

# Changes In Knowledge Of Sexual Behaviour During Adolescence Across Age-Groups And Its Influence On Marriages Among The Tigania Sub-Ethnic Group Of Meru County, Kenya.

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## **Abstract**

*This study hypothesizes that experiences at adolescence impacts greatly on adulthood. One aspect of adulthood impacted by experiences at adolescent is marriage. The knowledge an individual has on sexual behaviour contributes largely to sexual behaviour in marriage. Sexual behaviour contributes to the functionality and overall marital satisfaction. There has been a decline in marital stability among the Tigania sub-ethnic group of Meru County which is a cause of concern among marriage therapists. This study therefor sought to establish how the knowledge acquired during adolescence has influenced marriages among the Tigania sub-ethnic group of the Ameru of Meru County. The objectives of this study were to determine how knowledge on shared sexual behaviour, abstinence and sexual faithfulness in marriage as well as knowledge on sexual violence and abuse has influenced marriages among the Tigania sub-ethnic group of the Ameru of Meru County, Kenya. The study adopted ethnographic research design. A sample of 80 respondents participated in the study. Data was collected from the respondents using interview schedules and Focus Group Discussion with members of various age-groups. Data was analysed using Daily Interpretative Analysis based on various themes that were created based on the objectives. The findings revealed that people of different age groups had differing content of knowledge on human sexual behaviour that influenced their marriages. Respondents from the older age groups reported more functional and stable marriages and associated their marital stability to knowledge on sexual behaviour they received during adolescence. The younger age-groups reported less functional and stable marriages and indicated that they had on sexual behaviour was negatively contributed to stability and functionality of their marriages. The study recommends integration of aspects of traditional knowledge on sexual behaviour taught at initiation among the Tigania into the school curriculum and other curriculums that teach sexuality education.*

**Key Word:** *Sexual behaviour, Sexuality Education, Marriages, Shared Sexual Behaviour, Abstinence.*

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## **I. Introduction**

Sexual behaviour refers to the way in which people express their sexuality. Education on sexual behaviour is one of the thematic areas of sex education and includes knowledge on sexuality throughout life, shared sexual behaviour, abstinence, changes in sexuality throughout life and knowledge on sexual dysfunctions as well knowledge on abuse, assault, violence and harassment. (Sharpe (2003

Sex education includes knowledge on information, attitudes, beliefs and values a person has about identity, relationship and intimacy ([www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk), 2019). Sexuality education is expected to address the issues of personality, value formation, decision-making, peer and social pressures, affection and intimacy, body image, gender roles, communication strategies and various sexual behaviours (Kelly, 2006; United Kingdom, Department of Education, 2019). The recommendation by UK parliament and Kelly are done in the context of USA and UK which both have different cultural and psychosocial orientation from the Meru Context. It was therefore necessary to establish what the content of knowledge of sexual behaviour was delivered and how it

influenced marriages in Tigania Sub-Ethnic Group of Meru County. Kenya to broaden the understanding of marriages.

Countries are increasingly acknowledging the importance of equipping young people with the knowledge and skills to make responsible choices in their lives, particularly in a context where they have greater exposure to sexually explicit material through the internet and other media (World Health Organization, 2019). Sex and relationship education in United Kingdom is designed to equip children and young people with the information, skills and values to have safe, fulfilling and enjoyable relationships and to take responsibility for their sexual health and well-being (United Kingdom, Department of Education, 2019).

There is a continuing debate in Kenya on whether to teach sexuality education in schools (Wanyonyi, 2014). Proponents of sexuality education argue that young people do not receive the right sexuality education to help them manage their sexual behaviour according to the societal norms. According to Boonstra (2010), comprehensive sexuality education is needed in Kenya to ensure health sexual and reproductive lives. Opponents to introduction of sexuality education in schools argued that sexuality was a moral issue that influences human sexual behaviour so sex education should be a taught by religion and family (Kavivya, 2003). The proponents and opponents of teaching sexuality education were all focusing on the adolescent lives but did not consider the post-adolescent lives, especially the influence of sex education on marriages. It is therefore necessary to establish how knowledge on human sexual behaviour was instilled during adolescence among the Tigania sub-ethnic community of Meru County, Kenya, to give an insight of what is acceptable in the Kenyan communities. Once this is established it might add insight on what content of sex education should be added to the school curriculum and help break the stalemate on what content of sex education should be taught in schools.

