission was granted, meetings with the research participants were scheduled where a detailed explanation of the consent form content was presented. After a detailed explanation of the study has been done and then participants' signature or thumb print, whichever applies, was secured for consent, which indicated that they had agreed to take part in the study and they were aware that they could withdraw, whenever they felt like. Research data, for example, recorded voices and transcripts, were securely stored and later would be deleted after five years.

3.11 Chapter summary

The chapter presented the research methodology of the study. It explained the research paradigm, research approach and design. The target population, sampling procedure, data collection instruments and data collection procedures were discussed. The chapter ended by explaining data analysis, trustworthiness and ethical issues considered in the study. The next chapter, Chapter 4 presents data presentation, interpretation and discussion of results.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents data acquired through interviews during the study, which were then analysed using content analysis. The data were organised for retrieval using the general technique of data transcription, data organisation, code identification of topics, and category construction. The goal of this study was to look into the appropriateness of the girl-child initiation training in the Zambezi Region of Namibia. Since the study needed to understand the perceptions, feelings, and experiences of participants in the Zambezi Region, the qualitative research approach was used to answer the research questions. The data was presented in two parts: demographics, and qualitative data, gathered during the study.

4.2 Data presentation

The researcher successfully recruited a sample of 30 individuals through interviews out of the 33 as targeted; this resulted to a response rate of 91 percent. Three (3) of the participants (*kamwale*) were not present at the time when the researcher had interview them. The information presented came from initiates (*Kumwale*), their parents, mentors or initiators, and headwomen. In quotations from the participants' interviews, the traits that identify and exemplify the conceptual categories are further discussed. A P1 through P30 labelling technique was used to identify the participants in order to protect their privacy.

4.2.1 Demography of respondents

This section consists of gender, ethnic group, and age, level of education, occupation and religion of participants.

Participants	Targeted Population	Actual Respondents	Male	Female	Ethnic groups		
					Mayeyi	Subia	Mafwe
Girls (initiates)	15	12	0	12	4	4	4
Parent/Guardian	6	6	1	5	2	2	2

Initiators	6	6	0	6	2	2	2
Headwomen	6	6	0	6	2	2	2
Total	33	30	1	29	10	10	10

Table 4.1 Responses from interviews

According to Table 4.1 in the targeted population column above, the study projected to interview 33 participants. However, 3 of the study's target participants were unable to participate for various reasons, and only 30 (91%) were able to complete the interview. Interviews with girls (initiates) as young as 12 years old, as well as parents and guardians of initiates as young as 6 years old, were conducted as part of the study. Then there were 6 initiators (senior women) and 6 headwomen (tribal leaders). The investigation indicated that 29 women (96.7%) and 1 man participated in the study (3.3%). The participants came from three ethnic groups: Mayeyi had 10 (33.3%) participants, Subia had 10 (33.3%) participants, and Mafwe had 10 (33.3%).

Age Range (years)	Actual Number of participants	Percentages
12 – 20	12	40%
21- 30	0	0%
31- 40	2	6.7%
41- 50	10	33.3%
51 +	6	20%
Total	30	100%

Table 4.2 Age ranges of participants

According to Table 4.2 the age of participants from youngest to the oldest who participated in the study are as follows: age category 10-20 years had 12 (40%); age category 21-30 years, they was no participant; 31-40 years had 2 (6.7%); age category 41-50 years had 10 (33.3%) and age category 51+ years had 6 (20%). The majority of participants were from age category 10-20 years these were initiates then followed by age category 41-50 years this age category constituted (initiators, parents/guardians). The other category on third position was age category 51+ years this age category constituted of headwomen (leaders of ethnic groups) and the last age category of 31-40 years constituted of parents/guardians only.

Education level and occupation	Actual number of participants	Percentage
Primary school	2	6.7%
Secondary School	10	33.3%
Farmer (Commercial or Subsistence)	5	16.7%
Small Business	1	3.3%
Temporary Employment	2	6.7%
Professional	3	10%
Homemaker/Housewife	4	13.3%
Unemployed	3	10%
Total	30	100

Table 4.3 Education level and occupation of participants

According to Table 4.3, this presented jointly the educational level and occupation of participants. The initiates who were at primary level were 2 (6.7%) and then majority that were attending secondary school, were 10 (33.3% participants. In terms of adults who participated in the study their occupation were as follows: farmers (commercial and subsistence) were 5 (16.7%); those who owned small scale businesses, only 1 (3.3%) participant and those who were temporarily employed during the study were 2 (6.7%) participants. Then professionals were 3 (10%) participants; homemaker/housewives were 4 (13.3%) and those who were unemployed were 3 (10%). The majority of participants were secondary school children and the least was those who owned businesses.

Religion	Actual number of participants	Percentages
Christian	14	46.7%
Muslim	0	0%
Traditional	10	33.3%
Atheist	0	0
No religion	6	20%
Total	30	100%

Table 4.4 Religions of participants

According to Table 4.4 the participants emanated from different religious backgrounds which were Christianity with 14 (46.7%) participants; Traditional with 10 (33.3%) participants; No religion with 6 (20%) participants. They were no participants from the Atheist and Muslim religious groups.

4.3 Emerging themes of findings

Theme 1: Girl-child initiation training

Theme 2: Activities performed during girl-child initiation training

Theme 3: Health and sanitary conditions during the girl-child initiation training

Theme 4: Measures that can help improve the conditions during the girl-child initiation training activities

The above themes are discussed in depth based on a qualitative content analysis that was carried out to create several categories that described the data gathered during the interviews. To support the facts offered in this chapter, the data was presented together with quotes from participants. The data were presented under the area of developing themes of findings, with the first theme being girl-child initiation training, followed by the other themes mentioned above.

4.4 Theme1: Girl-child initiation training

The understanding of girl-child trainings phrase is employed in diverse contexts by different ethnic groups, many people have negative perceptions about girl-child initiation trainings, and the media has depicted these initiation trainings as abuse of a girl-child. Participants were asked a series of questions, the answers to which were grouped together under this theme.

The question: What do you understand about initiation ceremony?

The participants responded by giving answers which are presented as: preparing girl-child into womanhood, teaching responsibilities, preservation of culture

Preparing girl-child into womanhood: People go through several stages in life, and these stages have different duties that are expected of them, according to the participants. As a result, the initiation ceremony is a training of a girl-child into another level of life, womanhood, which comes with its own set of challenges and responsibilities. As a result, the girl-child is trained on such aspects of life so that they can aspire to be a moral behaved woman. The following were the responses of the participants:

“Initiation training is for young girls who are about to enter adulthood hence they go through this training so that they prepare for adulthood.” (P7, parent)

“The initiation ceremony is a life training of girl-child into adulthood, at these trainings they impact knowledge on behaviours expected of them.” (P28, headwoman)

“Our culture is very unique and gives young girls an opportunity to be trained on what is expected of them when they reach the stage of adulthood.” (P16, initiator)

“We are taught life lessons on how to behave as we enter the stage of being an adult.”
(P6, initiate)

“The ceremony is always interesting as girls meet and undergo the training the importance of becoming an adult is being emphasised and also the teenage behaviour that we used to do will shunned.” (P10, initiate)

The initiation rites, according to participants 7, 28, and 16, are intended to prepare young girls for maturity as they progress through life's stages. Participant 6 and participant 10 focused on changing the behaviour of young girls, which is ingrained during initiation training as they transition from adolescence to maturity. This demonstrates the importance of initiation rites in the Zambezi Region ethnic groups as they prepare young females for adulthood, which is crucial since when they enter maturity, they already know what is expected of them in their cultures.

Teaching responsibilities: The initiation rites, according to the participants, are intended to educate the responsibilities that come with being an adult. They went on to say that these lessons are crucial since these young girls are taught how to be responsible adults. Being a responsible adult has an impact on how you interact with others in your community, according to the participants. The following was said by participants:

“These trainings are very important they teach you how to be a responsible person in life which I believe is very important for me.” (P23, initiate)

“When you have undergone the training you think different from others and you act responsible in everything you do in life.” (P14, initiate)

“After my training I was now responsible with my house chores but before the training never saw the importance of doing house chores.” (P1, initiate)

“These trainings they instil a sense of responsibility in these girls as the trainings is comprised of activities that ensure that after the training they are grown up women who are responsible in their lives.” (P19, headwoman)

Participant 23 stated that the teachings of initiation trainings inspire girls to be responsible, which is necessary in life. Participant 14 believes that once you have completed the initiation training, you will be able to take on more responsibility. According to Participant 1, the programme would teach girls how to be responsible with their household tasks. Initiation training, according to participant 19, instils a sense of responsibility in girls. This demonstrates that these initiation trainings encourage girls to be responsible in their daily lives, and that the activities they participate in during the initiation ceremony have an impact on them becoming responsible adults.

