

## Concerns of Distressed Communities Towards Male Circumcision

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**ABSTRACT** The relevance and sacredness of contemporary traditional male circumcision (TMC) as a rite has come under scrutiny in recent years by both stakeholders and the communities practising the rite. To examine the concerns of the distressed communities, the study adopted a qualitative approach complimented by exploratory, descriptive, and case study designs as its research design. A sample of three key informants, and purposively selected men and women from the Bisho community aged 30 years and over were utilised for the study. Participants shared an array of concerns and distresses associated with the rite, including 1) deterioration of the relevance of rite, 2) absence of family support systems, 4) portrayal of perfidious behaviour by initiation graduates, and 5) family and social responsibility proving to be a burden too heavy for initiation graduates. The study recommends the need for raising awareness on retrogressive aspects of TMC, the practical implementation of legislation by the government, and the strengthening of psycho-social support programmes for communities practising the rite.

### INTRODUCTION

TMC amongst the amaXhosa has been an ages-long respected, value-laden, and wide-spread cultural practice that is believed to enable adolescent males to develop from boyhood to manhood (Douglas et al. 2018). The cultural practice has been useful in teaching TMC products to be independent, responsible, and respectful (Bullock 2015; Nomngcoyiya and Kang'ethe 2017). However, there has been wide-spread outcry and dissatisfaction regarding the significance of the rite in recent years, often aimed specifically towards TMC initiation graduates (Siweya et al. 2018).

The initiation (circumcision) of male individuals is a cultural practice conducted in various countries across Southern Africa, Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. This practice is especially dominant in South Africa amongst ethnic groups such as the amaXhosa, amaNdebele, and vhaVenda. The practice of TMC has stood the test of time, even though the South African socio-political environment has changed drastically over the past century (Nyoka 2017). *Ukwaluka* (that is, traditionally and ritually performed male cir-

cumcision) is considered a test of endurance and of how courageous a man can be in his life. During yesteryears, TMC practices were viewed as a way of moulding young men in order for them to behave in a matured manner (Nomngcoyiya 2015). However, it was realised, in the 1980s that the circumcision ordeal was leaving a trail of ruin and despair amongst many young Xhosa men (Funani 1990). For many years, South Africa has experienced an increase in the rates of challenges and problems associated with *ulwaluko*.

According to various reports, TMC leads to several medical and physical ailments in young Xhosa boys, including, but not limited to, infertility, the loss of organs, and the contraction of HIV/AIDS due to the use of unsterilized objects during circumcision (Nomngcoyiya and Kang'ethe 2017). Yet, government, community members, and other stakeholders have done little to address the negative effects that some activities carried out during the ceremonies impose on the lives of circumcised men (Douglas et al. 2018). Additionally, the specifically social impact associated with some rituals performed during TMC tend to go underreported, as most re-

searchers are more interested in the medical complications and the practice's alignment with the Bill of Rights (Froneman and Kapp 2017).

Upon reintegration into society, it has been noted that there tend to be various behavioural changes evidenced amongst the circumcision products (Mpateni and Kang'ethe 2020). During ceremonies in the "bush" or "mountains", young men are often exposed to various potentially unhealthy practices, such as alcohol consumption, which can lead to many behavioural changes that raise concerns within their communities upon re-entry (Bullock 2015). Young men may also be more inclined to indulge in criminal activities, substance abuse, and aggressiveness, among others, after taking part in the rite, which has raised many concerns in communities regarding whether the rite of passage is still serving its ancient purpose of transitioning boys to become responsible men (Sibiya 2014). Although there are still many gaps in the research concerning what transpires during the TMC practice, it has been noted that communities have expressed concerns towards traditional circumcision products (Nomngcoyiya and Kang'ethe 2017). Hence this paper aims to explore the different concerns that are raised by community members on the flaws of traditional male circumcision.

### Objectives

Traditional male circumcision as a cultural practice has been useful in teaching the TMC products to be independent, responsible, and respectful. Although the rite has been beneficial to the Xhosa people, there has been an escalating outcry on whether the cultural practice is still serving its purpose based on the behaviour of the TMC products in more recent years (Ntombana 2011). Therefore, the study examined the role of traditional male circumcision practice in the Xhosa society according to the community's narratives. Secondly, it investigated communities' concerns towards the behaviour of traditional male circumcision products. Finally, the study aimed at devising strategies and methodologies that address concerns of the distressed communities towards traditional male circumcision products in Bisho Area, Eastern Cape.

