

The Perspective of the Church on the Status and Functions of Female Circumcision among the Naandi

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Introduction

Female circumcision is an initiation ranging from a minor operation of the clitoris (clitoridectomy) to major forms of initiation such as the pharaonic circumcision (infibulation). Female circumcision denotes all forms of initiation in general disregarding whether the operation is minor or major. Today female circumcision faces great challenges to attract global attention. The Christian church was among the first to challenge its worth among the Nandi community on which this study is based. The stigma that the rite faces is in itself strong enough to attract Global attention.

In Africa, studies indicate that female circumcision is in itself a rite integral to African Religion. Renowned and upcoming works on African Religion such as those by Mbiti J. S., Adegbola A. A. E., Awolalu J. O., Dopamu P. A., Idowu E. B., and Mugambi J. N. K among others, suggest that female circumcision is a component of African rites of passage among communities that practice both male and female initiation. This rite of passage falls under initiation among them childbirth and accompanying rituals, marriage ceremonies and rituals performed at death.

Female circumcision was practised by the Nandi before the coming of Christianity. Upon the coming of Christian missionaries, female circumcision was pointed out as a cultural practice that was 'barbaric' and 'evil'. Christian converts were discouraged from participating in female initiation rites. On the other hand, the people who refused to undergo the rite were considered outcasts by the community. Those who escaped had to seek refuge in mission stations. The church today has the same view towards female circumcision. However, despite continued condemnation, the practice persists, raising quite critical questions: Does persistence of female circumcision indicate that the practice plays an important function? What is this function? Has Christianity interfered with this function? Why then has the church not succeeded in stopping the practice? This study therefore aims at investigating the status and functions of female circumcision among the Naandi and the perspective of the church towards the practice.

2. The Status of Female Circumcision among the Naandi

The Nandi belong to the Kalenjin group, which comprises eight major dialectic groups. These include the Kipsigis, Nandi, Keiyo, Marakwet, Tugen, Sebeei (Elgon Kalenjin), Pokot and Terik. All are descendants of the Highland Nilotes". The Nandi tribal area at the advent of British rule was divided into seven geographical localities known as *emet*. These are:- Aldai, Kapwareng, Chesumei, Mosop, Chemase Soy, Kamasia Soy and Emkwen. Currently, the Naandi predominantly occupy Nandi, Uasin-Gishu, and Trans-Nzoia counties of the former Rift Valley province of Kenya.

By tradition the Nandi are a semi-nomadic, warrior and pastoral community. The most prominent traits that emerged and identified with these people is that of a strong fighting sense which found expression in an efficient military organisation and a profoundly religious attitude towards life.

The religion and ethos of the Nandi were significantly influenced by reference to a deity called *Asis* who is generally believed to be benevolent, but who can cause disaster if angered. *Asis* is believed to be responsive to intercession and his displeasure could be appeased by sacrifice. Generally his activity is good and active evil is due to the influence of malignant evil or discontented ancestral spirits, *oindet*-plural *oiik*

2.1 The origin and structure of circumcision

There are seven age-groups among the Naandi, which are determined by the time of boys', and not girls' circumcision. However, after marriage women share the same age group with the husband. The age groups recur cyclically in the following order: - Kimyigei, Nyongi, Maina, Chumo, Sawe, Kipkoimet and Kaplelach. All the boys initiated during a series of ceremonies enter the same age grade. The circumcision takes place at ten to eleven year intervals⁸. Initiation for both boys and girls is therefore an institution of Naandi culture.

The origin of clitoridectomy among the Nandi is not clearly known. However, according to a myth, the first man who practised circumcision in Nandi was one Kipkenyo who came from a land called Do and settled in the Kakipoch division of Nandi known as *chemngal*⁹. The story goes that Kipkenyo had a number of brothers and sisters who all died when they reached puberty. He then decided that when he had his own children he would change all of them at puberty. He therefore circumcised them and since none of his children died he settled on the practice. The practice therefore became part of their culture.

