

CULTURALLY-INFLICTED CHILD RIGHTS VIOLATION: A CASE OF KHOMBA PRACTICE OF SHANGAAN PEOPLE IN ZIMBABWE.

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Abstract

Wittingly or unwittingly, cultural rights should take central place in the consideration of rights issues and the striving towards a more just world order. Allegedly, harmful cultural practices have collided with children's rights in Zimbabwe and beyond. The study came after the realisation that child rights are being violated through the practice of khomba which is a rite of initiation for adolescents under the age of 18. Therefore, the study focused on interrogating the nature, reasons and community perceptions on culturally-inflicted child rights violations that are associated with the Khomba practice among the Shangaan people in Chiredzi, Zimbabwe. This paper adopted a qualitative research design to capture the perceptions of 26 purposively sampled respondents regarding this rite of passage. During data collection, in-depth interviews, key informant interviews and field observations were utilised. The analysis of data was done through thematic content analysis in line with the research objectives. The study exposed a number of Khomba induced child rights violations including; interruption of schooling among adolescents and their exposure to sexually explicit content. It also noted that the rite continues to thrive mainly because of its association with tribal identity as well as authorities' hesitation to address the situation. Recommendations of the paper suggested ways in which holistic interventions can begin to address harmful cultural practices within social, legal and political contexts.

Key Terms: Shangaan People, Child Rights, Khomba ritual, Zimbabwe

Introduction

The contesting of a culturalist perspective on the discourse concerning cultural identity or identities is long standing in African scholarship. Notwithstanding the existence of legislation which protects children from abusive harmful traditional and customary practices, common especially in the third world, children still fall victims to the insensitive cultural practices (Maylie, 2013; Chimuka, 2010). This is disregarded or merely overlooked as a result of several reasons, among them, reluctance of law enforcers, perception of child protection as low priority by responsible authorities, ignorance on the part of child care givers or just the acceptance of such scenarios as "normal". The study focused on child rights violations which result from the harmful practice of the traditions emanating from fastidious

cultures. Not all components of Shangaan culture inflict child abuse, as noted by (Maphosa, 2008). However, the study concentrates specifically on the initiation rites undertaken by the Shangaan people, which have proved to infringe on the rights of the children. Although it can be argued that the continuity of these rites is an evidence of their necessity to Shangaan society (Maphosa, 2008, Maphosa, 2011, Chimuka, 2010); their repercussions constitute abuse in terms of the Zimbabwe's Children's Act (Chapter 5.02) of 2001 and Zimbabwe Constitution Amendment (No.20) of 2013. The Children's Act (in section 2) defines a child as any person (including an infant) under the age of 16 years. In contrast, Zimbabwean constitution (of 2013) defines any person or human being below the age of 18. Despite their differences, these current and other erstwhile legislations put complete attention on child protection from any form of harmful or abusive environment within the catchphrase of 'best interest of the child.'

Overview of child protection in Zimbabwe and cultural Practice

The ratification of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) shows that Zimbabwe is committed to implement the provisions of both instruments. One key area in these conventions is the protection of children from abuse; physical, emotional, sexual and neglect. Hence, the matter of child protection from abuse is an obligation and one of the main responsibilities of the government of Zimbabwe. In order to realise this, Zimbabwe promulgated host of child protection programmes and policies such as National Action Plan for Orphans and other Vulnerable Children (NAP for OVC), Children's Act Amendment (Chapter 5.06), Domestic Violence Act, Education Act, among others. Although there are pieces of legislation which stipulate the ideal conditions in which Zimbabwean children should survive (Chinyangara, 1991, United Nations, 2010); the task of achieving that is fraught with many challenges. Various factors such as lack of financial capacity by law enforcement agencies, lack of knowledge on the part of victim children, the customary justification of some abuses or the private nature of environments under which abuse occurs lead to shortcomings in the enforcement or implementation of child protection statutes and policies. These might be possible reasons but the role of non-kaleidoscopic cultures remains a critical issue in the perpetuation of child abuse in Zimbabwe. Maphosa (2008) and Shanalingigwa (2009) observe that, cultural beliefs such as Khomba, is practiced in many communities, for example, Rwanda, South Africa, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. It has been practiced primarily for religious and cultural reasons as a rite of passage to mark transition from childhood to adulthood. There is realization that many cases of culturally-inflicted child rights continue to occur because they are normalized under these several customs and traditions. This is common in remote areas of Africa where it draws very minimal, if any, attention of child protection organizations or law enforcing agents like the police.