## Theoretical Framework

### *Social Learning Theory*

The social learning theory was first presented by Albert Bandura in 1977. The theory focuses on learning that occurs within the social context and provides a framework for understanding, predicting, and changing human behaviour (Nabavi 2012). Social learning theory suggests that people can learn by observing the behaviours of others as well as the outcomes of those behaviours. According to Nabi and Prestin (2017), the theory also incorporates internal thoughts and cognitions, and can aid in connecting learning theories with developmental theories. Thus, in observing the social behaviour in a society, a person should think about the observed behaviour by assessing its merits and demerits before imitating the behaviour. Nabavi (2012) is of the view that learning may be practiced through observation alone and, in some cases, cannot be shown in or determined by a person's outward performance. In other words, it is up to each individual person as to whether or not they will imitate the behaviour that they observe in their society. A person's decision for or against imitation is usually influenced by reinforcement and punishment (that is, a behaviour's advantages and disadvantages) (Nabi and Prestin (2017).

In TMC, it can be argued according to social learning theory that a community, through this practice, is trying to encourage initiates to learn the expected behaviours of their society and to apply or mimic these behaviours in their day-to-day living. In the mountains, initiates learn by observing as well as from the teachings that they gain from their elders. It can also be argued that the behaviour that circumcision products display upon their return to society is a result of what they observe in the mountains (Mpateni 2017; Nomngcoyiya 2018). There has been a rise in cases of alcohol and drug abuse amongst youths in South Africa (Bala 2016), which can further be attributed to how many initiates are introduced to substances in the mountains and then imitate substance use (abuse) when they get back into society. Based on how social learning theory can aid in understanding behaviour, learning, and imitation, the theory was deemed

appropriate for this study. Specifically, this theory was used to explain how individuals imitate certain behaviours that they see in the people around them, which helped to offer a better understanding of different behaviours displayed by TMC products.

### MATERIAL AND METHODS

This paper adopted a qualitative study design that was descriptive and explorative in nature. The study also utilised a case study approach as its specific research design in order to acquire in-depth experiences and concerns while interacting with a limited sample in the domain under study. Data for this study was collected via in-depth interviews from three key informants, namely one representative from the Eastern Cape House of Traditional Leaders, one chief assistant, and one community leader. Information related to the concerns of distressed communities and stakeholders with respect to TMC products was also gathered from 10 purposefully selected men and women from the Bisho community aged 30 years and older, consisting of one traditional surgeon, five community members, three family members of TMC products, and one traditional educator. Key informants were selected because they offered deep insights into the practices conducted during initiation; political and legal requirements, among other issues. Community members were selected as they shed more light on first-hand experiences of initiates in communities and direct observations of initiates' behaviours before and after initiation and raise their concerns towards the practice.

In this study, a non-probability sampling method was used, namely purposive sampling. Purposive sampling allows researchers to use their judgement in choosing relevant participants for their research (Engel and Schutt 2017). In this case, Xhosa men and women of different ages (but no younger than 30) were chosen, as they could offer a broad understanding and knowledge of issues related to the research topic. The study was cross-sectional and took place between August and October of 2018. Study participants were subjected to one-on-one in-depth interviews, as well as the key informant method that utilised both isiXhosa and English

languages for data collection. IsiXhosa answers were later translated into English for data analysis. All the data were audio recorded and transcribed. Field notes were also taken to complement the raw data gained from the audio recordings. The collected data were analysed using coding processes and content thematic analysis, whereby the raw data were rearranged, categorised, and ordered into themes, as depicted by the emergent views of the study participants.

### Ethical and Legislative Considerations

Ethical issues were considered during the research process, and the moral principles of all participants were respected. Participants in the research were volunteers who were willing to share their personal and sensitive information. This voluntary participation was helpful for acquiring relevant information associated with the concerns of distressed communities and selected stakeholders concerning contemporary TMC products. Unlawful conduct, upsetting revelations, and other unacceptable practices such as undermining and ridiculing their practise were avoided during the entire data collection process.

Due to the nature of this research topic, there was the potential for physical, psychological, and/or emotional harm. Hence, the researchers ensured that all forms of harm were avoided throughout the research process. The study also ensured that participants' confidentiality was taken seriously by not revealing participants' names or residential addresses, and offering pseudonyms in published and analysed data.