Cultural preservation: Participants, particularly adults, stated that these initiation trainings are intended to preserve their culture, as their culture is highly important and must be passed down from generation to generation in order to be preserved. The topics noted under cultural preservation were about burials, death, family duties and cultural ceremonies. The participants also disclosed that these initiation rites are one of the venues via which they pass on cultural information to the younger generation. Participants also expressed the belief that when girls go through initiation training, they are taught cultural values and standards, as well as instruction on cultural features of their civilisations and reasons for why certain aspects are done in their culture. The following is what the participants said in this case:

“We teach our girls our culture so that they know how important it is.” (P9, initiator)

“Our culture has to be passed from generation to generation hence we pass it to young girls during initiation trainings so that they know the culture and be able to practice it properly.” (P25, headwoman)

“One of the activities involved in the initiation trainings is to test the girls on their understanding and knowledge about our culture, this is important as it this activity will allow us to teach them what they don’t know as well as explaining why we do certain things in our culture.” (P17, initiator)

“We use these initiation ceremonies to teach our girls our culture and most of them after the training they lead us in other cultural ceremonies with songs and dances as a result they is continuity in our culture to young generations.” (P22, initiator)

“During our initiation training we were taught on various cultural aspects that I didn’t know personally and I am glad now I understand my culture more than before.” (P4, initiate)

“One of the senior women during our initiation training was good at explaining why we do certain things in our culture and also the importance of us continuing to practice our culture in our communities.” (P23, initiate)

Participant 9 emphasised the importance of their culture, which they convey to newcomers at introduction trainings. Participant 25 stated that they transmit down culture from generation to generation during initiation trainings. During initiation trainings, Participant 17 reported that they are given knowledge tests to measure their awareness of their culture, and then culture lessons are centred on what they do not know as well as explanations of why they do certain things in their culture. Following the initiation trainings, Participant 22 indicated that many females became more involved in other traditional rituals, which they also led through song and dance. Participant 4 emphasised the cultural parts of the initiation process that she was unfamiliar with. Participant 17 stated that they were taught the necessity of keeping their culture alive in their communities. This demonstrates that culture preservation was accomplished during initiation ceremonies, as activities throughout the trainings include explanations of cultural traditions as well as the importance of culture, thereby fulfilling the mandate to maintain their culture.

Preparation for marriage and sexual life: The initiation ritual, according to participants, is intended to prepare girl-children for marriage, since the trainings also teach young girls how to be good wives to their husbands. Also covered are how to care for a family as a woman and the expectations placed on married women by the community and their in-laws. Another part of this category was gender roles in the home, where girls are trained to respect and treat their husbands as the head of their households. Participants backed this up by saying:

“One of the topics during initiation is about marriage and mentors teach these young girls of what is expected of them by their husbands when there are married.” (P11, headwoman)

“The initiation training teaches us of our roles as women when we are married and these roles are important as they let us be caretakers of our homes.” (P15, initiate)

“Marriage is one of the fundamental aspects in our communities and the rate of divorce in our country is alarming hence when we teach these girls about marriage it creates some resilience in them, so that when they face challenges during their marriages they are able to conquer as the teachings teach them on life skills and this reduces divorce rate in our communities.” (P13, initiator)

“The aspect of marriage is one of the important things in life hence our girls are taught how to take care of their families as mothers and also how to behave when they are with their husbands.” (P20, parent)

During initiation trainings, Participant 11 revealed that girls are taught about marriage and what their husbands expect of them. Participant 15 stressed the importance of women's roles in marriage. According to Participant 13, females are educated how to overcome obstacles they may face during marriage, which lowers divorce rates in their communities. Participant 20 indicated that girls are taught on how to take care of families when they are married. This demonstrates that in the Zambezi region, marriage is considered sacred, and men and women have separate responsibilities in marriage. As a result, during initiation trainings, girls are taught about many facets of marriage with the goal of moulding them into good spouses and mothers to their families.

Misconception of initiation trainings: Many participants indicated that people assume that initiation ceremonies lead to early marriages of young females, revealing that there is a misperception regarding them. The participants were adamant that such ideas are untrue, as these trainings encourage young females to refrain from sexual activities and to wait until they are of marriageable age before marrying. The participants had to say the following:

“We teach our initiates (Kumwale) not to rush into marriage but wait till they have reached an age of 18 years.” (P21, headwoman)

“Yes sexual activities are taught during the initiation training but that does not mean we teach these young ladies to be married, we actually emphasises the need for them to mature first as marriage is for grown people.” (P17, initiator)

“All my girls who went for initiation trainings were all married at the age above 18, the teachings they received during the training taught them the sacred of marriage and how it is important for them to enter into marriage when they are mature.” (P20, parent)

“Some people think once you have gone through the initiation training you can now get married but this is not what they are taught during the training in actual facts marriage is treated as an important aspect hence maturity is needed for one to be married.” (P5, initiator)

The initiation training teaches initiates (*Kumwale*) to marry when they are of mature age, which is over 18 years, and the importance of marriage in the society is taught to young girls during the training. Participants 21, 17, 20, and 5 all agreed that the initiation training teaches initiates (*Kumwale*) to marry when they are of mature age, which is over 18 years. This demonstrates that the belief that initiation trainings promote early marriage is subjective, as actual ethnic groups who participate in initiation trainings state the exact opposite of what many scholars and media outlets claim.

The question: What age do girls participate in the initiation training?

Participants gave different views under this question regarding which age is suitable for initiation training. The following emerged at any age and once girls have reached puberty.

Any age: According to some participants, a girl can enter the initiation course at any age as long as she is not married. Anyone of any age can participate in the initiation training as long as they are mature enough to participate in activities and understand the concepts presented during the trainings. Participants stated the following in support of this:

“I joined the initiation ceremony at age 20 and they were other girls who were 22 years and the younger ones were 14 years of age in our group.” (P12, initiate)

“I don’t think there is a specific age which is expected by society to join as long the girl is mature.” (P18, parent)

“We normally recruit girls from 13 years and above as long they are not married or have a child.” (P9 headwoman)

“Any girl can join as long they are mature to understand the importance of passage rite.” (P26, initiator)

“When girls are of good age they can join the initiation training.” (P5, initiator)

During initiation training, participant 12 stated that the girls in her group were of various ages. Participant 18 believes that the initiation trainings are open to anyone of any age. Participant 9 stated that they usually recruit girls aged 13 years and up. Participant 26 stated that the girl can participate in the initiation ritual as long as she is mature. This indicates that no exact limit has been established in the *Mafwe*, *Subia*, and *Siyeyi* ethnic groups for the age of girls authorised to participate in initiation training, but the majority of girls who participate in these trainings are over the age of 13 years.

Puberty stage: Several participants stated that a girl is eligible to undergo the initiation training when she reaches puberty and has her first menstruation. The participants also revealed that most girls begin their menstruation (*Kufulumana*) at the age of 13 years, which is when they are eligible to participate in the initiation training. Some participants stated the following:

“When I reached the puberty stage I was advised by my mother to join the initiation ceremony.” (P30, initiate)

“When girls begin their menstrual cycle, it is when they are ready to begin initiation training.” (P2, initiator)

“Puberty stage is the perfect time for girls to start their initiation as they will be ready to be taught about sexual life.” (P7, parent)

“I joined the initiation training with my friends when we reached the puberty stage.”
(P15, initiate)

“It’s common that when girls reach the puberty stage that is when there are ready to start with the initiation ceremony.” (P19, headwoman)

Participants 30, 2, 7, 15, and 19 all stated that when girls enter puberty, they are eligible to begin initiation training. This demonstrates that the females are ready to begin initiation training at puberty since they are regarded mature enough to learn about life lessons at that age.

The two questions: How long is the initiation training? At what time of the year is the initiation training?

These questions were asked to headwomen, parents and initiators and the following emerged from the data that were one month, school holidays and any time of the year.

One month: All participants from *Masubia*, *Mafwe*, and *Masiyeyi* ethnic groups said the initiation process only takes a month. The entire course should be completed in a month, including all exercises and teaching sessions. The following are a few quotes selected from the responses of participants:

“It only takes one month then you are done.” (P13, initiator)

“It does not take time, it’s only one month.” (P22, initiator)

“Our training was one month only.” (P18, parent)

“You complete the training within a space of a month.” (P28, headwoman)

The highlighted quotes above were representatives of *Masiyeyi*, *Mafwe* and *Masubia* ethnic groups and they all had the same sentiments that the training is done in one month.

School holiday: Several participants indicated that the initiation training takes place during school vacations, and that any female who wanted to join and is a school student was welcome to attend. In this regard, the participants had to say the following:

“We normally conduct these trainings during school holidays.” (P11, headwoman)

“We always want to give opportunities to the young girls going to school to participate in the trainings as a result we conduct it during school holidays.” (P26, initiator)

“We avoid disrupting girls to go to school that is why we have these trainings during the holidays.” (P2, initiator)

“School holidays are always the best as most girls are on holiday that is when we conduct our initiation trainings.” (P25, headwoman)

“It was during a school holiday when we went for training.” (P29, initiate)

The above-mentioned participants all stated that the initiation training takes place during school vacations. This means that arrangements were being made to allow girls who were still in school to attend the initiation ceremony.