The Shangaan people, concentrated in the low-veld of Zimbabwe, their adulthood initiation rites have multiple long term effects on the rights of the child for they perpetrate numerous forms of physical, sexual and emotional child abuse (Maphosa, 2008). Since the geographic location of this community is remote, and most of the practices are held in secrecy, culturally-inflicted child abuse has remained in obscurity and continues to gain permanence in the lives of local people. However, the above argument is not given the same significance by Shangaan people who believe that their Khomba practice is culturally indispensable. It is also quite clear that if a cultural practice survives the test of time, globalization, cultural diffusion and urbanization; despite the negativity it bears on child development, its holders perceive it as necessary in ways unknown to outsiders (Maylie, 2013; Althaus, 1997). Cultural rites such as Khomba practice give birth to cultural beliefs that

each and every child should pass through before adulthood if he/she is to become a good adult person. Maphosa (2011) notes that in the end of initiation, the boys emerge from seclusion and return home with a spirit of triumphalism and initiated boys return to their homes clad in white shorts, white T/shirts, barefooted and with a bare hair-cut. The boys are also given *thuba*, that is, a wooden stick. It is a distinctive mark for the initiated men. The *thuba* is meant for masculine identity in Shangaan culture. The Shangaan society community is predominantly patriarchal (Maphosa, 2008). To this end, McKay and McKay (2010) highlight that, most rites of passage in patriarchal societies across the globe are deliberately designed to inflict physical pain because those who overcome prove to be worthy of manhood.

There is a need, therefore, to explore these cultural issues, together with positive and negative packages associated with them. It appears, however, that the responsible child protection stakeholders have adopted a bystander's position regarding the implication of Khomba practice on child rights discourse in Zimbabwe. The study also sought to find out the major reasons behind this level of passivity. For Shangaan people, Khomba rite is considered to be virtuous for the development of culturally relevant children. The propagation of such cultural narratives as Angel guardians of free and better development of children is questioned in this article. For this paper, such grand cultural beliefs should be interrogated as they go along with many uncounted tales of child rights violations.

Research design and Study Setting

This study was carried out in Chiredzi rural district wards 4 and 5 in Zimbabwe which are concentrated by Shangaan people who habitually practice Khomba rituals. This study was qualitative in nature. Methodological choice was influenced by the facts that Khomba practice operates much in hidden consensus or secrecy. Qualitative methodology lies within inclusive school of interpretivist paradigm that allows multiple positions to be taken into account when analyzing culturally-specific situations. Khomba practice involves immersion in cultural situation of the Shangaan people and the main idea of the study was to explicate the ways in which the practice affects child rights. As Shaw and Gould (2001) note, the adoption of qualitative design invites contextual exploration and releases us from stupor of familiar into state of wide-awakeness. Thus, in-depth interviews, key informant interviews and field observations were used to collect data from the study participants. These qualitative methods allowed the study to yield more thoughts, feelings and personal experiences of the Shangaan people. In support of this, Muzvidziwa (2000) argues that qualitative methods of research focus on meanings and are concerned with the production of in depth knowledge.