Participants were informed verbally about the research procedures and the importance of the research before they took part in the study. Informed consent and voluntary participation are related, which meant that participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time and with no repercussions if they no longer felt comfortable.

## RESULTS

### Profile of Participants

As indicated by Table 1, the study had a sample size of 13 participants, comprised of 10 community members and 3 key informants. Nine

**Table 1: Sample size, gender, age, sexual orientation, marital status and educational levels of participants**

| S. No. category | Sample size       | Gender |   | Age       |           |              | Sexual orientation |            |       | Marital status |         |          | Educational levels |           |            |           |               |
|-----------------|-------------------|--------|---|-----------|-----------|--------------|--------------------|------------|-------|----------------|---------|----------|--------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|---------------|
|                 |                   | M      | F | 30-40 yrs | 40-50 yrs | Above 50 yrs | Hetero-sexual      | Homosexual | Other | Marr-ied       | Sin-gle | Divorced | Widowed            | Grade 1-7 | Grade 8-12 | Bachelors | Post-graduate |
| 1               | Community members | 10     | 7 | 3         | 3         | 4            | 10                 |            |       | 4              | 2       | 2        | 2                  | 1         | 9          | 0         | 0             |
| 2               | Key Informants    | 3      | 2 | 1         | 2         | 0            | 1                  | 3          |       | 2              | 0       | 1        | 0                  | 0         | 1          | 1         | 1             |
|                 | Total             | 13     | 9 | 4         | 5         | 3            | 13                 |            |       | 6              | 2       | 3        | 2                  | 1         | 10         | 1         | 1             |

participants were male while four were female; this gender demographic was to ensure that women also took part in the study as they form part of the community and they are also affected by different behaviours displayed by TMC products. Age was also of paramount importance in the study; five participants belonged to the age bracket 30-40 years, three participants were of the age bracket 40-50 years, and five were over 50 years (Table 1). The inclusion of these age ranges was to ensure that the researchers obtain appropriate information necessary for the study, as participants from these age groups are skilled and knowledgeable on what transpires in the community as well as regarding the behaviour displayed by TMC products.

All participants identified themselves as heterosexuals, and the study revealed that all male participants took part in the rite of passage (Table 1). In addition, participants were of different marital statuses – six were married, two were single, three were divorced, and two were widowed (Table 1). The research findings indicated that regardless of participants’ different marital statuses and genders, all participants were knowledgeable about the expected behaviour of TMC products as well as how contemporary TMC products are conducting themselves in the community.

The educational qualifications of participants included: one participant with a primary school-level education (Grade 7), 10 participants with a high school-level education (ranging from Grade 8 to 10), one participant with a Bachelor’s degree, and one with a Master’s degree (Table 1). The low levels of education amongst the participants might point out to the social-economic status of the community, where majority of the population cannot access adequate educational resources and facilities. However, this can also be caused by the burden of social responsibilities that an individual may have after taking part in the rite of passage. For example, some TMC products fail to go further with their education as they would have to take care of their families some ending selling illicit drugs to sustain them. Table 2 indicates the thematic findings

**Deterioration of the Relevance of Rite in the Contemporary Epoch**

Study findings indicated that the practice of TMC is gradually losing its relevance within the

**Table 2: Theme no and theme description**

| <i>Theme No.</i> | <i>Theme description</i>   |
|------------------|--|
| 1.               | Deterioration of the relevance of rite in the contemporary epoch                           |
| 2.               | Absence of family support systems for initiates during the rite of passage                 |
| 3.               | Portrayal of perfidious behaviour by initiation graduates                                  |
| 4.               | Family and social responsibility proving to be too heavy a burden for initiation graduates |

Xhosa society. The majority of the participants in the study stated that the rite is no longer serving its purpose amongst amaXhosa men. The role of TMC is becoming overshadowed by the way negative that some initiates conduct themselves after going through initiation. This denotes that deviant behaviours displayed by new TMC products is greatly contributing in the deterioration of the rite's role and relevance. These concerns were supported by the following participant explanations:

*"I fail to see the relevance of the rite because of various kinds of misbehaviours such as drug abuse, robbery and house breaks within our community and sadly the perpetrators of these deviant behaviours are our children who have undergone traditional male circumcision rite."*

*"For me, the way that traditional male circumcision products dress and conduct themselves in public is in total contrast to the teachings that we give them in the mountains. The teachings are no longer respected by these young ones and it is hard for me to say that the rite is relevant to this generation."*

Although the relevance of the rite is gradually deteriorating, some participants indicated that the practice still plays a role in transforming males from boyhood to manhood. Participants indicated that the teachings that are rendered in the mountains are of great relevance, as they contribute to moulding the behaviour of TMC products. Specifically, participants noted that the teachings are designed to foster the transition from boyhood to adulthood by promoting integrity and responsibility amongst Xhosa men. For instance, initiates receive teachings related to developing honesty, decency, integrity, responsibility, and respect, as well as regarding the upholding of social justice and discipline.