Anytime of the year: According to the participants, the initiation ceremony can take place at any time of the year, depending on the number of initiates (*Kumwale*) who are available to participate in the training. The time the trainings will take place is determined by the number of girls that are available for training. In this regard, participants had to say the following:

“We have it any time of the year as long as the number of girls required is enough.”
(P13, initiator)

“I joined the initiation training in June and the next training for the other group was done in December.” (P29, initiate)

“What determines the time when the training is to be done is the number of girls available so when there are above 10 the training can start.” (P9, headwoman)

“We can have it anytime of the year, there are no stipulated months.” (P25, headwoman)

The number of girls available for training impacts the time the training is conducted, according to participants 13 and 10. It can only be done at any time of the year, according to participants 29 and 25. This demonstrates that there are no predetermined months for these initiation trainings.

The question: Are the girls allowed to refuse to participate in the ceremony?

This question was asked to initiates (*Kumwale*), initiators (*Chilombola*), and initiate parents throughout the interviews. Girls have a right to choose and are not coerced to participate in the initiation ritual against their will, according to all participants. Other participants reported that their parents and relatives urge their daughters to participate in the initiation trainings, which has resulted in a large number of females in the communities participating. Right of choice emerged as the code that emerged in response to this query.

Right of choice: Participants confirmed that they had a right to choose whether or not to attend initiation ceremonies, and that no one forced them to attend trainings against their will. In this regard, some participants had this to say:

“When I was 16 years old my aunty advised me to join the training and told her was not yet ready that is why I joined the training when I was 21 years.” (P23, initiate)

“No one is forced to join the training and girls are given the right of choice to join or not to join.” (P2, initiator)

“We cannot force these girls to join because if they come unwillingly they will not learn anything that is why we give them the right to choose.” (P19, headwoman)

“I was told about the initiation training and got interested to join, and then I convinced my friends to join at the same time.” (P15, initiate)

“We advise our children on the importance of the initiation training at our homes and we leave them to make decisions on their own.” (P7, parent)

Participant 23 stated that they had the option of joining when they were ready. Girls are offered the option to join the training, according to Participant 2. Participant 19 emphasised the importance of allowing girls to make their own decisions, as forcing them will not achieve the training's goals. Participant 15 revealed that they joined the initiation training on their will. Parents' duty, according to Participant 7, is to advise their daughters regarding initiation training, but the decision is ultimately up to the girls. This shows that no one is forced to participate in initiation training, and girls have the right to participate when they are ready.

The question: What is the relationship between the initiation training and the lifelong learning?

This question was asked to initiators, parents/guardians and headwomen.

Lifelong learning: Participants stated that the initiation programme is significant in their culture as it teaches *kumwale* of life skills such as the value of marriage, moral behaviour, entrepreneurship, and social skills. This is believed to prepare the girls for lifelong learning since all elements of life are addressed during the training, preparing the female child to face any obstacles that may arise as well as having abilities to manufacture products that they can sell and earn a livelihood from. In this case participants revealed the following:

“The skills that are taught during the initiation ceremony have a bearing on how one behaves when they are adults and the teachings make one to be set for life.” (P27, parent)

“It enables you to gain social skills which are very important for life because without them you may encounter challenges that may impact your life.” (P21, headwoman)

“The trainings are very important for life as they allow you to be able to tackle life challenges.” (P13, initiator)

“These trainings have impact on lifelong learning as these young girls will be trained on skills that they can apply for life.” (P16, parent)

These participants reported that initiation trainings have a lifelong impact since the teachings and activities that take place throughout the training equip one to use them for future life endeavours. This demonstrates that initiation training has a lasting impact on lifelong learning since it develops social and vocational skills.

4.5 Theme 2: Activities performed during girl-child initiation training

This theme presented the activities which take place during the initiation training and the process which girls undergo during the training. Several activities were revealed by participants that are presented below:

Initiation process: The announcement is made by the headwoman (*Induna*) regarding the approaching initiation training, according to the attendees. Then, at the Induna household, initiates (*Kumwale*) go and register with their parents/guardians. This is done to show parental approval. Senior women or mentors from the communities, known as *Ishimbiro* in the *Masiyeyi* ethnic group and *Chilombola* in the *Mafwe and Masubia* ethnic groups, are chosen to participate in the initiation training. The Indunas will be in charge of the entire procedure, after which a start date for the training will be determined. Traditional huts known as *Shitungu* in *Masiyeyi* and *Chitungu* in *Mafwe and Masubia* will be renovated or rebuilt with the cooperation of village residents in preparation for the initiation programme. The *Chilombola/Ishimbiro* collects money and food per family and from other organisations willing to donate for the training. Then, when the training begins, *Kumwales* are accompanied to the training by their mothers or female relatives, and they are placed in the supervision of *Chilombola/Ishimbiro*.

The question: What activities are performed during the initiation ceremony?

Participants revealed many activities which are performed during the training. The following are the activities:

Local culture and practices: Participants stated that their culture is their pride, and as a result, they teach their children about the importance of culture. In the *Mafwe and Masubia* groups, the sessions of teaching culture and practices are known as *Chizo chokumunzi ne misebelisezo*, while in the *Masiyeyi* group, it is known as *Shizo sha mukyo indi ku litukiseza*. Cultural features such as traditional ceremonies and how they are handled are taught in these initiation rites. Girls are taught the importance of marriage, their duty as married women, and the behaviour required of them by society, in-laws, and husbands during this session. The participants revealed the following:

“We teach them about our culture which is very importance; some of the cultural practices include songs and dances of traditional ceremonies.” (P26, initiator)

“*The Chilombola taught us about marriage especially on sexuality in marriage.*” (P12, initiate)

“Traditional ceremonies were the main topic of our training and now I know the stages of the matrimonial ceremony.” (P10, initiate)

“Behaviours of married women are taught at the training and roles of women when there are with their families are also taught.” (P9, headwoman)

“The training is meant for girls to know all cultural practices that we have in our culture and we teach these girls so that when there are adults there are also able to teach another generation.” (P11, headwoman)

Cultural traditions, including traditional rites, are taught to *Kumwale* at these initiation trainings, according to participants 26 and 11 and 10. Participant 9 discussed the importance of women in households and the behaviours that are expected of married women. This demonstrates that cultural traditions are included in the trainings, which helps to preserve the *Mafwe*, *Subia*, and *Siyeyi* ethnic groups' cultures as they are passed down from generation to generation.

Preparing traditional meals: participants noted that some foods are essential in their societies, and they are taught how to make them for different traditional meals during the initiation training. *Masubia* and *Mayeyi* people employ phrases like sump (*Isonza zechishenga*), pap (*Ikoko*), and water lilies (*Ino masiko*) to describe foods. During their trainings, *Mafwe* people prepare the same meals, which are known as sump (*Ixole*), pap (*Ichira*), and water lilies (*mwedye*). These meals are claimed to be important in the Zambezi Region's culture, and they have a specific way of being prepared. In this regard participants had to say:

“We teach them how to make traditional meals such as Ixole which is prepared as part of our traditional celebrations.” (P13, initiator)

“I know how to prepare sump in a best way and I was taught how to prepare this meal during the initiation training.” (P29, initiate)

“All girls who go through the initiation training become good at preparing traditional meals as this is taught during their training.” (P19, headwoman)

“We have several dishes in our culture and we teach our girls how to prepare them during their initiation training.” (P26, initiator)

Participants 13 and 29 reported that during training they were taught how to prepare sump. Participants 19 and 26 said traditional food preparation was taught during training. That is why they teach initiates during the initiation training about the preparation of numerous traditional dishes. This indicates the value of traditional foods in their cultures.

Women taboos: participants revealed that women go through menstruation period and this is treated as a taboo in their cultures. During initiation, girls are taught on how to take care of themselves during the menstruation period. Women taboos are known as *zizila zabanakanzi* by *Masubia* and *Mafwe* people. Then the *Siyeyi* people it is known as *shizira shabarwakazi*. Participants indicated that during training initiation girls are taught of various ways to keep hygiene and also remedies of menstruation pains. Some participants indicated that there are taught on how to clean their private parts which is also hygienic and also tightening their vaginas with different herbs. The other aspect of women taboo taught during the initiation training is the stretching the labia minora which was deemed as an important aspect of womanhood. In this regard, participants had to say the following:

“The first menstruation period of girls is always a difficult phase hence girls needs guidance of how they can take care of themselves.” (P2, initiator)

“I did not know of remedies to ease the stomach cramps during menstruation but was taught of several methods to deal with the pain.” (P30, initiate)

“Some girls are affected psychological about the menstruation process hence we train them on how to deal with such issues during the initiation training.” (P21, headwoman)

“As part of growing up the girl bodies change and they start their menstruation cycle, but most parents are unable to teach their girls how to be hygienic during menstruation that is why we teach them about hygiene when they are menstruating.” (P17, initiator)

“We were taught on how to clean our private parts and also on stretching our labia it is important because it prevents various disease, unwanted odour and also long labia are part of womanhood.” (P30, initiate)

Participant 2 said that during the period of the menstruation girls are taught to take care of themselves. Participant 30 showed that she was taught treatments to cope with menstrual stomach cramps. Participant 21 said some girls will be affected by the menstrual period, thus they will be taught how to deal with it. Participant 17 reported that it is very important to be hygienic and that girls are instructed in menstrual hygiene. Participant 30 revealed that there were taught on how to clean their private parts to prevent unwanted odour. This shows that initiation training involves practices that are extremely significant in girls' lives since a menstrual procedure is a vital component of their lives.