The period between the 1980's and 1990's has the least records of female circumcision in Nandi. Changes are rapidly taking place and female circumcision is one of the areas facing a lot of criticism worldwide. However, to assume that female circumcision is least practiced in Nandi as per the findings of this study could be fair but the practice still persists. Specific villages in the area of study that had traces of this tradition included Kapnyeberai, Songoliet, Ndubeneti, and some part of Chepterit.

In most of these villages the practice is performed with a lot of secrecy while in others it is done openly. A respondent at Songoliet village who asked for anonymity confirmed that the ritual is still highly valued and is practised openly in the named village. The ritual is also performed in its original form and all aspects of the ritual followed. The most common aspect of the practice is the wearing of traditional attire by initiates. While conducting the study, the researcher encountered girls who had been initiated. A case in point is that of Jeptoo who left school to prepare for initiation and to enter the next stage, that of marriage. Due to her tender age, the chief of Kilibwoni Location, where she hailed from, and the teachers at her school tried to protest but in vain and the battle was lost. This is an example of many girls who drop out of school, a reason for the outcry against female circumcision.

Another evidence of persistence of the rite among the Nandi is one of twin sisters who were initiated at Ndubeneti, Kilibwoni Location. These were Chepngetich Colleta and Chepungei Jane who got initiated on 18th April 1998 and graduated from seclusion on the 8th of May the same year. At the time of this study, the researcher interviewed one of the twin sisters married at Kaplolok. Though she became nervous of the questions asked, she however, managed to disclose that she got initiated because the spouse of her twin sister demanded that the sister gets initiated. This prompted her initiation too because among the Nandi twins cannot be separated in such a ceremony.

These evidences of the practice indicate the continuation and value of female circumcision as an integral part of Nandi culture. It is clear however, that the rituals performed today are not the same as those of the past. Today the ritual has lost much of its content compared to the past. There are however some villages where the protestant church dominated in which the practice seems to

have disappeared. These include areas around Kosirai and Kapsabet. Most respondents in these areas were surprised that the researcher was carrying out a study on a ritual that they had believed died out completely. In the process declared total ignorance of the ritual.

From the findings the researcher refuted the above view which proved to have been an assumption based on unreliable facts. It seemed probable that suspicion made then deny the real fact that the practice continued within their vicinity. Contrary to this later group is the former who held the ritual central and was stern in determining that nothing could stop it. However the findings of this study show that female circumcision among the Nandi has been greatly affected.

The above group of informants contributed much to the study because they were quite frank in what they insisted on. They are a patriotic group to their tradition and are proud of being Nandi. This group of informants referred to the others who have abandoned the practice as 'lost sheep' who had been influenced by Protestants *chebisaas*. They blamed the church, especially the protestant church, for having a negative impact on the ritual. Besides blaming the church, they also blamed the urban elites it represented. This is the group of protestant converts and elite dominating the urban Nandi society at Kapsabet where the first A.I.M. set their early stations.

When asked how often the community performed the rituals, respondents pointed out that they had done so since time immemorial. General statistics however show that not more than four girls in the said villages got initiated per year from 1997 to 1998. Though, a rather small percentage it shows evidence of the persistence of the rite of passage, changes in the social function of the ritual is also evident. Changes such as the number of people involved, the expenses incurred and the length of time given to the ritual, indicate how it has lost its original meaning.

Regarding the present status of the ritual, this group of informants said they performed the ritual only in case of demand. In essence, they no longer enjoy the ritual and ceremonies that followed because in case of need it was hidden *kisunguli* and a few who are willing to participate do it in secret. The ritual is compounded with fear and most of the participants would not like to be identified with it. It is clear that the present generation would rather identify with Western culture than African culture. One respondent, argued that her son did not see initiation as a pre-requisite for marrying his wife but since culture dictate so she was initiated.