**Objective**

- i. To establish the content of knowledge of shared sexual behaviour and its influence on marriages in Tigania Sub-Ethnic Community of Meru County of Kenya.
- ii. To establish the content of knowledge of Abstinence and sexual fidelity and its influence on marriages in Tigania Sub-Ethnic Community of Meru County of Kenya.
- iii. To establish the content of knowledge on Violence, Assault and Sexual Abuse and its influence on marriages in Tigania Sub-Ethnic Community of Meru County of Kenya.

**Research Design**

The study adopted is an Ethnographic Research Design. The researcher studied what happened in the Tigania community of Meru County as lived and practiced by the Tigania people in order to understand how the delivered content on human sexual behavior and its influence on marriages.

**Location of the Study**

The study was conducted in Tigania region of Meru County which hosts the Tigania sub-ethnic community. Tigania region encompasses Tigania West Sub-County, Tigania East Sub-County and Tigania Central Sub-County. Tigania sub-ethnic group is one of the 5 sub-ethnic groups of Meru living in Meru County namely. The other sub-ethnic groups are the Igoji, the Miutine, the Imenti, and the Igembe.

**Population of the Study**

The target population was 474,263 married people in Tigania Region as at the 2019 population census (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). These married people are distributed into various age groups because the Tigania operate within an age-group system. The age groups are determined by the time when a man was circumcised. Women adopted their husbands’ age groups (Nyaga, 1997, Rimita, 1988). During the period of this study, there were seven functional age groups of which six were married. These age groups and their period of circumcision have as follows (Table 1)

**Table 1: Age Groups among the Ameru and their period of Circumcision**

Age Group	Period of Circumcision
<i>Michubu</i>	1933 to 1948
<i>Ratanya</i>	1949 to 1959
<i>Lubetaa</i>	1960 to 1970
<i>Miriti</i>	1970 to 1984
<i>Guantai</i>	1985 to 1997
<i>Gichunge</i>	1998 to 2012
<i>Kiramunya</i>	2013 to when the next age group is named

### **Sample Size**

Data was collected from 80 married people. Among the married people, 50 people were randomly sampled to participate in Focus Group Discussions while 30, who were from the oldest age group, were interviewed as sexuality educators and counsellors.

### **Research Instruments**

Data was collected using interview schedules and Focus Discussions Group (FDGs).

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study was be guided by the American Psychological Association ethical principles of psychological code of conduct in conducting research as indicated in the (APA, 2002).

### **Data Analysis**

Data was analysed using Daily Interpretative Analysis (DIA). The objective of DIA was to record flashes of insights or preliminary conclusions. This involved organizing information into themes as guided by Kombo and Tromp (2011). The researcher then deconstructed blocks of data through fragmentation and merged them into collection categories that related conceptually and theoretically; and which conclusions were made.

## **II. Findings Of The Study**

The study findings were as discussed in section 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4.

### **Aspects of Knowledge on Sexual Behaviour among the Tigania of Meru County, Kenya**

Sexuality knowledge among the Tigania was aimed at establishing satisfactory relationship between spouses. This knowledge began in childhood and was emphasized during the initiation period. Girls were taught by older women and boys were taught by older men while in seclusion. There was set content, method of delivery and an evaluation. There was also a *Gaar* system is where after circumcision, all unmarried young men (*murani*) moved into a common house away from their families. Here they were taught about societal culture, customs and values especially on sexual relationships. Those who defied the values, were punished.