Home chores: Participants indicated that some of the activities include house chores. The participants revealed that it is important for a woman to be able to do house chores and be able to feed the family by farming in gardens and bigger fields. One of the activities which the girls are supposed to do is fetching water in the river this is known as *kuteka menzi in Subia* and *Siyeyi* ethnic groups and in *Sifwe* it's known as *kuvweta ami*. This is regarded as women role in the household hence girls are taught on how to preserve water in the household and also how to keep water in a hygienic environment so that it is safe to drink. In this case, participants had to say this:

“There are house chores such as fetching water which are known to be women roles in the household hence these girls are taught on how to fetch water in the river.” (P22, initiator)

“When it comes to taking care of the household, women play a bigger role hence a girls are taught on various household chores such as washing clothes and other duties.” (P7, parent)

“We were taught on various methods of keeping the drinking water safe and also preserving water so that it's used for various purposes.” (P8, initiate)

Household tasks were covered throughout the initiation session, according to Participant 22. Other domestic responsibilities, such as washing, were also mentioned as part of initiation training by Participant 7. Participant 8 stated that they were taught several ways to keep water safe as well as how to use it for different purposes. This shows that beginning training rites are

lifelong trainings since they have an impact on our daily lives and responsibilities. They also instil responsibility in the females when it comes to their chores.

Making clay pots: Making clay pots is a part of the participants' culture, and some even stated that they make living by selling pots in their villages. Since clay pots are commonly used to prepare traditional meals in the Zambezi region, the initiation training includes the creation of clay pots of various sizes. The following was said by participants:

“We teach them how to make clay pots and these pots are used to make traditional meals.” (P17, initiator)

“Some girls after receiving training on making pots they become more creative and they end up making good pots which they sell to other community members.” (P28, headwoman)

“Making clay pots has always been part of our tradition and we teach our girls how to make strong pots which are used in our household.” (P16, parent)

“We have many women who were taught how to make clay pots during the initiation training and are now selling these pots in different regions of Namibia.” (P24, parent)

Initiates are taught how to construct clay pots, according to participants 17 and 16, and these pots are used to prepare traditional meals as well as for other household uses. The second aspect of generating a living from selling these pots to community members as well as other people across Namibia is mentioned by participants 28 and 24. This illustrates that producing pots is not only for domestic use, but also for profit, as these pots are sold to make a living.

Weaving baskets and rug making: Participants said they were also taught how to weave baskets out of grass collected near rivers. Basket and rug weaving is regarded as a significant activity in the Zambezi Region's societies. The baskets are used to carry and store food, while the rugs are used by the women to sit on. These baskets and carpets are also sold, and people earn a living selling them to various communities. In this regard, participants had to say this:

“During initiation training we teach these girls how to weave baskets and these baskets are used for storing food in our houses” (P22, initiator)

“Weaving baskets and rugs is part of the training and we were taught how to make them in different styles by our initiators.” (P29, initiate)

“The rug I made during my initiation training is used by my mother when we are sitting under that tree.” (P8, initiate)

“We were taught how to weave baskets and rugs and now we sell them to people from Zambia who then sells them in their country.” (P3, initiate)

Weaving baskets is part of the training, according to Participant 22, and these baskets are used to store food. Participant 29 also stated that they were taught how to weave baskets and rugs, but that they were taught how to do so in a variety of styles. Participant 8 stated that her mother used the rug she produced during the initiation training. Participant 3 indicated that the basket weaving training they received enabled them to make a life from it, as they now sell baskets and carpets to Zambians. This illustrates that the training is useful to females since they are taught how to weave baskets and rugs, which are subsequently used to store food in their homes as well as sell and earn money.

The question: How was it taught?

This question was posed to initiates that took part in the study. Under this question group discussion, drama and songs emerged.

Group discussions: Participants stated that the initiates will be divided into separate groups for instruction sessions each day. These little groupings would shift in meaning, indicating that they were not permanent groups but rather a mix of girls of various ages. These brief chats, according to the participants, encompassed issues such as marriage, culture, and behaviour. In this regard, participants revealed the following:

“We were always put into small groups for teaching sessions and this was good as small number allowed us to concentrate on the teachings.” (P3, initiate)

“Small group discussions were created almost every day for teaching sessions.” (P10, initiate)

“We only participated as a whole group in dramas and songs but teachings were done in small discussion groups.” (P15, initiate)

“Teachings were done in small groups.” (P23, initiate)

Participants stated that lectures were done in small groups, and that small groups were manageable since they allowed them to concentrate on teachings without being interrupted by a large number of individuals.

Dramas and songs: Participants also noted that teachings were done through theatre and songs, with initiators assigning them different roles to play in a production, which were particularly educational for girls, as many stated that learning concepts through drama and songs was easier. The songs were part of the lectures, according to numerous participants, who stated that the songs that they were taught included traditional dances and were educational songs about gender roles and disparities, as well as how women should protect themselves from gender-based abuse.

“We participated in songs and dramas as part of our teachings during the training.” (P4, initiate)

“I like the dramas more as I was able to act in different roles assigned to me.” (P6, initiate)

“The initiators would assign us different roles for acting as part of the teachings.” (P30, initiate)

“Traditional songs and dances were performed during the training and many of us enjoyed that part of the training.” (P14, initiate)

“Songs which we sang during the training had different meanings some spoke about gender based violence and that women should report such cases to elders.” (P8, initiate)

Participants mentioned that theatre and songs were also used to teach them. As part of their education, the initiates were allocated different roles in dramas, and the songs they sung had meaning, as highlighted by Participant 8, who stated that some of the songs were about gender-based violence. This demonstrates that dramas and songs were used as additional medium of

learning during the training, and that these mediums of instruction have a favourable impact on education since participants recall the songs and dramas quickly.

Practical practice: Participants stated that tasks requiring practical experience, such as producing clay pots, weaving rugs, and baskets, were learned through demonstrations by the initiators, after which the girls would physically copy the demonstrations to create their own. The participants indicated the following:

“In the making of clay pots we had to gather the mud at the fountain and the initiators had to demonstrate to us how to make big and small pots.” (P1, initiate)

“A practical practice of weaving baskets was done during the training.” (P29, initiate)

“We had to use our hands to make the clay pots and the initiators inspected our pots then made recommendations on how to improve.” (P14, initiate)

“We were taught different techniques on how to weave rugs and we had to do it hands on as it is the only way to learn faster.” (P12, initiate)

As part of the training, Participant 1 indicated that they were required to collect mud in order to build clay pots. They were practical basket weaving practices, according to Participant 29. As part of his training, Participant 14 stated that she used her hands to make clay pots. Then, Participant 12 indicated that several techniques for weaving rugs were taught. This illustrates that practical experience was included in the training and was utilised to improve skills in clay pot manufacturing and basket and rug weaving.

The question: Do you think the activities performed are appropriate?

The programmes are acceptable, according to the participants, as they teach initiates numerous skills while also educating them on life topics such as responsibility, vocational skills, moral behaviour, cultural traditions, women's roles in the home and society, and marriage. These characteristics are thought to be significant in a girl's life since she will be prepared to face life's problems as well as live up to society's expectations. The participants responded as follows:

“Yes the activities are appropriate as they teach our girls about our culture.” (P21, headwoman)

“I think the activities are appropriate as there is no physical and emotional abuse of girls but rather teachings of marriage that helps them in future.” (P27, parent)

“The activities are very good for our kids as they are taught on various things as weaving baskets and rugs as well as cultural practices.” (P11, headwoman)

“After the girl has gone for initiation you can see behaviour change and they become more responsible, this shows that what they learn during the training is of value.” (P16, parent)

The activities are appropriate, according to Participant 21, as they teach about their culture. There is no mistreatment of girls, according to Participant 27, but there are marriage lectures. Initiates are taught crucial components such as basket weaving and cultural activities, according to Participant 11. Participant 16 agreed that the activities are suitable since they help girls improve their behaviour following the training.

4.6 Theme 3: Health and sanitary conditions during the girl-child initiation training

This theme revealed the environment on which initiation trainings are conducted. The following was under this theme.

The question: Do you think conditions in which the training takes place are appropriate for the girl-child?

Participants expressed a variety of opinions on what they believe should be altered in the future to establish a training atmosphere that is conducive to learning. When this question was posed, this resulted.