Using snowballing technique, 16 Shangaan and 5 non Shangaan adults over the age of 18 were selected so as to get different perceptions from both insiders and outsiders to the cultural practices. The age limit of 18 was chosen because these can understand the meaning of the practice since they have already passed through it. Key informants were selected using purposive sampling, and these included 1 teacher from a selected local school, 2 child protection specialists, 1 human rights officer as well as 1 state registered nurse at Chiredzi General Hospital. It would have been preferable to gather exclusively the perceptions of the Shangaan people alone but due to the covert nature of the rites, detailed information about what takes place in camp may not be disclosed. Therefore this interpretive study also gathered the general perceptions of non-Shangaan people on the topic from community members, health personnel, child protection specialists, human rights watchdogs as well as school teachers.

From ethical perspective, the study granted the participants their right to informed consent. The researchers gave a full explanation of the purpose of the study because the

subject area is sensitive, especially to respondents of Shangaan origin and interviewees had to be assured that the information they gave was meant strictly for academic purposes. The researchers also made it clear to participants that they were not coerced to participate in the study.

Presentation of the Findings

This section gives results of the study findings from in depth interviews, key informant interviews and field observation notes conducted with participants of the Shangaan origin and those who were not non-Shangaan by origins as well as information gathered from the key informants. The findings are grouped according to thematic frames which consequently address the research objectives.

Forms of child rights violation perpetrated by *khomba* Practice

Education of minors

The *khomba* rite, as indicated by interviewees is carried out in winter and takes approximately three months to complete the curriculum. It was established that the practice take place between May and August every year. This means that the entire second academic term of the year is lost because of the ritual. One of the key respondents echoed that girls are eligible for the rite once they go for their first menstrual cycle and that happens at approximately 12 to 14 years of age. As for boys, at around 14 years, they will be ready for *Khomba* rite of initiation. This means children's formal education was not given primary importance to the holders of this cultural aspect, since the rite of passage was prioritized first. One of the key informants noted that:

"The schools in this area have resorted to accepting the customs, if children, mostly girls do not attend school during the second term; they are not deleted in the school register as required by the regulations of the education teaching standards."

Some key informants assume that the relevance of formal education is further undermined by the prevalence of unemployment in Zimbabwe. This made it irrational for the Shangaan to give up their informal education in form of initiation which apparently presents more benefit to their cultural identity.

Exposure of minors to sexually explicit situation

Although they were unwilling to disclose specific detail, Shangaan participants admitted that issues to do with sexual performance were taught to the initiates in preparation of their venture into adulthood. Most of the people of Shangaan origin attested to that, despite being trained to be sex experts as they consider it to be one of the main characteristics of womanhood; training involves serious explicit sexual demonstrations. Some participants noted that the training involves dancing or acting without clothes especially for girls. On this, one key informant noted this as the foundation of many teen pregnancies. It was also revealed by the nurse that many teen maternal labour complications cases are experienced at the hospital as well as the pervasiveness of sexually transmitted diseases among child initiates. It was noted that:

"Children who are taught to engage in sex at a tender age and turn out to be victims of teenage pregnancies and Sexually Transmitted Infections."

In the light of these responses, it was deduced that the act of exposing children to sexual matters meant for adults, is itself abusive. In extreme cases, it was reported that the girl initiates among Shangaan people are even coerced to find a sexual partner as soon as they are initiated.

Subjection of minors to physically abusive circumstances

Human rights specialists who participated in the study noted that there is no universally agreed and exhaustively all-encompassing definition of physical abuse but it can generally relate to inflicting pain of a physical nature through beating or other similar methods. The Khomba practice for men in form of circumcision is done outside clinical conditions and participants admitted that the process is very excruciating. It was noted that the process is not voluntary and done under unsanitary conditions. One of the Shangaan participants said:

“Circumcision is a sign of Shangaan maleness although at the time of their circumcision he was 17 and afraid of the pain.”

It was noted that pain experienced during traditional circumcision enhances manhood and instills strong responsibilities in men. Completing the whole process was considered a great victory for the boys who would be ready to gain prominent respect and honour in the community. Due to some current wave of changes, some of the key informants revealed that, today, some Shangaan people do their circumcision process in collaboration with clinics. However, this was considered imperfect since it does not involve necessary pain for one to be considered a ‘full man’. As a result, communities distrust modern doctors and clandestinely continued to do their practice in traditional way.