The introduction of the formal school system that occurred with the advent of colonization, missionaries and the formal school system led to change in the delivery of traditional knowledge on human sexual behaviour. There was a ban on female circumcision and the *Gaar* system that occurred in 1953 when the members from the *Ratanya* age-group were circumcised. The Tiganias defied the ban and held a protest referred to as "*ngaitana protest*". *Ngaitana* means "I will circumcise myself" (Lynn, 1996). In the protest, it alleged young girls circumcised themselves and marched to the police station and demanded to be arrested and detained. This ban became the turning point for knowledge on human sexuality and marital satisfaction among the Tigania. Lynn looked at the '*Ngaitana protest*' from the perspective of an historian and did not evaluate the psychosocial reasons and effects of the protest. This study established that the women were protesting against the ban on female circumcision because that is where they got knowledge on their sexuality which was tailored towards a satisfactory marriage. The people also disobeyed the ban on the *Gaar* system until during the period when the *Miriti* age group were circumcised when *Gaar* system phased out. The ban of the female circumcision and the *Gaar* system that led to the disintegration in the delivery of traditional delivery of knowledge of sexual behaviour

The school system that was introduced by the missionaries did not offer an equivalent replacement of the education knowledge on human sexual behaviour. Many people started attending the formal school system during the '*Miriti*' the group. This is the age group that began experiencing crisis in marriages and has the crisis continued to get worse with the succeeding age-groups. Marriage was no longer very stable. It is not uncommon for people to walk in and out of marriages. Asked which marriages were more satisfactory, respondents indicated that marriages among the older age groups were more satisfactory than the younger age groups. The respondents associated the higher levels of satisfaction in marriages to the knowledge on human behaviour one received. The reported that the knowledge taught to the older age-groups instilled respect the psychosocial boundaries which are necessary for satisfactory marital relationships.

Most conflicts that led to marital dissatisfaction among the respondents of the *Mburung'a* and *Gichunge* age groups were due to failure to respect each other's personal space which is necessary for a satisfactory marriage. These findings demonstrate that is therefore necessary to revisit the psychosocial boundaries necessary for a satisfactory marriage and teach the youth about them. These assertions agree with those by Robinson, (2014) that with the Changing technology, access to information on the Internet, greater awareness on none heterosexual identities, relationships, families and significant shift in meanings and experiences of childhood requires a more open and complex discussion with young people on sexuality issues if they are to become competent, informed and responsible citizens (Robinson, 2014).

The study also found it necessary to investigate selected knowledge areas of human sexual behaviour among the Tigania and how the influenced marriages.

### **Knowledge on shared sexual behaviour**

Knowledge on shared sexual behaviour was handled together with the knowledge on changes in sexuality throughout life as this was taught as changes occurred. Boys discussed their sexuality with their grandfathers and girls with their grandmothers as they performed day to day tasks. As they got older into adolescence, the changes in sexuality throughout life were clarified at initiation.

It is also at initiation that Boys and girls were taught that they could not sleep with their spouses and a child on the same bed. Both girls and boys were taught to not to have sex with children's clothes in the bed. They were told that this would be similar to turning their children's clothes into an altar. It was also believed that sleeping on children's clothes during sex was similar to having sex with your children. So, women were taught to make sure those children clothes were never put on the bed. And if accidentally they were on the bed, the woman had to make sure that she hanged them on a rope before getting into bed with her husband. If it happened that a couple had sex with the children's clothes in the bed, they would be told the culture (*Kimiru*) had sued them "*Kimeru Ikibuthitite*". This was an abomination '*mwiro*'. The husband would be required to cleanse '*Gwicia*' the children.

Women were also told never to sleep on their husband's clothes. They were told that this would lead to the death of their husbands. To avoid this, they were taught to make sure that their husbands never got to bed in clothes. If the husband did so, the wife had a right to refuse having sex with him even for a month as a lesson that he should never get in bed in clothes. The understanding was that having sex over your husband clothes was similar to sacrificing your husband. This was emphasized in songs especially such as '*Kirarie*'

Since the 1950s, Meru people were not very keen on abstinence as was reported by respondents in this study. Sex among unmarried people was only frowned upon if a girl got pregnant before engagement. However, when one was getting married, they had to disclose the persons they had sexual intercourse with then they would be cleansed Among the *Ratanya*, *Lubetaa* and *Miriti* age groups uncircumcised girls would have sexual relationships with their age mates. You would find uncircumcised boys visiting the uncircumcised girls in their mother's kitchen and playing with them. The mother would not chase the boys but would warn the girls with the following words.