From the above evidence, it can be concluded with tangible evidence that the rite of passage still exists among the Nandi. Some possible reasons for resurgence and persistence of the ritual include the significant functional aspects attached to the rite as discussed earlier. As much as most respondents felt it was a form of retardation, they agreed that there is something that can be learnt from the culture.

As already discussed in the study, it is held that through initiation ceremonies societies secrets can be shared thus binding the people together. This then followed a resurgence in the old tradition of female circumcision in Nandi. Today the resurgence of female circumcision is therefore not only attributed to custom and culture but also to a wave of change politically and socially..

Those who held the above views strongly were however a cliché of Nandi specifically the traditional ones who represent 5% of traditional Nandi, a majority being an older generation of *maina* and *chumo*, age groups found mainly in some villages in Kilibwoni division such as Kapnyeberai, Songoliet and Ndubeneti. This cliché' highly value female circumcision and insist that the rite would never disappear. Among the upcoming age set of *Kaplelach* who represent the young and educated Nandi, it was confirmed through the findings of this study that they totally dislike female circumcision. The girls of the same age-group have mostly attended school beyond standard eight. The reason why they do not condone the ritual is that they are enlightened, than the older generation on the consequences that follow female circumcision.

Exposure has also become the best teacher for the youth who are in tune with current mass media through television, newspapers, and radios. Gender sensitive organisations, like the *Maendeleo ya Wanawake*, (MYWO) campaign against female circumcision and more recently the Family Planning Association of Kenya has extended its projects to sensitising women on the dangers of female circumcision. As female circumcision is stigmatised for infringing the rights of women and enhancing backwardness then the present generation of girls will abandon the rite.

It is therefore clear that there is a clash of ideas between the old, traditional Nandi, and the young and educated modern Nandi in regard to female circumcision and both are on the extreme sides. Though the former still hold on to it, most of the original aspects and symbolism of the rite have been discarded while the latter witness the decline and final demise of the ritual by not participating in it. According to the researcher's opinion the decline of the ritual could also represent a significant social change, a fact that was supported by most respondents.

From the formal point of view, female initiation seems to have changed much in its symbolic aspects: the ritual songs, and the objects used. On the other hand, if we take a functionalist theoretical perspective which stresses transformation in the rituals role in the organisation of the social system, the ritual has changed fundamentally from its original context.

3. The Functions of Female Circumcision among the Naandi

Initiation rites in African religion serves various functions which may be social, religious, educational and psychological. Van Gennep defines initiation as:-

“a process through which an individual is admitted or introduced to membership of a group, often by means of a special ceremony. Initiation rites are part of the rites of passage, which accompany every change of place, social position and age.

Cock Croft L. in his text *Africa's way - A journey from the past* argues that ritual is important because it gives individuals a sense of belonging. Rituals in many African societies find their expression in initiation ceremonies associated with puberty. These ceremonies are the most profound experiences for adolescents.

In Nigeria initiation is valued as an important rite of passage and its completion is a source of joy to the parents and the whole community. Female circumcision in Nandi is also a rite of passage with similar importance to this hence it has become a central issue to be investigated by the study.

3.1 The initiation rite

Initiation for both male and female among the Nandi marked a very important stage in the life of an individual. Prior to the physical operation of clitoridectomy, a girl was checked for virginity. If she was one, she was honoured with gifts and sat on an elder's stool. The operation was then performed by an elderly woman, the *korget ab tum*. This office was the only position of public prominence open to women. This marked the beginning of a process of other teachings and rituals performed in seclusion through stages. Seclusion is a period of withdrawal from society during which the initiates are restricted in their mothers' house in an extension known as *sumut*. There the initiate remains clad in a long cowhide skirt, *nyargit* and hood *soiywet*. The initiates then underwent a period of restriction immediately after circumcision. They are said to be unclean thus not supposed to touch their wounds and are to eat using wooden folks known as *seketik*.