This implies that the rite is still playing a crucial role in instilling positive and important values and norms amongst Xhosa men, despite its deterioration amongst the younger generation. Perhaps this could be due to modernization footprints. These findings find expression in the following opinion expressed by one participant:

*"To me the rite is relevant in the sense that it is still serving its role in teaching young boys good morals. From my understanding the practice teaches boys morals and how appropriately they should interact with others who are older or younger than them as well as not to be violent."*

The study findings further indicated that despite the deteriorating state of the TMC rite, community members still believe it to be of great relevance. From the findings, the main contributory factor to the deterioration of the rite is related to the misbehaviour portrayed by the circumcised males in the society.

#### **Portrayal of Perfidious Behaviour by Initiation Graduates**

The majority of the participants in the study highlighted that circumcision products are expected to be exemplary towards other young men in the community; thus, embracing the cultural practice of developing respectful young men. One of the main purposes of the TMC rite is to mould the behaviours of initiates so that they can abide by societal norms and values. The societal expectation towards the products of the rite is for them to behave in an appropriate and acceptable manner, which is different (that is, of a 'higher' or 'better' form) from that of the ones who have not taken part in the practice. The study findings also reflected that the products are meant to respect themselves as well as other people within society. One participant shared this common assertion:

*"A man should be an example to others and know how to interact in the society in a decent and respectful manner. Products should be able to conduct themselves with dignity in public places and society at large. It is not acceptable for products to be drinking alcohol or smoking in public places as it makes them lose the essence of dignity."*

Although TMC products are expected to behave in an acceptable and dignified way, it is

evident from participants' claims that, in the present day, such good behaviour is rarely the case. Instead, misbehaviours are highly dominant amongst the products, as participants have identified TMCs being involved in house breakings, mugging, sexual abuse incidents, and vandalism of property. Such findings were indicated in the following sentiments:

*"We no longer feel safe to travel in the evening or walk alone during the night as we can get robbed, beaten or even get killed by our male children who are now behaving in a strange manner."*

*"As I see it, the initiates no longer respect the teachings that they are given at the mountains because despite being taught that they should behave in an acceptable manner they come back to the society and behave otherwise."*

Thus, the study findings indicated that while circumcision products are expected to conduct themselves in a respectful, dignified, and appropriate manner, it is evident that products are no longer portraying the expected behaviour. Instead, they are mostly involved in deviant behaviours, which has raised concerns in their communities.

#### **Family and Social Responsibility Proving to be Too Heavy Burden for Initiation Graduates**

All participants reflected that TMC products are expected to assume some responsibilities for both their families and their larger society. With regard to their families, initiates are expected to be respectable fathers and to act as role models to their children. They are also meant to provide for, take care of, and protect their families. Additionally, in families where there is an absence of a father figure, the TMC products are expected to assume the fatherly role and to be responsible for the welfare of the entire family:

*"In our culture when the father figure of the house passes away, the circumcised male child is expected to inherit the possessions of the father figure such property, domestic animals as well as taking over fatherly responsibilities."*

TMC products also have the mandate to be responsible for their larger societies by contributing to the development and growth of their communities. However, the study findings in-

dicated that the responsibilities are often too much for the circumcision products; especially considering their age, which is usually 18, or slightly older than 18 years of age. Thus, these initiates are often still young and have limited life exposure and experience. As a result, they are in need of more grooming and mentoring before they take on full family responsibilities. Due to the heaviness of their responsibilities, circumcision products strive to meet, but often fail in, their expectations and, as a result, tend to begin neglecting their duties. Such incidences were echoed in the following participant remarks:

*"Young men are having a hard time in exercising social responsibilities expected of them such as taking care and providing for their families. As a result, they resort to negative means of fulfilling their duties such as stealing as a way of providing for their siblings or families."*

