

Perception of the Rural Luo Community on Widow Inheritance and HIV/AIDs in Kenya: Towards Developing Risk Communication Messages

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Abstract

This paper explores the perception of the Luo community on widow inheritance and HIV/AIDS and examines the risk communication messages by recommending what successful risk communication messages should entail. The paper maintains that the practice of widow inheritance among the Luo community in Kenya should be reexamined due to the emergence of HIV/AIDS and the fact that Changes in the practice of widow inheritance has made women vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. Women's vulnerability need to be tackled for any progress to occur in the fight against HIV/AIDS and for the prosperity of the nation. This article has examined using a feminist lens. Women are often the 'bearers' of culture and, therefore, well positioned to be the agents of change now and in the future. A healthy population fosters development and stability. Theoretical approaches to bring to bear in this paper are Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM) and Social Learning theory and Cultural Interpretive Model. The article is located within the fields of risk, health and development communication. Through communication, women need to be empowered to make informed decisions.

Key words: HIV/AIDS, women vulnerability, wife inheritance, communication messages

Introduction

Traditional cultural practices reflect values and beliefs held by members of a community for periods often spanning generations. Different communities in the world have cultural practices specific to them, some of which are beneficial to all members while others are harmful to a specific group, such as women. Culture is not a static term; it is constantly transformed by overarching changes. In many African societies, the custom of widow inheritance had been practiced for centuries and is still common in some tribes. It is practiced in some communities in Kenya. This practice has been recorded in other African countries including Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Namibia and Uganda as well as parts of India (Maleche and Day 2011).

The Luo as a cultural group are found in South Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Ojwang' 2005:72). The Luo of Kenya speaks *Dholuo* and they live along the shores of Lake Victoria and spill into North Mara in Tanzania. They are found in the Diaspora in all major towns in East Africa and major cities of the world. The traditional political structure among the Luo revolves around *ot* (household), *dala/pacho* (homestead), *anyuola* (clan, extended family lineage system) *oganda* (nation) and *piny* (a conglomeration or nations) (Ogotu 2007). The household is headed by the woman and is made up of a mother and her children. The homestead is headed by a man and is made up of a man, his wives, children and other people living with him in the homestead. The Luo Nation is headed Council of elders under the leadership of *Ker*. Through the act of marriage, an individual became a wife/husband or daughter/son to a household, a homestead, a clan or the nation. The woman was, therefore, not only a wife to the husband but also a wife of the household, homestead and clan. This is an indication that marriage was not a husband and wife affair but an entire extended family affair. Death of a spouse did not dissolve marriage; therefore, the woman remains (*chi liel*) wife of the grave. Therefore, a woman should not remarry but have an inheritor (Nyarwath, 2012).