A ceremony that followed this period of restriction is known as *labetab eun* that is the washing of hands which was meant to remove the restriction on uncleanness. This marked the beginning of intense training and instruction by a ritual expert called *motiriot*, a tutor assisted by other women who have gone through the ritual, appointed by older women. This tutor is expected to be a woman of good standing, *libwob* who was to accompany the initiates throughout the seclusion period. She is their symbol of unity, their counsellor, their source of strength, comfort and their model.

The content of what takes place in the ceremonial house between the initiates and their tutors during circumcision and the time of seclusion is kept secret and not known to anybody. This is not only considered secret, but also falls in the realm of culture rather than religion. The initiates in seclusion *tarusiek*, are in a state of inactivity. The seclusion period is symbolic of death and its end is like the resurrection of a new and responsible life. The person is officially admitted into the next stage which is socially more productive and he or she is authorized to play a full and active part in it, as an integral member of the community. Teachings in seclusion served a very important function, without this teachings the youth were believed to be ill prepared for the responsibilities of marriage and parenthood.

At this stage they are neither children nor adults until they undergo a period of education introducing them to tribal knowledge and wisdom. It is during this educational period that the girl slowly begins to change her pattern of life to the woman's and gradually becomes grown up in thought, word and deed. She leaves her childhood behaviour and looks at the past with contempt.

3.2 The functions

The functions of circumcision and initiation among the Nandi are varied and carry a lot of symbolic meaning, they can be categorised into religious, social, educational and psychological.

During the seclusion period, the girls undergo a session of training on how to perform the roles of a wife and mother and those of the society at large. The initiates are taught how to handle elders, children, in-laws and of prime importance, her relationship with the husband. They are sensitised on sexual matters and given instructions on how to handle their spouses in marriage. This includes when to refrain from sexual intercourse, for example during pregnancy, during menses and upto the time the child begins to walk. In the past this even acted as a form of family planning and a way of spacing children.

They are also expected to learn how to keep family as well as societal secrets, keeping family secrets is believed to contribute to a harmonious marriage. Societal secrets must be kept from strangers especially in time of war. The time of instruction becomes a kind of forum in which women share their feelings and ideas amongst themselves. This is basically one of the few female forums as most meetings are male dominated. Female circumcision therefore binds women together as a group with new initiates.

Socially female circumcision is a rite of maturation, marking the end of childhood and incorporation into the sacred role of motherhood. The initiation is a public recognition that the individual has entered another group. After circumcision a girl, *chepto* can become a married woman, *kwony* thus making a turning point in her life. She is expected to carry out full responsibilities in marriage and privileges of being an adult, such as engaging in sexual affairs and participating in ceremonies that are done to the exclusion of the uninitiated. Among the Nandi, pre-marital sex was prohibited and this is a generally held notion in many African communities.

Female circumcision is an efficient tool in character formation; enhancing behaviour change and in giving status. Where such tradition overrides religious belief, parents can get their daughters initiated before marriage to avoid pit falls in marriage. At a time when suitors are rarely available,

parents would rather accept anything the suitors of their daughters demanded. This is evident as a major cause of female circumcision. Even in those circumstances in which parents and daughters would not have advocated for it, the ritual is performed due to the suitor's demand.

Female circumcision served as a gateway to marriage. Among the Nandi a girl was not married until she had been circumcised. A similar view is shared among the Kikuyu. At marriage the two families celebrate the occasion and exchange gifts. Payment of bride wealth in form of livestock is done by the bride's family.

Educationally, the knowledge acquired during initiation enlightens the initiate and is important in changing her personality. Teachings on behaviour, appropriate manners and language are included. As a process, initiation is a form of education where all that the individual held to be true is discarded and new truths imparted, one is given a new set of values, habits, language and customs to abide in. There is also a lot of dramatisation of things, which helps in retention of knowledge.