Factors which perpetuate the persistence of *Khomba* Practice

Initiation rites as drivers of patriarchy

The dominant figures of authority in Shangaan society are family heads, village heads and chiefs which are all male dominated positions. It was discovered that these are the people who set dates and appoint instructors as well as make logistical arrangements for these initiation procedures. The Shangaan society is a structure which is predominantly patriarchal. According to Shangaan participants, male children were sent to Khomba to ensure that there was male dominance in the community. One respondent who was married confirmed that:

“Khomba yakanakira kuti tinodzidza kuti murume ndiye musoro wemba and mukadzi anofanira kuterera zvaanenge audzwa nemurume wake”. (Khomba practice teaches the manhood in the household as women are also taught to be subordinate to her husband at all times.)

Some of the key informants noted that, the Shangaan people take the matter of Khomba rites with fanaticism. It also came to attention that initiation rites conveys on young boys the idea of masculinity which translates to the occurrence of more polygamous households. The idea of being socially approved to have more than one woman came across as enjoyable by young Shangaan men. Although polygamy has been historically accepted in many Zimbabwean ethnic groups, it has been met with resistance and contemporary disapproval in the modern society. In spite of this, the Shangaan treat it as almost inevitable

endeavor at some point in a man's life. This left many Shangaan people in favour of these perceived benefits of *khomba* molded mindsets.

Culturally defined sexual efficiency

It was revealed by the study that Shangaan men have generally expressed preference towards women who have expertise in sex and this is one of the reasons why children are continuously sent to attend cultural initiations to make them more referable. It was discovered that girls and boys who passed Khomba initiation are possessed with sexual skills. One of the participants noted that:

“Girls who have passed through Khomba or kudzanirwa rite are treated with utmost respect. They can only get married by huko (circumcised males) who have same experiences and skills in sexual field. These girls are unbeatable and no external person (non-Shangaan) must marry them”

It was also revealed that, the idea of instilling subordination on women has proved to have far-reaching effects. This also expresses acceptance of the idea that education is not necessary for women because after marriage they will be subordinates to their husbands on whom they will depend. The study revealed that, the motivation behind the preservation of this custom by the Shangaan leadership, is to give women the mindset which they want them to have.

Sensitivity and privacy surrounding the initiation rite

The study found out that the general nature of privacy and sensitivity attached to the Khomba practice is one of the reasons why it continues to be practiced by the Shangaan people, regardless of its threats to child welfare. For years, this matter has been treated by the entire district of Chiredzi as a sensitive topic. One participant retorted that

“The rite is done in the far and bushy forests where no people are allowed to visit. It is very difficult to know what is happening there; even boys and girls who attend this cannot tell you. Those who attended the initiation have better knowledge about Khomba practice”

Voluntary organizations in the district, even those specializing in children protection have also treated this as an area of high sensitivity. One key participant occupying the office of child protection officer at a local Non-governmental organization confessed that the issue of Shangaan initiations is highly sensitive and it could result in the organization facing hostility in these communities. As a result, many agents of child protection remained silent on the matter of Khomba practice and its implication on child rights.

Accolade benefits to the chief on commencement and completion of the initiation

The study established that Shangaan chief, as the highest figure of authority, receives some sort of tribute or honor at the opening and closing ceremonies of *Khomba* practice. Leaders get gifts in form of a beast and honorary proceedings of honor which signify respect at his homestead. One of the non-Shangaan participants bemoaned that, that:

“How can a chief stop such activities considering the benefits and respect he earns from the practice”?