*"Boys are going for traditional male circumcision at a younger age as early as 18 and they won't be mature enough to meet with social responsibilities that initiated men are expected to fulfil."*

*"These responsibilities that our children are given in the mountains are too heavy on them. Imagine my 18-year-old nephew went for circumcision and he was taught that since his father is late, he had to take responsibilities as the head of the family. This is just a child with no experience and exposure. It was really a heavy burden and it affected him socially and psychologically."*

*"In my opinions traditional male circumcision products should be given time to learn and get exposed to real life situations so that they gain experience. This practice of giving them social responsibilities soon after initiation is just putting them under unnecessary pressure."*

The research findings showed that TMC products are expected to fulfil different responsibilities in their families and communities, such as acting as role models and maintaining social order. However, these social responsibilities are proving to be a burden on young men, as they are failing to accomplish their duties, which is raising concerns amongst their communities.

#### **Absence of Family Support Systems for Initiate During the Rite of Passage**

All male research participants hypothesised that the absence of a supporting male parent

before, during, and/or after TMC negatively impacts TMC products. This has extended over time with its contributory factors such as illness and previous labour laws as well as poverty. Participants proposed that the absence of father figures who act as role models and support young boys before they go for circumcision may contribute to the negative behaviour often portrayed by the products. This is because the participants believed that initiates lack guidance and social support on how to behave as responsible men and in a culturally acceptable manner. Participants also highlighted that the absence of relatives and close family members during TMC practices increase the likelihood of initiates imitating the behaviours of others, such as friends of fellow initiates, who visit the initiation camps:

*“Some parents are running away from taking their responsibility before, during and after the initiation process such as to render social support to initiates as they will be undergoing a tough situation. It is the responsibility of parents to ensure that the boys are in the hands of a well knowledgeable traditional educator and surgeon.”*

In addition, if father figures are absent during initiation, they are unable to monitor whether or not the traditional nurses and teachers are carrying out the circumcision correctly and giving proper teachings to the TMC products. The study found that uninvolved parents in the lives of TMC products in mentoring and encouraging them to portray good teachings executed during the initiation process can lead the products engaging deviant behaviours:

*“The un-involvement of parents highly contributes in misbehaviours such as drug or substance abuse. If the male parent or guardian is there or frequently visits the initiate during the practice then some misconduct can be averted.”*

*“The main cause of the misbehaviour that we are witnessing in our days among the traditional male circumcision products is the lack of male parental support and guidance.”*

The presented findings reveal that many parents and guardians tend to neglect their responsibilities of offering support and guidance to their children before, during, and/or after initiation. Such neglect negatively impacts on the products' behaviours, which has

ignited concerns amongst communities and selected stakeholders.

## DISCUSSION

This study's findings highlighted that TMC's relevance is increasingly fading and losing its essence in moulding the behaviour of Xhosa initiated men. TMC practice in previous decades played an essential and explicit role in safeguarding and ensuring that the Xhosa culture sustained its sacredness; however, the practice's relevance is gradually dwindling due to the behaviour displayed by its products (Nomngcoyiya and Kang'ethe 2017). The cultural significance of the TMC custom has, in recent years, decreased to its lowest levels, with only a few circumcision stakeholders still believing that the practice promotes any prominence (Nomngcoyiya 2015). This study's participants indicated that, perhaps, the escalating rate of delinquencies amongst TMC products has greatly contributed to the diminishing relevance of the rite in Xhosa communities. Sibiya (2014) further indicated that the relevance of the TMC rite is being degraded by the changing times and the perceptions of its products.

Although there have been drastic changes concerning the relevance of the rite, many participants still acknowledged its relevance in the Xhosa culture. This acknowledgement is based on the notion that during the practice, initiates are educated about various life skills, expected adulthood behaviour, and morals. These findings are supported by a study on TMC conducted by Froneman and Kapp (2017), who indicated that boys are taught 1) how to behave like men; 2) how to manage themselves; and 3) how to understand other people and relate to community members of different ages, including children and parents under different circumstances. Initiates are also taught how to look after their houses and livestock; are informed about social norms, such as what time they should go back home in the evening and how to successfully accomplish their responsibilities. Traditionally, the rite marked the transition of a male from using his free time for playing to using it to improve his life, his family, and his greater community (Vincent 2008).

