



# MWIA CASE STUDIES

## CULTURAL VIOLENCE

### Case 3 1: Growing pains of the Samburu girl

#### Objective

- To show how harmful traditional practices can violate young girls in Kenya and lead to permanent injury

#### Narrative Case

*\* At the end of the case study you can find "Learning points" related to information presented in the narrative case, denoted by numbers in square brackets.*

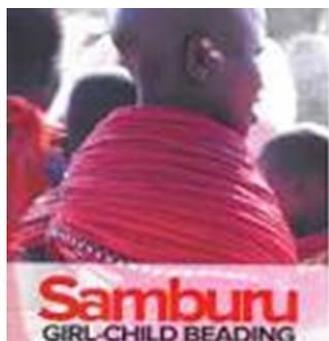
Blossom, a 10 years old Samburu girl from Kenya was brought to the hospital with severe bleeding and close to death. After consulting her mother, Blossom was found to have suffered an incomplete abortion after being 6 months pregnant. The pregnancy had followed being picked at a beading ceremony [1]. She had a ruptured spleen and injuries to her reproductive system. Her mother performed the abortion [2]. Blossom later returned to the hospital one year later with severe pneumonia and learnt that she had also contracted HIV. She was treated with herbs but without any success [3].

#### Learning Points

- [1] Girls are circumcised and beaded between the ages of nine to twelve. They are targeted based on their good family reputation and picked during cultural dances, or while in the bush looking after livestock.
- [2] Traditional crude methods are employed to bring about an abortion including the location of the 2<sup>nd</sup> trimester fetal skull in the pelvis or abdomen and the girl's mother crushing it using her knee or elbow. This rarely leads to a complete abortion and results in an incomplete abortion with complications. If abortion fails and the baby is born, then it is supposed to be thrown in the forest to be eaten by wild animals as the baby is an outcast.
- [3] There is limited access to knowledge about HIV, treatments and services with peers being used as the primary knowledge resource. Home treatments with herbs are commonly used. Condom use is associated with HIV positive people and sex workers and they are not accessible in interior regions of the Samburu country where most of the beading activity takes place. Mortality and morbidity are significant in this group.

## Background information

Beading of pre-pubescent girls in Samburu, a predominantly nomadic community in the North Central part of Kenya is a form of initiation. Traditionally young strong men aged 15-19 years of age, referred to as “morans” or “warriors” in the community are not allowed to marry. Mothers of young girls are expected to adorn them with beads as early as 10 years of age as a sign of “sexual engagement” to the “morans”. A hut is then built outside the



main house for this “service” without any consideration for the girl regarding exposure to pregnancy, sexually transmissible infections and HIV/AIDS. If the girl does get pregnant she is treated as an outcast and so it is the mother’s obligation to ensure the pregnancy does not get to term. This harmful traditional practice leads to permanent injury to the reproductive system, increase in the spread of sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS and the end of their school life. The other rite of passage is female genital cutting after which the girls are deemed ready for marriage. Other complications associated with this practice are i) early and risky sexual encounters and ii) an early marriage and early child bearing

This harmful traditional practice demands in-depth community dialogue with wider stakeholder participation to raise further awareness of its negative implications. The longer the girls stay in school then the better access there is to offer alternative rites of passage to them and their families. Primary prevention of HIV/AIDS in a setting where young girls cannot negotiate for safe sex, would benefit from use of women-centered products such as microbicides. Opportunities exist for use of multipurpose prevention technologies in prevention of both HIV and pregnancies, as well as education and rescue centers

## Useful Resources

- Samburu girl’s foundation: <http://www.samburugirls.foundation/issues/beading>
- Samburu Project Well Drilling Initiative-  
Changemakers: <https://www.changemakers.com/technologywomen/entries/samburu-project-well-drilling-initiative>
- Wasichana Wote Wasome Project 2013-2015(UKAID): <http://www.amurtafrica.org/index.php/news-and-updates/120-wasichana-wote-wasome-project-www-2013-2015-ukaid>

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