Although the chief is aware of the negative consequences of the Khomba Practice on child welfare, he may be reluctant to ban it because of the benefits he gets from the whole process. In addition, the instructors of these rites take a fee from the parents of the initiates and that gives them the motive to continue forcing or motivating young boys into initiation camps in a bid to profit from the exercise. Non-Shangaan participants believed that the token of appreciation provided to chiefs has a hidden agenda.

General lack of knowledge on the rights of the child

When asked on their knowledge on basic child rights most participants were more synonymous with rights such as food, shelter and clothing. This displayed a lack of complete knowledge on other child rights facets such as education, right to be heard and freedom to make their own choices. One of the participants affirmed that:

“During our days, we used to go to school but when the time for initiation came their parents send them there even amid the academic term.”

This bears big a connotation on children’s freedom as they are not allowed to make their own choices as far as participation is concerned. Apparently, this violates the child’s rights to be heard and included in matters which concern them. However, most of the participants displayed a lack of full knowledge of what constitute child’s right to free will. Some participants believed that every child should obey their parents without question. It also came to the study’s attention that very few Shangaan people considered the legal age of a child when planning the Khomba practice.

Poverty as a causal factor to the persistence of initiation rites

The study findings showed that families are generally financially incapable of taking care of their children, especially girl children and they could send them off to *Khomba*. This makes them customarily eligible for marriage which saves them the burden of taking care of those children whose childhood was affected by poverty. It also gave the girl’s family the advantage of receiving good bride price for the valued bride who would have undergone initiation making her a ‘proper woman.’ An initiate was most likely to get married and attract more value when it comes to bride price. This was complemented by sentiments of child protection specialists who noted that poor families rush to send under aged children to initiation rites in order to put them on marriageable position. This lessened the family’s dependence load. This means that despite the fact that families in these rural communities have, for long, been impoverished, the continuity of the Khomba practice is almost guaranteed.

Community perceptions on the impact of *khomba* on child well-being

Khomba perceived as a part of child socialization and preservation of cultural identity

It was common among Shangaan participants that Khomba is in their opinion, an integral part of the Shangaan way of life, identity and heritage. Participants disclosed that they are in support of the tradition because people inherited it from their forefathers and it is what distinguishes their tribe from the others. Participants confessed that khomba contributes to the grooming of children. Although there were some acknowledgments of the negativity part of culture, the Shangaan seem to have more respect for the role this initiation plays in the molding of their children’s personalities. One of the participants retorted that:

“Shangaan children are well groomed to be respectful and well-mannered with utmost respect for their elders and skills of co-existence with other members of society, even strangers as compared to children of nowadays in the high density suburbs of Chiredzi whose morality has deteriorated and become uncontrollable”

In this regard, *khomba* is regarded as a benefit to children’s moral development because it goes beyond just circumcision, it teaches children good morality.

Khomba perceived as having more detrimental than beneficial impact on child well being

All non-Shangani participants and key respondents alleged that Khomba practice has detrimental effects on child rights. Although this group of respondents acknowledged the possible benefits of this practice, they argued that the detriments outweigh any proposed advantage. One of the key respondents retorted that:

“Although the original Shangaan people support the rite as it is perceived with good outcomes for their children, it makes no sense when the fundamental rights of children are violated.”

It also came to the attention of the researchers that Shangaan people are conceited and defensive of their practices regardless of some ripple effects on child protection agenda in Zimbabwe. Ultimately, Shangaan people remained in support of its continuation without accepting modern clinical circumcision process.