Yet, the study findings showed that many male parents or guardians are reluctant to be a part of the initiates' journey to manhood. This implies that older male role models are not involved in the preparation and long-run success of the initiation process. The Eastern Cape Application of Health Standards in Traditional Male Circumcision Act No.6 of 2001 stipulates that parents should be fully involved before, during, and after the circumcision practice; they should also be informed of the procedures, surgeons, and instruments to be used during the process (Nomngcoyiya and Kang'ethe 2017).

Parents are responsible for making the decision for the male child to undergo the circumcision process at an acceptable age and time. This means that parents should be at the forefront of ensuring that the initiate acquires a knowledgeable and responsible surgeon to render the needed services during the initiation process. Douglas et al. (2018) emphasise that because TMC is a strong cultural practice amongst traditionally circumcising groups, it is usually not an optional procedure to be decided upon on an individual basis. Rather, TMC is a decision that rests upon the family.

The active involvement of parents before, during, and after the circumcision process can greatly contribute in the achievement of the rite's objectives, since appropriate procedures are more likely to be followed (that is, there will be more regulation of the surgeon overseeing initiates, and parents will be better able to monitor the general teachings and practices undertaken). This is because parents have the capacity to make appropriate decisions for their children, thereby better ensuring that correct and legal procedures are adhered to in accordance with the Eastern Cape Application of Health Standards in Traditional Male Circumcision Act No.6 of 2001 (Nomngcoyiya and Kang'ethe 2017). Parents can also ensure that the relationship with their ancestors is strengthened through the continuity of circumcision in their families. Therefore, the involvement of male parents in the practice is crucial, as they are the primary sources of psycho-social support, especially when a family member experiences terrible conditions and/or stress during and after initiation process.

Consequently, the absence of parental involvement is possibly the root cause of misbe-

haviours amongst circumcision initiation graduates, as they often lack the necessary psycho-social support, guidance, and role modelling that parents provide (Nyoka 2017). Due to this lack of parental involvement, circumcision products may tend to imitate behaviour from their environments, hence confirming the influence of the social learning theory. As noted previously, the social learning theory emphasises that behaviours and attitudes develop in response to reinforcements and encouragements from those within an individual's sphere (Andersen and Taylor 2008).

It may be that the absence of male parents is not intentional (Sibiya 2014). Instead, their absence may be circumstantial, especially in the case of female-headed families, where there is an unavailability of male parents or relatives who can willingly take responsibility of the male children's initiation journey (Sibiya 2014). The secrecy and sacredness of the rite has been found to be at blame, since circumcision is not discussed at all with female relatives. As a result, boys in female-headed households are usually faced with a genuine dilemma, as they are unable to their discuss initiation issues with their female family members or parent. Initiates with no father figures, therefore, tend to imitate various behaviours displayed by those around them, regardless of the appropriateness of such conduct (Nomngcoyiya 2018).

However, the non-involvement of male guardians or parents in the lives of initiates can be mitigated, to an extent, since traditional educators and surgeons play a parental role during the initiation process. Initiates do, thus, have the opportunity to model the characters of respectful men and, so, may be able to learn how to maintain good behaviour, even after the practice (Nyoka 2017). Additionally, Nomngcoyiya and Kang'ethe (2017) stipulate that initiates gain social, moral, and mental development in the mountains. This implies that products learn to become autonomously capable of making appropriate decisions. If an initiate engages in deviant behaviours and then proceeds to place all the blame on the absence of a male parental figure, or on his friends, it indicates that the individual likely has a weakness in decision-making. In the Xhosa culture, a man is expected to be cognitively strong and not easily (nega-



tively) influenced by situations around them (Vincent 2008).

From the study findings, it became clear that community members are concerned about the prevalence of drug or other substance abuse amongst the youth. Some participants highlighted that drunkenness prevails during the TMC ceremony, where initiates are often exposed to the consumption of alcohol. Similarly, the use of drugs, according to the study findings, often occurs as a result of drugs being smuggled in to ease the pain inflicted during the initiation process. Participants also blamed the non-involvement of father figures at the initiation camps for the prevalence of drugs and other substance use, because the circumcision products lack adequate role modelling and supervision.