Improvement on bathroom structures: Some participants stated that the restroom constructions built for girls to bathe are inappropriate as men passing by the training might see the girls showering thus, invading their privacy. Some participants stated that such circumstances are inappropriate since some individuals may consider rapping these young women if they are found bathing.

“Our bathrooms are constructed of grass which is not safe for the girls as those passing nearby may see what is happening.” (P14, initiate)

“The only concern I have is on the bathrooms they should be constructed using bricks so that there are safe for the girls.” (P16, parent)

“If only we could have better bathrooms for our girls it could be fine other things are okay.” (P9, headwoman)

The above participant expressed concern about the bathrooms being built with grass, which is unsafe for the girls as other people may see them as they bath. This was brought up as a worry for the girls' safety. This illustrates that there is a need for improvements in restroom construction in order to safeguard the safety and privacy of girls.

The environment is good: Some participants stated that the atmosphere is beneficial to girls since it allows them to learn in a distraction-free environment. The setting is reported to be favourable since it is located on the outskirts of the hamlet, where there is space for a variety of activities.

“I think the environment is good because it is not near the village people and is good for learning.” (P6, initiate)

“Everything is okay and the girls are well taken care of by the initiators and they create a good environment for them.” (P7, parent)

“Of course the environment is very good for the girls as the village people make sure that they provide all is needed by the initiates during the training.” (P25, headwoman)

The training atmosphere is good for the training, according to the participants, as the initiators and village inhabitant's work together to ensure a conducive environment for the training. This shows that the communities are on board with establishing a conducive environment for the training to take place.

Good health practices: due to the fact that hygiene is a major emphasis in training, the training surroundings are suitable in terms of health. The girls keep the surroundings clean to prevent outbreaks from spreading.

“The environment is thoroughly cleaned by the initiates hence its health for them.” (P2, initiator)

“The initiators always ensure that the rooms and kitchens are always clean and this protects the girls from any spread of diseases.” (P11, headwoman)

“We always ensure that we have all the cleaning materials so as to keep the environment hygienic.” (P17, initiator)

“We never had a case where girls get sick because of dirty environments; we try our best to ensure cleanness.” (P19, headwoman)

Participants stated that they always ensured that the training area was clean and that they always followed excellent health standards. The participants consider this to be an appropriate setting. This demonstrates that appropriate health practices are maintained throughout the programme, which is beneficial to the initiates' health.

Accommodation: Participants stated that, while the housing structures are temporary, the girls will be sharing in four per room, which is ideal for them as the rooms are well ventilated and there is no crowding. If the number of girls is low, certain structures may even be shared by two of them, indicating that the environment is suitable for training.

“There are always temporary structures but due to health reasons we make sure that there are good for the girls.” (P13, initiator)

“We always ensure that there is no overcrowding in rooms because it's not health for the girls.” (P22, initiator)

“The village men always construct many rooms for the girls and it's good because they only share two or three of them in a room.” (P28, headwoman)

Participants stated that throughout the initiation programme, there are always temporary rooms, and they build many of them so that the number of people sharing each room is limited, which is done for health reasons. This demonstrates that the training facility is suitable for the training of a girl-child.

Private parts rituals: Labia elongation is a safe approach for females, according to participants, since they utilise oils for the process, which have been suggested by traditional healers. The participants also stated that the vaginal cleaning technique has no health risks as the herbs used are suggested by their culture and have been used for years, proving that they are safe. In this regard, participants had to say:

“The cleansing of vaginas and labia elongation are safe processes which do not have complications.” (P21, headwoman)

“We use oils for stretching our labia and this process is pain free and does not have health complications.” (P2, initiator)

“The herbs we use for vagina rituals are very safe and do not cause health complications as they have been tested in our culture.” (P11, headwoman)

Vaginal cleanliness and labia elongation, according to the participant, are non-complicated procedures. Participant 2 revealed that they utilise oils for labia elongation, a procedure that is thought to be free of health risks. The plants used in vaginal rituals, according to Participant 11, have been tested in their culture and do not create health problems.

4.7 Theme 4: Measures that can help improve the conditions during the girl-child initiation training activities

This theme presented data from the interviews that participants advised during the girl-child initiation trainings to enhance conditions.

The question: Is there anything you think could be done to improve the activities during the initiation process?

Participants made several suggestions for how to improve the training environment, and the following emerged as suggestions:

Building permanent structures: Some of the participants suggested that permanent structures dedicated to initiation procedures be constructed. Currently, temporary structures are not safe enough, posing a risk to girls; therefore, having a permanent structure will save money on the expense of rebuilding each time there is an initiation programme, as well as being durable and safe for initiates. The following was extracted from participants:

“We need permanent structures that will be constructed in our villages that serve the purpose of initiation training only.” (P22, initiator)

“To improve on safety of initiates we need to have permanent structures as these temporary may be dangerous.” (P20, parent)

“Temporary structures are not safe they may collapse anytime while girls are sleeping, so we really need to build permanent structures that are safe.” (P15, initiate)

Participant 22 remarked that permanent structures are required to serve the aim of the initiation rite. Permanent structures, according to Participant 20, are needed to improve the safety of initiates. Temporary constructions are not safe, according to Participant 15, hence permanent structures are required.

Include other younger initiators: Some participants, particularly young girls, claimed that the environment is not girl-friendly as all of the organisers are elderly women, making it difficult to tell them what they want. Participants noted that if there are other younger initiators, it will be easier to approach them and open up about various topics about which they would like to learn more. In this case participants indicated that:

“To improve the training environment, they should also introduce younger initiators which are able to understand younger girls.” (P4, initiate)

“If only we could have young initiators that will allow us also to give we time to play our games as youth the training environment could improve better.” (P10, initiate)

“The current initiators are old hence they make the environment tense as they is no time for other things of our age but serious things only so if we had younger initiators it could be better.” (P14, initiate)

“I would suggest that younger initiators are really needed because they will be able to teach us about our relationships with boys not only marriage.” (P29, initiate)

Younger initiators who can understand young girls, according to Participant 4, should be introduced. Participant 10 agrees that if they could just get some younger initiators, they would be able to offer the girls more time to play. Participant 14 stated that the existing initiators are all elderly women, and that there is a need for younger people to take the lead. Participant 29 said that if they had younger initiators, they would focus on boy-girl relationships rather than only marriage. This demonstrates that having old initiators creates an environment that is unfriendly to younger girls, but having a mix of young and old initiators is appropriate for the girls.

Addition of activities: Some participants advised adding young hobbies that are appropriate for their current age. The addition of youthful activities, according to participants, will make the initiation rite more engaging. The participants had to suggest this:

“We need addition of activities that also include playing time.” (P30, initiate)

“We do not only activities that are about adulthood only but the ones that speak to us as youth.” (P9, initiate)

“I suggest that we have more activities that youthful as currently you are not allowed to suggest that to the initiators.” (P1, initiate)

Participants 30, 9, and 1 all proposed that additional activities be provided to allow the young girls to play their games. This demonstrates that the trainings are only for serious business, with the girls getting less playing time.

Increase the timeframe of training: Some participants advised that the training period be extended as the girls may not be able to learn everything in a month. Some participants even stated that two to three months would be sufficient since the training would not be rushed and there would be enough time to cover all areas. Participants said this:

“The time to train these girls is too short as many aspects need a lot of time for them to understand but we end up rushing them.” (P17, initiator)

“If only we could increase the time from one month to two months would be appropriate as it gives time for the initiator to thoroughly teach everything.” (P2, initiator)

“The time is limited and we had to teach girls many things in a month but if we are to add another month for training it will be very good.” (P21, headwoman)

“The only concern I have is about the time frame of the training it’s too short we should increase it to three months.” (P28, headwoman)

Participants stated above propose that the training timeframe be prolonged as one month is insufficient to cover all components of the training, necessitating the need to extend the timeframe in order to adequately train the girls.

4.8 Chapter summary

The *Masiyeyi*, *Masubia*, and *Mafwe* ethnic groups provided information for this chapter. The information presented was gathered from participants’ interviews. The data were organised into topics, with different questions posed to participants that led to data categorisation and meaningful titles. The next chapter, Chapter 5 presents discussion of findings.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses findings of the study linking it with literature in on initiation rites by different scholars in the world. Four themes were derived during data presentation and these themes are used in the discussion of findings of this chapter. The previous chapter, Chapter 4 presented data and the next chapter, Chapter 6 presents summaries of all chapters, conclusion and recommendations of the study.

5.2 Girl-child initiation training

The study revealed the understanding of initiation training from the perspective of participants and the following emerged:

Preparing girl-child into adulthood

The study revealed that the initiation ceremony is a training of a girl-child into another level of life, womanhood, which comes with its own set of challenges and responsibilities. Muashekeleh et al. (2018) state that the initiation ceremony is considered as a rite of passage or ritual, a festival in which parents commemorate their daughter's transition from girlhood to womanhood. Munthali and Zulu (2018) add to this by stating that the girl-child initiation training is perceived as a license for persons to be viewed as adults. Malawians also celebrate ancient rites known as Chinamwali for females to mark the passage between childhood and maturity, according to a report undertaken by the Malawi Human Rights Commission (2012). The study's findings and literature agree on the definition of initiation rite, which is defined as the training of girls for adulthood.