Among the Nandi, female circumcision is mainly seen as a mark of identity, which distinguishes those initiated Nandi group from other uninitiated Nandi as a unique distinct entity. It instills a sense of belonging and acceptance in the community, uncircumcised women are sarcastically called *cheplemia*, one is segregated when it comes to social discussions and when talking the initiated would literally say the house is not smeared, *ma malat kot* in case an uninitiated is present.

Through circumcision a girl enters a select group of grown up circumcised women who have their own secret songs, activities and ritual. She achieves a new level of socialisation, isolation from girls, separating the ordinary girl *chepto* for a woman set apart for marriage. This sense of belonging makes a girl be accepted and be considered a grown up.

Female circumcision among the Nandi helps to strengthen relationships between mothers and daughters, this is a bond whereby the mother can advice the daughter on expected roles. It marks the critical stage when girls domestic unit is handed over to her husbands domestic unit. The term circumcise *keyatita* in Nandi, literally means 'to open up' or unlock from a closed state. Thus the girl is no longer responsible to her parents but to the husband to be. Initiation also bridges girlhood, with motherhood since it signals the official permission for one to get married. In traditional Nandi society a child born out of wedlock known as *lakwab sarbuch* was killed. It was only after marriage that procreation was allowed.

Through female circumcision, cultural identity is preserved as a means of keeping traditional secrets. Most respondents who supported this view argued that no 'child' could keep a secret. Thus it was only after one underwent initiation that secrets of the society could be exposed. The vows made during initiation could bind one to keep any secrets.

Female circumcision is said to impart a sense of maturity and responsibility to initiates. During the operation, courage and bravery are supposed to be shown by the initiates. Failure to do this, a girl would bring shame to her family. Thus the initiation served as a test of endurance, courage and fortitude not only necessary in married life but also meant for hardening³¹. These virtues are not only necessary in married life but also highly esteemed by the Nandi.

Like its counterpart the male initiation, the rites are religious and initiatory. They involve instruction in reference to the tribe and the assumption of the social responsibilities. Initiates were directed on what should not be done *etanutik* and warned on what is taboo *Kigirei*.

The blood which is shed during the physical operation binds the person to the land and consequently to the departed members of 'her' society. Kenyatta³³ asserts that the pouring of the initiates' blood to the ground serves this function. It intimately ties the initiate to the land on which

he has sacrificed his blood and part of his body also binds him to the ancestors who are believed to dwell underground. This solemn unity and identification has a deep religious function, which joins the living with the dead the visible and the invisible. Until one has gone through the operation, he is still an outsider. Once she has shed her blood, she joins the stream of her people and becomes truly one with them.

By removing the most sensitive part of the female sexual organs clitoris it was hoped that promiscuity and prostitution would be checked. This was meant to reduce female sexual sensitivity so that they do not dominate male sexual performance. It is very essential in male dominated societies that women be prevented from experiencing the pleasures of orgasm, which is the male prerogative. It also has a psychological implication that after circumcision, women will completely accept male dominance, not only in sex but also in all other activities. A reason given by most respondents as to why most Nandi men insist that their wives be initiated.

However, it has been pointed out that female circumcision is not an effective means of diminishing sexual desires but rather makes sexual gratification less achieved. When sexual desire is less achieved, it is possible that the individual might be forced to seek for satisfaction where possible. This can lead to sexual promiscuity hence can contract Sexually Transmitted Diseases (S.T.D.'s) and even Acquired, Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) which leads to death.

Initiation ceremonies serve as a source of entertainment and a place of socialisation *keba tiendo* (to attend singing). This event is open to all even the married, free beer is also part of the entertainment.

After seclusion the girls who are normally well fed are believed to have undergone a complete revolution of mind, body and spirit. They are now confident that they can manage housework and take full responsibilities in their community.

Circumcision is also believed to be necessary for entry into the next world after death. Thus it not only served the purpose of social acceptance on earth but served a spiritual function of acceptance in the after world of which the Nandi people strongly belief in.