*'Mitarataro ii bwi nio na ijiji ntumbana nio ni'* meaning *I would not contain this weird behaviour I am seeing between you and the boys.'*

Young people were warned against was having sexual intercourse with '*Giciaro*', parents and people of the parents' age groups, siblings, in-laws, and uncles, aunts and any relative who had not got to the 8<sup>th</sup> generation whether before or within marriage. Having sex with any of the above was considers an abomination which the Meru's called "*Muiro*".

Among the *Guantai* and *Gichunge* age groups Girls and boys who did not have interest in members of the opposite sex and did not engage in sexual intercourse were considered by their age-mates as being stupid and foolish. However, parents considered such girls and boys as being responsible.

Sexual intercourse officially began after a young man informed his parents that he was interested in marrying a particular girl and that the girl had consented to them being married. Respondents of the *Ratanya* age group reported, parents would organize a visit to the girl's home a ceremony known as '*Kwona Mucii*' Translate "*to see the home*". As the parents and relatives partied and made merry, the girl and the boy would have their 'first' sexual intercourse. Once they had sex, both would report to their respective parents through their sponsors at initiation that each of them was sexually functional then the marriage negotiations would begin.

### **Knowledge on Sexual abstinence and fidelity**

Sexual abstinence and fidelity in marriage was not emphasized. Women and men would have 'side sexual relationships' known as "*Bankiro*". However, it was an abomination for women to have sex outside their houses. If a woman had a sexual affair away from her home she would been to be cleansed before getting back into her matrimonial house. This was done by her husband offering a sheep that would be slaughtered during the cleansing. If a man did not satisfy his wife sexually, the wife would get sexual satisfaction from a "*bankiro*" and the husband did not complain. This was done in a way that the wife did not show any contempt for the husband. If a wife did not satisfy her husband sexually or did not have the ability to bear children, such a woman allowed the man to marry a second wife. The wife would identify a potential co-wife and would be the first to 'carry a gourd full of gruel to the prospective co-wife's home as a sign that she had accepted her. This avoided conflict within the family. The wife or husband would not walk out of the marriage because they were committed to the marriage.

Asked whether men and women were satisfied with their spouses having affairs outside marriage, respondents had varied opinions. Some indicated that

*Sexual affairs led to dissatisfaction in marriage. However, people remained in marriage for the fear of stigma associated with divorce. The only time a sexual affair did not lead to unhappiness was when one spouse was not able to bear children and needed someone to help him get children. This he said was to be kept a secret because if it was revealed to a third party, the partner with a problem would very unhappy.*

Asked if men fought with their wives if they discovered they had an affair with another man, several respondents indicated

*'Only stupid men fought if their wives had an affair. Where was he when the other man broke into your territory?'*

Women would even compose a song during social events to mock a woman who had complained that her husband was having an affair with another woman or had fought a co-wife. . The words of the song ran

*'Ciomwiru nimbi tukurania ciomwiru nimbi tukurainia. Gainto kara. kawiita na mwene ciomwiru nimbi tukurania. Translated: My co-wife, what are we fighting about. The owner of that thing (the penis) went away with it'.*

The issue of open side relationship 'Bankiro' began being frowned upon during the 1960s with the *Ratanya* age group when people embraced Christianity. Also, the advent of HIV/AIDS and other sexuality transmitted infections also led to spouses fighting over multiple sexual relationships. Respondents from the *Miriti*, *Guantai* and *Gichunge* age group indicated that they cannot accept their spouses to have side relationships. If they discovered they would fight to the bitter end including divorcing or killing either the spouse or the other sexual partner. These are sentiments.

*I cannot share my husband with another woman. What if they infect me with AIDS?*

The same question was asked to the men. The men indicated that if they found their wives in a relationship with another man, they would kick them out of the matrimonial home or kill them or even kill the other man.