Cultural preservation

The study indicated that initiation trainings are intended to preserve their culture, as their culture is highly important and must be passed down from generation to generation in order to be preserved. The topics noted under cultural preservation were about burials, death, family duties and cultural ceremonies. The participants also disclosed that these initiation rites are one of the

venues via which they pass on cultural information to the younger generation. In support, Rooyen et al. (2006) indicate that initiation rites were thus kept as the most important channel via which culture was conserved and conveyed. Additionally, according to Shalyefu (2018), the training's topic includes etiquette, comportment, sexuality, death, burial, and even history. Furthermore, Mutale (2017) discovered in a study conducted in Zambia that the *Chinamwali* initiation ceremony plays a significant part in the Chewa tradition of transmitting cultural values and traditions from generation to generation. On the negative side, initiation rites have been identified as a cultural practice that has been deemed harmful in the literature (United Nations Population Fund, 2020). Initiation trainings are meant for cultural preservation, according to the findings and literature, and these cultural practices include traditional ceremonies, death, and burial as part of the teachings.

Marriage and sexual life

The study revealed that initiation rites prepare girl-children for marriage, since the trainings also teach young girls how to be good wives to their husbands. Also covered are how to care for a family as a woman and the expectations placed on married women by the community and their in-laws. Another part of this category was gender roles in the home, where girls are trained to respect and treat their husbands as the head of their households. In literature, Rooyen et al. (2006) training encompassed topics such as personal hygiene and privacy, sexuality, childbirth, health, married life, how to be a wonderful and loving mother, and how to be the best honoured wife. According to Musole (2015), rituals give young people instructions on gender roles and family life, including sexual activity and reproductive specifics. It was also stated that in African civilisations, women and girls are stereotypically socialised in such a way that they eventually become wives and mothers who will obey their husbands (Musole, 2015). Furthermore, Hilber et al. (2012) state that in order to ensure natality and a successful sexual life and marriage, life course, social, gender, and sexual norms are learned and enculturated. According to the Baushi of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, “sexual life in marriage appears to be the culmination of a long and meticulous preparation.” While it is widely assumed that the trend in initiation was to teach sex instruction in order to satisfy men in marriage, Rooyen et al. (2006) suggest that initiation schools socially educate youngsters for communal life. Marriage and sexual education

are taught at initiation trainings, according to the literature and study findings. According to literature, this is taught in numerous countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Teaching responsibilities

The study revealed that initiation rite is intended to educate the responsibilities that come with being an adult. They went on to say that these lessons are crucial since these young girls are taught how to be responsible adults. Initiation training is also designed to either educate young people for the obligations and responsibilities of adulthood or to merely declare that the young person is now an adult, according to the literature (United Nations Population Fund, 2020). The most essential lesson of the *Venda* or *Bawenda* of South Africa's initiation schools, according to Janssen (2002), was the training concerning the institutions and obligations of motherhood, fatherhood, and marriage. According to the findings of the study and the literature, females are taught about duties in numerous facets of life, including parenting and marriage roles.

Misconception about initiation training

The study revealed that people assume that initiation ceremonies lead to early marriages of young females, revealing that there is a misperception regarding them. The participants were adamant that such ideas are untrue, as these trainings encourage young females to refrain from sexual activities and to wait until they are of marriageable age before marrying. On contrary, regardless of the initiate's age, completion of initiation ceremonies is regarded an indicator of preparation for marriage (Muntali, 2018). According to the National Gender Policy 2010–2020, detrimental traditional practices such as early marriages and dry sex have an influence on women's health; research is needed to determine the amount of violence and cultural discrimination against girls. The study findings and literature have opposing perspectives on early marriage, with the findings indicating that females are encouraged to marry when they reach adulthood, while the literature suggests that initiation trainings promote early marriages and early sexual activity.

When participants were asked on what age girls participate in the initiation training

Puberty stage

The study revealed that a girl is eligible to undergo the initiation training when she reaches puberty and has her first menstruation. The participants also revealed that most girls begin their menstruation (*Kufulumana*) at the age of thirteen, which is when they are eligible to participate in the initiation training. The same was noted by Shell-Duncan et al. (2017) that initiation training is a rite of passage commonly undertaken at puberty. Furthermore, according to Janssen (2002), the onset of puberty was traditionally considered in terms of the girl's emerging sexuality and impending adulthood. Milubi (2000) also notes that the *Musevhetho* initiation rite is done among the Tsonga tribe of South Africa to mark a girl's passage into adolescence. Rituals are done for young girls in the North East of Namibia's tradition to initiate them into womanhood. When a girl first gets her period, a ceremony is held to prepare her for the realities of being a cultured woman (Andima & Tjiramanga, 2010). The findings of the study and the literature both agree that girls who have attained puberty are entitled to engage in initiation ceremonies.

Furthermore, the study discovered that girls who participate in initiation training begin at the age of 13 years and progress upward. Similarly, in Japan, puberty, which occurred between the ages of 12 and 14 years, was indicated by a change of attire (*genpuku*), as it was in most other regions of the world (Herold, 1985). According to Herold, the change of clothing indicated that the initiate had matured and needed to act in a mature manner. According to the findings of the study, most girls begin puberty at the age of 13 years, making them eligible for initiation training. The proposed age in the literature was 12 years, demonstrating that there is no difference.

Any age

The other perception regarding the age of girls who join the initiation ceremony, the findings revealed that anyone of any age can participate in the initiation training as long as they are mature enough to participate in activities and understand the concepts presented during the trainings and also as long there are not married. Literature revealed that studies conducted by Brown (2015), Johnson (2018) and Munthali(2018) on female initiation rituals are a set of regulated ceremonial events that are necessary for all females in a given society and usually take place when they are between the ages of 8 and 20 years. The study's findings also found that girls

can join at any age, which contradicts literature, which suggests that there is an age limit of 8 to 20 years.

When participants were asked if girls have a right to refuse to participate in the ceremony, the study revealed that girls have a right to choose and are not coerced to participate in the initiation ritual against their will, according to all participants. Other participants reported that their parents and relatives urge their daughters to participate in the initiation trainings, which has resulted in a large number of females in the communities participating. On Contrary, Siweya et al. (2018) indicate that adolescents are under much pressure to participate in initiation ceremonies, and those who do not can face major social consequences. Similarly, most young people attend initiation ceremonies as an important part of their culture that marks their passage from infancy to adulthood, but they have little choice as they are forced to attend by their parents (Zulu, 2010; Skinner et al., 2013). The study findings and literature hold opposing viewpoints on girls' right to choose whether or not to participate in initiation ceremonies. The findings suggest that girls have a choice, whereas the literature suggests that girls are compelled to participate by their parents.

When participants were asked how long the initiation is, the findings indicated that the initiation training takes a month and includes teachings and many activities throughout that time. According to the literature, '*Sikenge*' is an initiation ceremony or rite of passage practised in several communities in the region, particularly in the Zambezi Region. The procedure can take up to a month, and a girl is taught everything from how to be a good submissive wife who does not challenge her husband or elders to how to be a good submissive wife who does not confront her husband or elders (Titus, 2017). The findings of the study and the literature both agreed that the initiation training should last one month. The duration of the training, according to the literature, varies from region to region.

When participants were asked at what time of the year is the initiation training, the findings revealed that the initiation training takes place during school vacations, and that any female who wants to join and is a school student is welcome to attend. On contrary, according to Hari (2009), these rituals are also implicated as a source of girl dropout as they are non-educational and are frequently held during the school year, causing girls to miss a significant amount of school time. Furthermore, involvement in these rituals has an impact on females' educational participation in

two important ways: attendance and performance. This occurs as the time spent on these rites is taken away from valuable school time. When these girls return to school, teachers struggle to find the time to provide them with the individualised care they need to catch up with their peers (Mrotto, 2011).

Moreover, many academics have questioned the same rites as a reason for girls dropping out of school since they are said to be unfit for academic cycles as the rituals only prepare them to be better brides and mothers (Mrotto, 2011; Mtewe, 2012). Furthermore, Magesa et al. (2018) found that the girls who attend the rituals face harassment, abuse, and occasionally miss valuable school time in a study conducted in Kenya. The reason for this is that following the rituals, girls' behaviour changes, and some of them believe they are unable to deal with formal education. Mtewe (2012) adds to this argument by claiming that truancy and early pregnancy, both of which are linked to initiation ceremonies, are the primary causes of girls dropping out of school. The findings of the study revealed that initiation trainings take place during school holidays and had no effect on school-aged children, but literature suggests that initiation training leads many girls to drop out of school as it is held during school days in various countries.