Discussion

Amid investigation, the study found out that most members of the community were unaware of that Khomba practice involved some acts of child rights violation through failure to attend school, exposure to explicit sexual content, and physical and emotional abuse. This may be due to ignorance, illiteracy or lack of consciousness. This opinion is supported by Muzingili et al (2015)’s study in Binga district, Zimbabwe, which found out that communities were not fully aware of child rights discourse and its meaning to them. The disruptions in learning owing to passage of rites like Khomba practice is one of the main reasons why more than half the students failed to complete their educational cycle as expected. School authorities are aware of this tradition and they have agreed to keep alive the formal record of children who do not attend school for that long because they are known to return after their initiation. The study also observed that the initiation takes place mainly between May and August. These findings almost concur with Maphosa (2008)’s study findings in same community, that the rites take place between June and August which coincides with some school calendar in Zimbabwe. The issue of education and other human rights violation was aggravated by discrepancies in the definition of a child. For Shangani people, any person with a mature mind and way of reasoning can be regarded as an adult (Maphosa, 2008). This, therefore, shows that Khomba practice pays no respect to the legal age of majority as stated by the constitution of Zimbabwe which is the supreme law of the land. This culturalist perspective, which the study conjures, posits that the Khomba practice is anchored on pan-Africanist ideals which support the camaraderie of African communities through cultural identities. However, the reputation of these practices dents the free development of a child which also compromises his/her future career.

It was established that Khomba practice has served many purposes among Shangaan people such as maintenance of patriarchal virtues, to instill sexual efficiency among girls, and privacy of the rite, among others. Chimuka (2011) reveals that *khomba* graduation means that

an individual, especially females will be ready for marriage. Most of girls who pass out of the training camp sites may not even return to complete school for they will be celebrated by their respective communities as newcomers to adulthood making it unnecessary to complete school. This is consistent with various scholars (see Ahmed (2014, Chanza, 2014), which discovered the same scenario in Malawi, where initiates are told that it is an abomination to fail to secure a man after at least three months of completing the rite. This result in many premature marriages since the Khomba men generally prefer women who would have undergone initiation which further ruins the possibility of ever completing education and realisation of other child rights such as the right to choose. The *khomba* rite goes beyond just prohibiting children from attending school or making life decisions; it changes the entire mind set and attitudes of children who would have returned from initiation. Just like the Xhosa young initiates mentioned by Maylie (2013) that upon completion of the initiation sessions, young males are welcomed and considered men by their communities although according to the law are still children. To ensure its success, the process is done far away from home in a forest called *enhoveni* (the forest area) which lies about ten kilometres from the rest of the community (Mandova, 2013). In support of this idea, Rice (1996:67) is of the opinion that in sociological realms, the forest is also the place of gender-role socialisation. In this study, socialisation means a process by which initiated boys and girls are trained on the complexities of the social dynamics of society.

The third part of Zimbabwe Children's Act of 2001 (Chapter 5:06) 7(4) states that if any parent or guardian of a child or young person assaults, ill-treats, neglects, abandons or exposes him/her, allows, causes or procures him/her to be assaulted, ill-treated, neglected, abandoned or exposed in a manner likely to cause him unnecessary suffering or to injure or detrimentally to affect his health or morals or any part or function of his mind or body; he/she shall be guilty of an offence. Despite this legislative framework, child development and mental well-being in relation to the exposure of children to sexual content in *khomba* camps is questionable. This situation results in long term effects of teen pregnancies, and initiates feel the need to practice what they would have been taught. In other cases, girl initiates in Malawi, as reviewed in regional literature, are even coerced to find a sexual partner as soon as they are initiated (Chimuka, 2011). Through the use of non-clinical methods, boys suffer too much pain during traditional circumcision. Maylie (2013) shares the same opinion by noting that the pain associated with traditional circumcision is also identical with that in northern African nations where female genital mutilations are performed. It emerged from the study that those who get infected are given the option of seeking medical care, though they will not be regarded as strong and deserving initiates. Thus, most initiates refrain from seeking medical care in situations of infection which may result in death and other health consequences. Although none of the participants revealed the exact living circumstances or conditions which prevail inside the camp, they admitted that there are rare incidents of circumcision wounds which get infected leading to death. The rite of circumcision lasts from three weeks to six weeks, where the boys 'undergo the traditional knife' in the forest (Mandova, 2013). The forest provides the boys with a variety of experiences and they have to experience physical, educational, emotional, psychological, moral and spiritual metamorphosis in order to attain adulthood. All these are accomplished through throbbing experiences that contradict the principles of 'free will' and desired child development processes.