It is because of these functions that female circumcision among the Nandi become meaningful to the people who still practice it. Despite the fact that these functions sound rich in content and should be aped, some Christians believe there is nothing good in these functions. Due to this they discourage the physical operation and the teachings done during the seclusion period.

The above functions have therefore contributed highly to the persistence of female circumcision. The information was gathered from respondents who felt strongly that female circumcision had a functional significance in the community. Most respondents who shared their views seemed to still value the functions of female circumcision. However, the majority would prefer to maintain the teachings done during seclusion period and drop the physical operation.

4. The Perspective of the Church on Female Circumcision among the Naandi

Fish C. B. and Fish G. in their book *The Kalenjin Heritage*, compared and contrasted Judeo-Christian circumcision with that of the Kalenjin basing their study on the Kipsigis of Kenya. As Christian missionaries, they were, however not advocating for African customs. They wanted to point at how evil and backward these customs were thus they should not be practised by converts.

They noted that nowhere in the bible is female circumcision mentioned. Yet in their work they did not address reasons as to why female circumcision should not continue being practised. As Christian missionaries, they were interested in the details of the rituals and discouraging the practice yet the question was not answered. Though the research was carried out among the Kipsigis the work is important for this study. It states how missionaries tried to compare and contrast the African rituals with biblical rituals of socialisation.

From the findings of this study, the immediate response of the church as to whether female circumcision should be discouraged, was affirmative and in line with the views held by the early Christian missionaries that discouraged the practice. The views were supported by the protestant informants who pointed at the practice as idolatry.

A slight divergence from the above was however witnessed when 30% of the respondents felt that there was something good in female circumcision that the church did not realise while 70% sided with the views of the church. Table 1 shows these percentages.

Table 1 **Should Female Circumcision be discouraged?**

Responses	Number	Percentage
Yes	122	70%
No	53	30%
Total	175	100%

Out of the total number of respondents, 30% felt that female circumcision should not be discouraged wholesomely for there was something good in the practice and that not every aspect of it was evil. This view was supported by factors stated by these informants as the advantages of female circumcision already discussed in chapter two of this thesis. Among the advantages being that the teachings provided in seclusion were meant to enhance respect and obedience. One respondent in favour of the practice commented, *ki tumdo ko ki ngomnon* that is, initiation was instilling knowledge.

In determining individual likes and dislikes of the practice, it was found out that a very small percentage of the informants liked it, the majority disliked it. The immediate response to this question was that most young informants said that the practice is meaningless. This is in support of the general view that the present generation regards the old no longer applicable. On the same aspect majority of the men would opt for uninitiated women for wives. Out of the total number of respondents 77% men supported this view while 23% of men would opt for initiated women for wives. Table 2 summarises this information.

Table 2: **Men's choice of initiated women for wives**

Responses	Number	Percentage
Those choosing initiated women	40	23%
Those opting for uninitiated women	135	77%
Total	175	100%

The minority group of men who still supported female circumcision represent Nandi men who still insisted that their wives be initiated. On the other hand it is evident that a smaller percentage of Nandi women are stigmatised by not having undergone the ritual, this is a pointer as to why the ritual persists in the area of the study.

On the other hand, responses as to whether male spouses demanded that their wives be initiated were minimal 33.3% of female respondents consented that they encountered problems with their husbands because of not having undergone ritual. While 66.7% said they did not encounter any problems with their husbands despite not being initiated. Among the major problems that the uninitiated face are mainly sarcastic intonations from their husbands and friends. They are mainly ironically stigmatised for example for preparing poor meals *samis kimyet*. This is a major reason why some married women have opted to get initiated.

Table 3 Women stigmatised for lack of initiation

Responses	Number	Percentage
Those encountering problems	58	33.3%
Those not encountering problems	117	66.7%
Total	175	100%

It was also evident that in areas where the Roman Catholic Church dominates, no much conflict was seen to exist between Christianity and most traditional beliefs. From the findings, those who still insisted on circumcision of girls were mainly Roman Catholic faithfuls of age 30 years and above, whose level of education was below form four. Those who disliked female circumcision were mainly Protestants between ages of 26 to 40 years, and their level of education was above form four.