The pervasiveness of drug and substance abuse amongst the circumcision products is likely due to their irresponsible approach to, and misusing the notion of, being 'real' men; where they behave and believe that they can act and do as they please (Vincent 2008; Nyoka 2017). Additionally, Nomngcoyiya (2015) argues that the vast abuse of substances upon reintegration into the community could possibly be a response to the emotional and physical torture that circumcision products are often subjected to during the circumcision process. That is, products may abuse substances as a means of venting their frustration and anger that they had to go through the initiation process (Khuzwayo and Sikweyiya 2019). The abuse of drugs and substances can, thus, be equated to the products seeking attention from their communities and the government for the abolishment or thorough monitoring of the procedures taken during the rite of passage, especially with regard to the use of severe punishment to adhere to the rite's teachings (Nomngcoyiya 2015).

Although most participants revealed that the prevalence of drug and other substance abuse can be attached to TMC, Ntombana (2011) asserts that the traditional practice cannot be wholly blamed for current social ills. There are many contributing factors that play a role in the abuse of substances and drugs by TMC graduates, including social learning, peer pressure, and rational intuition and media influences. The social learning theory affirms that behaviours and attitudes develop in response to the reinforcement

and encouragement from others (Andersen and Taylor 2008). With regard to circumcision products, they often come from environments in which substance and drug abuse is already prevalent; thus, they observe and master these behaviours outside of the TMC context (Nomngcoyiya 2015; Bala 2016).

Khuzwayo and Sikweyiya (2019) point out that in many cases, circumcision products are young men who are exposed to peer pressure; whereby, they seek to belong to a certain group and attain identities that are acceptable to the group. As a result, they may find themselves mimicking their peers' behaviours, regardless of the consequences. Various media platforms also create characters that individuals may idolise, and which may become circumcision products' role models, leading them to mimic their behaviours, including possible substance and drug abuse (Bala 2016).

The majority of the study participants further highlighted that TMC products are expected to behave in a socially acceptable manner that distinguishes them from those who have not undergone the rite. They stated that "initiates are expected to be exemplary in their communities; that they are expected to respect themselves and other people". This view supports Spearman and Harrison's (2011) earlier assertion that a traditional circumcision graduate should be someone who possess positive qualities and should behave in a socially acceptable manner.

According to the World Health Organisation (2008) and the *United Nations' Programme on HIV/AIDS* (2009), transmission of cultural knowledge and skills is deemed necessary for the development of initiates' personalities, as well as for their education on sexual issues. The transfer of cultural knowledge also forms part of the teachings offered in initiation schools. The importance of sexual reserve and the inappropriateness of promiscuity after reintegration into society are emphasised in initiation schools. However, participants did not mention the behavioural expectations of TMC products in relation to risky sexual behaviours and consciousness regarding sexual issues. Vincent (2008) notes that education regarding sexuality is a significant feature of the educative part of traditional initiation, and initiation schools offer an opportunity for effective sex education. The lack

of emphasis on this aspect with regard to initiates' behaviour upon re-entering society indicate that some communities are less concerned about the risky sexual behaviours portrayed by TMC products and more concerned with other behaviours, such as respect of self and other people in the society (Khuzwayo and Sikweyiya 2019).

Findings also showed that TMC products behave in contradictory ways to what is expected of them. Most participants indicated that misbehaviour is highly dominant amongst the products of TMC, as they engage in house breakings, mugging, sexual abuse, and the vandalism of property. Magodyo et al. (2016) note that the practice of *ulwaluko* has changed, and, as a result, has led to increased instances of criminal activities, drug abuse, risky sexual behaviours, and inhumane behaviours amongst some initiates. Similarly, Ntombana (2011) notes that deviant nurses may negatively influence TMC initiates to behave in inappropriate ways through unsuitable teachings. The misbehaviour amongst TMC initiates might, therefore, be the result of loopholes that exist within the TMC practice itself. For example, initiates may be exposed to the consumption of alcohol and wrong or biased teachings during the initiation process.

The study findings revealed that there are various ambiguities within the rite, as it is gradually failing to fulfil its role of identity formation amongst circumcision products. Although identity formation is one of the main reasons that males undergo traditional circumcision, the researchers found that, due to democracy and human rights that should be observed at all costs, it is now difficult to attain this role. Many of the study participants were of the view that identity formation rests entirely on the TMC graduates, as they possess all the necessary powers to choose their identity. The failure of identity formation that is in line with what is acceptable in the Xhosa culture might also be attributed to modernisation and advancements in technology; whereby, youths tend to find their role models on social media platforms that may dilute the cultural importance of the rite. Magodyo et al. (2016) further purport that violence is sometimes enacted by and associated with being a man and as a depiction of power. TMC can be seen as a possible cause of violence due to its quest

to transform boys into what culture has identified as men (Magodyo et al. 2016). Participants also suggested that when initiates are in the mountains, they are potentially not receiving enough education pertaining to how to embrace their new identities of being 'men', and what dangers this new identity might have if wrongfully handled.