### **Knowledge on violence, assault and sexual abuse**

Women were taught that it was ultimate that they respect their husbands. If a wife by any chance insulted her husband or was rude to her husband and her husband reported her to the clan, he would be fined seven pots of traditional brew known as 'Maroa' and a he-goats to be paid by her biological father. If a husband mistreated his wife, or hit his wife in presence of children he would be fined a bull to be eaten by *Njuri Ncheke* elders and the clan. He would also be required to provide enough yams to feed his age mates as a part of the fine. And receive a thorough beating from the clan elders. Women were educated that if their husbands annoyed them, they would go home to their biological parents and wait for the husband to go and plead with her parents before going back to the matrimonial home.

Men of *Michubu* and *Ratanya* age groups, the community allowed men to batter their wives if the wife did not feed him, feed the children or feed the cows or refused to have sex with the husband. Among the *Lubetaa* age-groups women would be battered if they did not feed their men, take care of their children, take care of the cows clean the home, were reported to have gossiped and backbitten other people or were found to be idling in other peoples' homes. The women would also be battered if they refused to have sexual intercourse with their husbands. It was an abomination for a woman to hurt her husband in any way. This was a common statement among the respondents:

*"Women were not allowed to even look at their husbands in a way thought to be showing any form of disrespect leave alone spitting, speaking rudely or physically hitting her husband. If she attempted doing so, she would be fined by the community"*

Though battering of women was acceptable, a man was not allowed to beat the wife to an extent of cause breakage in the skull, a strain, a fracture or a swelling. Women were told that if that happened, they were expected to go back to their parents and wait for the man to come and apologize to the parents. To deter men for ending up being abusive to their wives, if a wife went back to her parents' home after being battered, the man would be fined by the elders to deter him from such actions. Women were also asked to evaluate the character of the husband. If they evaluated and felt that there was a possibility of the man killing them or maiming them, they were taught not to wait for the man to harm or kill them but leave the marriage.

This changed with the *Miriti*, *Guantai* and *Gichunge* age-groups where women would leave husbands who battered them and started protesting to violence from spouses. Respondents indicated that religion and school education enlightened them that battering was a form of domestic violence and was not to be condoned. Also, the respondents of the *Guantai* and *Gichunge* age groups reported that there was much disrespect, competition and violence in their marriages than other groups. Many elders of complained that:

*Men and women of the Guantai and Gichunge age-groups are lost. They are neither Christians nor Africans. We do not know where they receive the notion that they should compete with each other in marriages. You find them insulting and beating each other on the road. Even when elders warn them, they do not listen. We do not know where this generation is ending too. We no longer have marriages; we have people living together who do not tolerate each other's weaknesses.*

Rape and other form of sexual violence existed among the Tigania even in before the *Michubu* age group. Respondents from the *Michubu* age-group indicated that when they were young, if a girl was raped by their agemates, they would not report the boys due to the fear that the boy of their age group would curse them and they would be stigmatized in the community. However, if such a girl got pregnant, she was banished from the community, forced to procure an abortion or was married off to an old man. Even married women would be raped mostly by strangers known as *Mbenja*, *karinga Ndonge*. When this happened, the woman would not enter into her house or talk to her children until she was cleansed because she was considered unclean. Probed further to know where such a woman operated from until the cleansing took place, the respondents reported that she slept in the food granary. One of the women respondents had been raped was asked her how it had affected her marriage. Her reply was:

*It was a very painful experience. She thanked God that she did not get pregnant because she did not know what would have happened to her. However, the incident had caused scars in her marriage that at no time did she enjoy sex. She was in the marriage to get children. She had allowed her husband to marry another wife who would satisfy him sexually.*

Male respondents were asked whether they knew that it was wrong to rape a woman, they replied that they knew it was wrong and those who did it were criminals who found fun raping women.