4.1 The Church

The Roman Catholics are not so strict in detachment from tradition. They also agree that the church does not provide teachings that can replace female circumcision. The Protestants on the other hand argue that, since God is the source of all rights, he does not advocate for female circumcision. It is therefore evident from the above that whereas we can conclude that religious affiliation contributed much to the disparity of views, it should be noted that age and level of education also determined difference in ideas.

From a general perspective, 83.3% of male respondents who were Roman Catholics opted for circumcised ladies for marriage, while the remaining 16.7% opted for the uncircumcised. On the other hand 83.3% of the respondents who were Protestants opted for uncircumcised girls for marriage while only 17% opted for the circumcised. Table 4 gives a summary of these responses.

Table 4 Preferences by Protestants and Catholics on marrying initiated/uninitiated ladies

Group	Those opting for initiated Girls		Those opting for uninitiated Girls	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Catholic	146	83.3%	29	16.7%
Protestants	29	16.7%	146	83.3%
Total	175	100%	175	100%

The above responses point to the fact that whereas the majority of Roman Catholic respondents still favoured the practice there were also a few Protestants who were in favour of it. Thus, the Roman Catholic church should not be wholesomely victimised for the persistence of female circumcision in the area of study. There were cases of Protestants who consented that they actually accepted female circumcision because of its positive contributions in society despite going to church. Those who turn to it are said to be backsliders and seen as outcasts.

Regarding the stand of the church on how they handle the circumcised, there was a strong belief in indiscrimination of such members. Of the total number of respondents 77.8% said that it caused them problems to adjust in the Protestant church while the rest who were Roman Catholics said it did not cause any problems to them. A step of confession and repentance led to acceptance back to church. It is therefore evident that female circumcision has been a concern more to the Protestants than the Roman Catholic Church faithfuls. The protestants stress on the repentance by

such Christians before they are accepted into the congregation. Some withdraw on their own and calls for a further step of approaching them wisely through visiting, teaching and encouraging them to go back to church.

On investigating cases where staunch Christians are also involved in female circumcision, it became evident that they were not let aside. 83% of the staunch Roman Catholics and Protestants could in one way or another participate in female circumcision rituals while the rest 17% confessed to be totally non-partisan.

Table 5: Evidence of Female Circumcision

Responses	Number	Percentage
Practice still exists	58	33.3%
Practice does not exist	117	66.7%
Total	175	100%

At family levels 92.9% of the total respondents acknowledged that female members of their families had refused to undergo the rite of passage and the remaining 7.1% are those who had been initiated indicate persistence of female circumcision.

In answering the question as to whether female circumcision is relevant today or not, 36.4% of the total respondents felt it was relevant while 63.6% felt it was not relevant. This is indicated in table 6.

Table 6: Relevance of Female Circumcision as a rite of passage

Responses	Number	Percentage
It is still relevant	64	36.4%
It is not relevant	111	63.6%
Total	175	100%

Thus, a higher percentage felt it was not relevant while the remaining few still acknowledged its relevance.

These findings point to a type of conflict between the people's culture and the church. Though the church strongly feels that female circumcision is outdated and therefore must be discouraged, a cross section of the community still attach significant importance to it and hence persist in its practice.

5. Conclusions

Female circumcision is an integral part of African religion found in many other African cultures thus should be reckoned with. From the findings of this study, the ritual in its purely traditional form seems to be rich in content and its functions seem to outweigh the dysfunctions as per the community. These functions range from social, religious and educational.

From the findings of this study, it is reported that the practice persists in the area though not pronounced. In other areas the practice has stopped and its disappearance is greatly attributed to the influence of Christianity especially the Protestant church who mainly view the practice as backward and obsolete.

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