The research findings from a few of the participants indicated that TMC is still an essential element in building the identities of young Xhosa men. This identity building is achieved through the teachings that initiates gain in the mountains as well as through the *ukuyala* ceremony that is held as soon as the initiates come back into the society (Ntozini and Ngqangweni 2016). The process of identity formation is embedded in the idea of grooming initiates so that they become responsible, law-abiding citizens (Nomngcoyiya and Kang'ethe 2017). All participants in the study reflected that during ancient times, identity formation was one of the most important features of TMC, and was the reason why most parents wanted their male children to undergo the rite. Sibiyi (2014) also purports that circumcision has a constitutive role in the finalisation and consolidation of identity in many cultures.

However, the findings indicated that most TMC products are not fulfilling all their responsibilities in the present day. Perhaps, this may be due to poor parenting styles that do not support the good behaviour learnt by initiates in the mountains (Nomngcoyiya 2015). As a result, initiates may engage in various deviant behaviours such as immense abuse of alcohol (Vincent 2008). Participants indicated that circumcision products are, in some ways, failing their society, as they often become intimidating towards their families, community members, and greater society because of their misbehaviours. As a result, most products are not good role models to younger boys who are not yet initiated; thereby promoting further misbehaviour in communities, which is a great concern to participants. A further reason for these misbehaviours, as indicated by participants, may be that many products attend circumcision at an early age, which is characterised by less exposure to life's complications and responsibilities, and greater immaturity in terms of cognitive development.

However, Froneman and Kapp (2017) are of the opinion that becoming more mature is not something that happens instantly. Instead, TMC products should be given time to fully mature before their responsibilities are completely rested upon them (Froneman and Kapp 2017). Perhaps, this is because of the dire immoralities manifested by graduated initiates. Initiates gain full independence after taking part in the rite and immediately attain many responsibilities, which can cause them to become irresponsible with their freedom after circumcision. Such irresponsible behaviour is problematic, since TMC products are expected to spend their time wisely and in conducting productive activities, such as community development projects, in order to gain further knowledge and take on more responsibilities.

### CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to examine the concerns of distressed communities and selected stakeholders related to contemporary TMC products in the Bisho area. Based on the study findings, the study aim was met, as participants managed to present communities' and selected stakeholders' concerns regarding TMC products. These concerns included behavioural problems related to products' propensity to take part in robbery, theft, and substance abuse, and/or their failure to maintain the sacredness of the rite.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper recommends that outreach programmes be developed to educate people in communities on issues related to TMC. There is also a need for the government to be more involved in the practice and to fund outreach programmes that are associated with. Awareness campaigns should be conducted in both schools and communities in an endeavour to educate young men prior to and post-TMC, so that communities and initiates know what is expected. The paper also recommends that traditional nurses and surgeons receive adequate training and screening before they are selected to take part in TMC. This can ensure that all those involved in initiation are law-abiding and respectable citizens.

It is further recommended that there be effective collaboration between relevant departments, such as the Department of Health and the Department of Traditional Affairs, in training nurses and surgeons so that they perform their duties professionally, maturely, skilfully, and with sufficient knowledge. In addition, strict selection criteria should be administered to ensure that only trained nurses and surgeons take part in the practice. The paper also recommends that a written curriculum be established to guide traditional teachers in what they should teach in the mountains. The purpose of the curriculum would be to ensure that initiates receive all the correct teachings that they should, as well as to guarantee that the teachings are delivered in an appropriate and expected manner.

Participants described TMC as a multi-sector rite that incorporates diverse organisations in safeguarding its success and preventing accidents. The researchers, therefore, recommend that there is a need to include social work services and programmes to help products deal with any possible trauma that they may experience during, or as a result of, the initiation process. The research findings indicated that some of the misconducts and misbehaviours that products exhibit result from frustration and/or unresolved trauma. The inclusion of social workers in a multi-sector approach could mean that psycho-social support programmes could become readily available for initiates. Social workers should also be actively involved in the reintegration of products into society and offer continuous monitoring on the progress of the circumcision products upon their re-entry. Such monitoring could aid in addressing the unruly behaviour often witnessed in society, and, thereby, contribute to achieving harmony in South African communities.

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