When participants were asked on the relationship between initiation training and lifelong learning the participants revealed that the training prepares the girls for lifelong learning as all elements of life are addressed during the training, preparing the female child to face any obstacles that may arise as well as having abilities to manufacture products that they can sell and earn a livelihood from. In support of Maambo's idea, Ngabwa (2015) states that rituals are a tool for acquiring and learning habits based on harmony with one's spouse, parents, in-laws, and other elderly people in general, as well as mastering dispute resolution processes, according to some Zambian women who had experienced initiation rites reported they felt more accepted by their partners, relatives, and the community at large, according to literature. They expressed delight in upholding cultural customs and, as a result, were seen as capable of caring for their spouses and homes. This was accompanied by a general sense of fulfilment that resulted from having met cultural expectations and thereby preserved their country's history and identity (United Nations Population Fund, 2020). On the other hand, some people do not regard initiation training to be an important component of lifelong learning or African culture (Hayashi, 2017), nor do they

recognise the importance of the conditions experienced during girl-child initiation training in the life of the girl-child (Makono, 2019). Other researchers agreed with the conclusions of the study that initiation trainings have an impact on lifelong training, while others disagreed, showing that initiation trainings have no significance to lifelong trainings. As a result, one may reasonably conclude that there are components of initiation training that have an impact on lifelong learning, as well as aspects of initiation training that do not.

5.3 Activities performed during girl-child initiation training

When participants were asked on the activities performed during the initiation training the findings revealed the following.

Local culture and practices

The study revealed that Girls are taught the importance of marriage, their duty as married women, and the behaviour required of them by society, in-laws, and husbands. In support, during initiation training, the girl is trained by certain senior ladies who are well versed in the society's culture, according to the literature. The importance of gender roles in marriage is emphasized. Domestic and agricultural responsibilities, respect for elders and potential husbands, sexual and food preparation are among them (Makono, 2019). In addition, in two regions in northern Mozambique, Cabo Delgado and Niassa, initiation ceremonies and rituals are seen as a symbolic rebirth into womanhood and a preparation for sexual life and reproduction (Van Bavel et al., 2017). Marriage duties, respect for elders and sexuality are among the cultural behaviours taught during initiation trainings, according to the research.

Women taboo

During initiation girls are taught on how to take care of themselves during the menstruation period. Also that they are taught on how to clean their private parts which is also hygienic and also remedies of menstruation pains. In support, Rasing (2001) reveals that a variety of vaginal procedures are taught at initiation, including herbs to warm and tighten the vagina, cleaning, cleansing, and menstrual pain control. Girls are taught how to tighten their vaginal muscles using traditional remedies, according to the findings. According to the literature, constricting the vaginal cord for 'dry sex' is a widespread technique. Young women are instructed to utilise herbs

to dry out and tighten their vaginas before sexual intercourse in several communities across Namibia, including Zambezi and Ovaherero communities, since their male partners prefer sex with women who do not lubricate but instead have 'warm' and 'tight' vaginas (LeBeau, 2004). On women taboos, the study findings and literature agreed. The study findings suggested that girls are taught how to clean their vaginas and how to utilise herbs in the process. This was also observed in literature by Rasing (2001) and other scholars such as LeBau (2004).

Another feature of women's taboos highlighted by the studies is that girls are encouraged to extend their labia, which is considered crucial since it signifies that a girl has matured and entered womanhood. The labia minora is stretched during initiation, according to Frank (2015). Girls in some Zambezi tribes are trained to stretch their labia minora from the age of nine to ten years, using rods, string, stones, and their hands to pull on their flesh, producing swelling and blisters. According to the literature, LE is inextricably linked to femininity; if one does not have elongated labia, one is not considered feminine, and thus desired and deserving. While fear of being criticised can have social and emotional ramifications, it can also harm one's physical health (United Nations Population Fund, 2020). The outcomes of the study revealed that labia elongation is a part of the initiation training. It was also highlighted in the literature that labia elongation is also practiced in other nations. According to the literature, the LE process is considered harmful and causes discomfort and blisters in girls.

Preparation of traditional meals such as sump, pap, and water lilies was also documented in the remains. The findings also mentioned housework such as getting water. Clay pots, basket weaving, and rug weaving are all frequent activities during the initiation training. Initiation training according to Munthali (2018), prepares girls for their respectful adult roles in society (preparing meals, weaving baskets, making clay pots, attending cultural ceremonies, bearing children, getting married, owning a house, or being accepted into positions of community leadership).

The study also revealed that in the three ethnic groups of *Subia*, *Mafwe*, and *Siyeyi*, initiators (*Chilombola*), also known as mentors, are in charge of all training activities and lessons. The initiates are guided and directed by older ladies or mentors within the communities during these activities (Brown, 2015). Musole (2015) further states that during *Sikenge*, the Zambezi Region's

principal tutor, known as *Chilombola*, is in charge of the training. Some typical activities were mentioned in the study findings and literature, such as basket weaving, clay pot making, and meal preparation. These practices are featured in a variety of countries' initiation trainings.

When participants were asked how they were taught during the initiation training the study revealed that teachings were done through theatre and songs, with initiators assigning them different roles to play in a production, which were particularly educational for girls, as many stated that learning concepts through drama and songs was easier. Also literature revealed that food, clothes, dance, and song are all part of the rites, and they are utilised to instruct girls (United Nations Population Fund, 2020). Songs and dramas were found to be a part of the trainings, and this was also recognised in the literature as a medium of instruction during the initiation training. Other types of instructions that were used in the study, such as short talks and practical practices, were not included in the literature.

5.4 Health and sanitary conditions during the girl-child initiation training

The participants were asked that do you think conditions in which the training takes place are appropriate for the girl-child, the study revealed a positive and negative perceptions about the initiation rituals.

Private parts rituals

The study revealed that labia elongation is a safe approach for females as they utilise oils for the process, which have been suggested by traditional healers. The study also stated that the vaginal cleaning technique has no health risks since the herbs used are suggested by their culture and have been used for years, proving that they are safe. In literature it was noted by Esho (2018) that LE is taught by a sexual socialisation process in which the girl's mother, grandmother, carers, or sisters teach her how to manipulate her genital organs directly. In most communities, herbal remedies and oils that are not technically verified are used to expand and keep the labia in place, according to the author. Discomfort, irritation, oedema, and secondary infections affect girls. Ncube (2018) indicated that in Zimbabwe, the practice of LE is accompanied by the insertion of herbal drugs into the vagina to tighten it for the benefit of male sexual pleasure, according to literature. This can have major medical repercussions, such as vaginal wall irritation, painful

intercourse, and infections. Study findings demonstrated that the LE process is safe and does not cause any health concerns, although literature stated that females experience discomfort, irritation, oedema, and secondary infections.

Other favourable aspects of the initiation process include the fact that they adhere to appropriate health practices in terms of cleanliness at the training camp and that, despite the fact that the accommodations are temporary; the girls are not crammed into the rooms, preventing disease transmission. The negative opinion was that the restrooms were built out of grass, which was seen as unsafe, and that it was also an infringement of the girls' privacy as passers-by could see them bathing. The next chapter, Chapter 6 presents summary of chapters, conclusion and recommendation.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study summary of the 5 chapters, followed by the conclusion based on the findings of the study and then the recommendations sums up the chapter.

6.2 Summary of chapters

Chapter 1: This chapter provided an interesting background on girl-child trainings and how they fit into the larger context of adult education as a social activity. Various activities such as meal preparation, basket weaving, and clay pot making were discovered as part of the training activities in the background. The trainings were claimed to be taught by senior women known as initiators or mentors, who imparted knowledge to the girls about life skills that allowed them to progress into maturity. Furthermore, it was noted in the background that these trainings have sparked multiple arguments about their appropriateness, and that various researchers have reported on these trainings around the world, particularly in Africa. In diverse cultural situations, these trainings are known by distinct indigenous names. Furthermore, the background revealed that Namibia's Zambezi area is one of the most important centres for girl-child initiation training. According to the problem statement, there is a disconnection between the concept and the appropriateness of the activities carried out during the girl-child initiation programme. The research questions that led the study were provided in this chapter, with the major research question being: How appropriate is girl-child initiation training in Namibia's Zambezi Region? The significance of the study is that it may raise awareness for protective initiatives, such as legislation and policy, to address accusations of unsuitable conditions involving girl-child initiation training. This chapter also includes limitations, delimitations, and definitions of numerous terminologies.

Chapter 2: The chapter presented the review of relevant literature that is related to the appropriateness of the girl-child initiation training in international world and in Namibia. First, the theoretical framework that informed the study was explained. Second, it presented the global, continental and Namibian perspective on the appropriateness of the girl-child initiation training.

The chapter ended with discussions on the activities performed during girl-child initiation training, perceptions of initiates and initiators about health and sanitary conditions during the girl-child initiation training and measures can help improve the conditions during the girl-child initiation training activities.