There were strangers who lived in bushes and forests and were notorious of raping women. These were either meant to cleanse themselves from abominations. Such people were hated and if discovered and reported to a village/clan court and found guilty, they would be punished. The punishment of a rapist was heavy. They were fined a fine known as '*Mirongo ithatu*' which included '*Kiempe*', '*Ndegwa*' and '*Ikwa*' (a drum of honey, a bull and yam). He would then produce a sheep so that he is cleansed. The whole clan would be involved in cleansing of a rapist and then the rapist would be excommunicated from the community.

Among the *Miriti* age-group, if a girl was raped, she was told not to disclose to anybody because they feared being cursed by the boys of their age-group. This was because the boy would be fined and this would annoy the boys of the age-group who would call the meeting and curse the girl. This continued with the *Guantai* and *Gichunge* age-groups. One respondent told me that there was a cursing ceremony that took place in November, 2016 in Tigania Central Sub-County when a certain girl was raped, reported to her parents who disclosed the rape and the boy was fined. The age-mates called a meeting and cursed the girl. By the time of this study the family was trying to organize how they can cleanse the girl from of the curse of the boys.

### **III. Discussion**

The study established that there were differences in the knowledge on human sexual behaviour delivered to people of different generations. This knowledge had influence on marriages among the Tigania.

Delivery of knowledge on human sexual behaviour was properly organized for the older generation. Those *Ratanya* age group, *Lubetaa* and part of the *Miriti* age groups reported that they had a program of sexual behaviour at initiation at initiation, though it was not written. The members of the age group that was slightly older acted as the educators who passed the content to the subsequent age group. These findings agree with Fadiman, (2012) that culture among was transmitted from the oldest generation to the youngest and that before embarking on any study in Meru Community about any aspect of the community, one was expected to begin from the oldest age group for they were considered the custodian of knowledge. Any content on human sexual behaviour to be changed needed approval from the oldest generation. This is a factor that any stakeholder who needs to develop and implement any curriculum on human sexual behaviour to be delivered among the Ameru and specifically the Tigania has to consider for the curriculum has to be accepted by the people of the Meru Community.

Responses from the respondents of the *Michubu, Ratanya, Lubetaa* and *Miriti* age group led to the conclusion that Tigania community had an informal problem-based curriculum on education on human sexual behaviour that was delivered at initiation. According to Yew and Goh (2016) a problem-based curriculum focuses on engaging the learners meaningfully to solve the problems of in their lives.

It was also noted that among the Tigania, education on human sexual behavior since childhood was meant to provide long life solutions to marriage and parenthood. The education on human sexual behavior focused on making a person a good spouse and parent. The introduction of Christianity and formal school system led to breakdown of the Tigania social system. These findings agree with Kyalo (2012) that the influenced by formal education, embracing of Christianity increase of media coverage greatly affected the African social and family life. During the interviews, it was discovered that the respondents of the *Ratanya, Lubetaa* and *Mung'atia* age groups were very certain about content and age at which they received knowledge on human sexual behaviour. Contrariwise, the respondents of the *Mburung'a* and *Gichunge* age groups had to take time to remember the content they learnt about human sexual behaviour. Respondents from the two youngest generations also had diverse content of knowledge on human sexuality such that they could not agree during the FDGs. The findings of this study agree assertion by Kithinji (2013) that the Meru Community had a way of teaching their young people knowledge on marital issues leading to stable marriages among the older age groups. Kithinji concluded that colonialism impacted negatively on marriages in Meru County. What Kithinji did not establish is the influence of content of sexuality education on marital satisfaction in Meru County. The findings from this it can be concluded that study content of knowledge on human sexual behaviour influenced marriages in diverse ways.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The study concluded that one of the reasons for differences in marital satisfaction and stability among the Tigania of Meru County was due to the differences in knowledge on human behaviour. It is therefore necessary for the stakeholder in education, health and culture to revisit the issue of developing a curriculum on human sexual behaviour that focus on success of marriages.

#### **V. Recommendations**

The study recommends that stakeholders in Education, health and culture intending to develop Sexuality Education Curriculum to borrow some of their content on human sexual behaviour from the Tigania because they who had a functional curriculum which was acceptable by the community and most likely would be acceptable to the larger Kenyan Community.

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