For Shangaan participants, Khomba practice was the only way to safeguard people's cultural identity through socialization of children and maintenance of patriarchal ideals in the society. A scholar like Atkinson (1999:112) considers the rite of circumcision as significant because it is a repository of the broad scheme of traditional education in which parents plan

to impart the needs of their children and also pass on the traditions or heritage of society. Since this system presents advantages to those who are in charge of positions of power in these communities, they are bound to protect the continuity of the practice making sure that for years, men retain superiority over women, constantly in charge of their wives' economic production and reproduction. The Shangaan people as protagonists of woman who can sexually perform, able to satisfy her husband and lessen the chance of him having extra marital affairs and consequently avoiding related diseases. The conception of Khomba practice is that, the individual is symbolically and mystically sealed to his family and village (Maphosa, 2011; Mandova, 2013). In the same social premise, the family and village are symbolically and mystically re-sealed to the initiated boys and girls. In order to instill this, the initiation is carried out clandestinely and intruders are fined a beast, this means that intervention or efforts to stop the rites may not hold much significance. The generality of non-Shangaan society is not fully conscious in detail of the exact happenings in the camp and they considered the practice detrimental to child development. To some participants, it was almost impracticable to unearth appropriate intervention plans to help children when people are not aware of the processes of *khomba*. In South Africa, Maylie (2013) found out that authorities were hesitant to confront the matter of initiation rites because they are afraid to be labeled as politically perceptive by politicians who are unenthusiastic to compromise their support base by candidly going against a people's belief system. However, the practice has denied many girls opportunity to learn, subverting, not only local constitutional rights, but other international statutes which advocate for the equal treatment of children in the society.

Recommendations

- **Child rights sensitization campaigns:** The study recommends that both government authorities and private voluntary organizations conduct mass awareness campaigns to desensitize extremist communities on issues surrounding cultural customs and the violation of children's rights. Child protection specialists from both statutory and non-statutory organizations should make it known to communities that contemporary society does not require one to prove masculinity or ideal femininity through endurance of pain, be it physical or mental strain exerted by customary initiation. These particular communities may have to be conscientised on the universally declared child rights making it comprehensible that it constitutes punishable offence for these rights to be violated.
- **Holistic engagement of law enforcement agents in child protection programmes:** Law enforcement agencies such as child protection stakeholders as well as Shangaan traditional leaders who hold key positions of authority should be engaged. It can be presumed that these are conversant with the basic rights of children and also wield the authority to take action to abolish, or at least alter, the deleterious effects of the Khomba practice. The same goes for the paramount Shangaan chiefs and authorities who should be engaged in totality to take the initiative to introduce measures which provide sanctuary to the interests of children.
- **Alignment of Khomba practice to formal policy guidelines-**There is a need to introduce age restrictions to at least 18 years of age for both female and male initiates. It should also be ensured that enlisting be done on voluntary basis. Acts of circumcision should be done with the presence of trained medical personnel and medicine, in order to prevent unnecessary loss of life.

- It is important that the rite be compressed to few days so that it fits during school holidays to avoid academic learning disruptions.

Conclusion

In some parts of the world, customary practices are dynamic and they are modified, altered or discarded altogether, if they have outlived their relevance. However, a ritual like *khomba* practiced by the Shangaan has withstood the test of time and criticism. This paper got an insight into the diverse forms of child rights abuse cases which come along with the execution of the Khomba rite. The study highlighted how Khomba rite of passage affected the children's universal rights such as right to education, health care, shelter, free will and protection from harmful environments. Considering the pride among Shangaan people with regard to Khomba rite, it will be folly to campaign for complete abolishment of the practice. When thoroughly interrogated, Khomba practice has its historical merit but the current swings in the democratization of children's rights invite the contextual changes of the rite in order to promote the rights of children.

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