Chapter 3: This chapter presented the methodology of the study. The study indicated that qualitative approach was appropriate as the study explored the culture and experiences of girl-child trainings in the Zambezi Region hence descriptions of ceremonies and activities were best interpreted in a qualitative way. As the research sought to understand the culture of *Masubia*, *Mafwe*, and *Mayeyi* ethnic groups, a multi-case ethnographic research design was deemed appropriate. The ethnographic research design was chosen to take a practical approach in which the researcher was involved in their day-to-day settings to obtain a true and detailed account of their experiences and culture. Girls (initiates) named *Kamwale* in the local Zambezi region, their parents, mentors (initiators) who were elder women, and headwomen (*induna*) who hosted the ceremonies in the Zambezi Region made up the study's target group.

A sample of 33 people was chosen from the target demographic, and 30 of them took part in the study. The study used two non-probability sampling methods which were purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive was used in order to find participants who were knowledgeable about initiation trainings. Then, based on the recommendations of the interviewed participants, snowball sampling was employed to identify additional participants. The study also outlined the data instrument used during the data gathering which were interviews. Furthermore, the chapter described the research technique used by the researchers during the study, which included obtaining permission from traditional leaders of ethnic groups, followed by parental authorisation to interview girls under the age of 18. Data acquired during interviews were analysed using qualitative content analysis, which resulted to data presentation and interpretation. Qualitative data were checked for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. During the research, ethical considerations were observed.

Chapter 4: In-depth interviews with females (initiates), parents/guardians of initiates, initiators (women who conduct initiation rites and headwomen) and indunas (leaders of the Masubia, Mafwe and Mayeyi ethnic groups) were used to collect data for this chapter. The demographic

data were presented first; in this section, the exact number of participants, which totalled 30, was presented, as well as the gender of the participants and the number of participants from the ethnic groups listed above. The age ranges of participation, educational level, occupation, and religious groupings of participants were then reported in detail under demographic data. The chapter further presented findings of the study which were presented in four themes thus: girl-child initiation training; activities performed during girl-child initiation training; health and sanitary conditions during the girl-child initiation training; and measures that can help improve the conditions during the girl-child initiation training activities.

Initiation trainings, according to the research, are trainings in which girls are introduced to adulthood. These trainings teach females about duties, moral behaviour, marriage, cultural practices, and marital sexuality. The study also indicated that there are misconceptions about initiation rites, which are perceived to promote females to marry young, whereas in truth, they encourage girls to marry when they are of legal age, as marriage requires maturity. The training lasts one month, and the girls are not forced to participate; they do so of their own free will. The training can take place at any time of the year, although it is usually during school vacations. Girls who have attained puberty are eligible to participate in the training. Preparing traditional meals, women taboos, home chores, producing clay pots, and weaving baskets and carpets are all part of the training ceremonies. Small group discussions, theatre, songs, and practical exercises were used to teach the activities. Participants thought the events were acceptable since they taught cultural values, responsibilities, social skills, and vocational skills. The assessment of the health and sanitary situation was that permanent bathroom and room buildings were required. Hygiene standards were also observed at the training camps, which were believed to be beneficial as diseases would not spread.

Chapter 5: This chapter provided a synopsis of each chapter, summarising the most important points. Then each study's conclusions were based on the findings, which were based on the study's major purpose, which was the appropriateness of female child initiation trainings in Namibia's Zambezi Region. This chapter outlines the research questions that prompted the study, as well as replies to these questions based on the findings. The study's conclusion was also offered in this chapter, which emphasised the significance of girl-child initiation in Zambezi

ethnic groups' culture, as well as the lessons learned during the initiation rites. The study's recommendations and areas for further investigation are also presented in this chapter.

6.3 Conclusion

This study's main goal was to undertake a systematic inquiry into girl-child initiation training with a purpose to interrogate the understanding of the concept, activities performed and their purposes, as well as the appropriateness of the conditions during the training and its relevance to lifelong learning.

6.3.1 Main Research question 1: How appropriate is the girl-child initiation training in the Zambezi Region of Namibia?

Initiation rituals in the Zambezi Region are suitable, according to the findings as they teach the girl-child about responsibility, good moral behaviour, cultural preservation, marriage, and vocational skills. The programme was intended to teach young girls to be self-sufficient and capable of carrying out their adult responsibilities responsibly. The teachings are said to have an impact on lifelong learning since the training prepares the girl-child for adulthood, and as a result, they are able to withstand any life challenges they may face, such as marriage and other aspects of life, as they are prepared for such challenges during the training. The programme also educates young girls how to protect themselves from gender-based violence by reporting it to their elders.

6.3.2 Sub-Research question 2: What are the activities performed during girl-child initiation training in the Zambezi Region?

Various activities and instructions occur during the initiation rite, according to the study. In these initiation rites, cultural aspects such as traditional ceremonies and how they are handled were taught. Preparing traditional food such as sump, pap, and water lilies was another occupation. Women's taboos include how to care for themselves during menstruation and how to clean their private areas for hygiene. The girls were also educated about their roles in the house, including how to handle house chores. The initiation training included the creation of clay pots, which are usually used to make traditional meals, as well as basket weaving and rug weaving. Local communities use skills like producing clay pots, baskets, and rugs to raise money and feed their

families, according to the participants. Vocational trainings were not only performed in their homes, but they were also used to earn money. Small group discussions, drama, and songs, as well as practical practice in tasks like making clay pots, were used to impart the activities and lessons.

6.3.3 Sub-Research question 3: What are the perceptions of initiates and initiators about health and sanitary conditions during the girl-child initiation training activities in the Zambezi Region?

The research found both good and negative opinions of the girl-child initiation training's health and sanitary settings. The negative perception was that the bathrooms were made of grass, which was thought unsafe for girls as they exposed them to men passing by the camping site and invading their privacy. Another unfavourable image that evolved was that the training rooms were temporary constructions, and that permanent facilities that were safe to conduct the trainings were required. The favourable opinions were that the environment in which the trainings were held was good as it was free of interruptions and clean. Another positive perspective is that they practiced good hygiene, which resulted in clean environments and no disease transmission. In terms of lodging, the opinion was that, despite the temporary constructions, the girls were not crammed into the rooms, which was seen as a good thing since there would be no illness spread within the camp.

6.3.4 Sub-Research question 4: Which measures can help improve the conditions during the girl-child initiation training activities in the Zambezi Region of Namibia?

The researcher proposes the following measures to be taken so as to improve the conditions during the girl-child initiation training:

- It is critical to engage key stakeholders and create an enabling environment so that girls can effectively participate in initiation training at the appropriate time and age,
- Initiation counsellors/ initiators remain entrenched information sources therefore an effort to provide them with training is crucial on health-related matters during initiations trainings.

- The Zambezi region may seek for funds from NGOs to build proper houses which can be permanent; this improves the conditions of housing structure;
- The researcher proposes that parents, initiators and headwomen to always consult on the issues affecting the girls during the training and be able to resolve them with emergency.
- They may introduce structured programmes which guide their initiation activities so that they won't be repetition of tasks;
- Construction of proper bathrooms in the training campsites will improve the sanitation of the trainings;
- The Zambezi region ethnic groups may include Ministry of Health to educate the girl-child about health-related issues such as HIV/AIDS during the training so as to impact knowledge about many health related;
- The trainings may include also the Ministry of Gender and Child Welfare which will also have topics on girl-child empowerment which will gives the girls a mind that there are capable of doing any type of job as their boys counter parts.

6.4 Recommendations of the study

This section presents the recommendations of the study based on the findings gathered during the study. The researcher has hope that the recommendations suggested would be implemented in specific areas addressed so as to have better understanding of girl-child initiations. Also, the recommendations suggested to ethnic groups which were under study to be implemented so that the trainings are conducted in safe and inviting environment which breeds good behaviour in girl-children in our communities and nation at large. The following are the recommendations of the study:

Recommendation 1

The study recommends that the headwomen should mobilise funds from the village and also seek donations from different organisations then construct permanent structures for the initiation trainings.

Recommendation 2

The study also suggests that training facilities be built where initiators may receive well-structured training and that the number of women initiators in the community be increased.

Recommendation 3

The study also suggests that the Zambezi area continue to align their initiation trainings with government laws and regulations, and that any injustices that violate Namibian laws be corrected so that the trainings are recognised as appropriate and not as cruelty to girls.

Recommendation 4

The study recommends institutionalisation of the girl-child initiation training into the indigenous local education systems.

Recommendation 5

Recommends recognised formal structures to replace the informal and non-formal ways of initiation training.

Recommendation 6

The study also suggests that the activities and conditions performed during the initiation trainings should be documented for replication and for improvement where necessary.

Recommendation 7

The Zambezi region ethnic groups conducting initiation rites should seek scientific assistance to demonstrate that the herbs they use for vaginal cleaning do not cause health problems or side effects.

Recommendation 8

Ethnic communities in the Zambezi Region should guarantee that their actions do not violate human rights and that they follow all applicable laws in Namibia during their conduct of initiation rites.

6.4.1 Recommendation for future research

The researcher recommends other researchers to conduct comparative studies between other regional practices or impact evaluations of the initiation graduates.

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