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Socio – cultural and family change in Africa: Implications for adolescent socialization in Kisii County, South Western, Kenya

Joseph Misati Akuma¹

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the individual and institutional responses to the changing cultural landscape in rural south western Kenya. These changes result not only from new conditions in worldwide economic, political and cultural relations, but also human interactions within national and local contexts. By concentrating solely on the family, the findings indicate that the local people have responded by: firstly, abandoning some of their traditional norms and replacing them with modern values, giving rise to problems as these new values are either partially or totally incompatible with present local circumstances. Secondly, blending previously accepted social values with emerging ones is fraught with great difficulties. As is observed, whereas a solution lies in abandoning the 'moribund' values and continuing with those that are necessary for modern living, the common practice in the study area has been to discard the more important component of the values. This is illustrated by, for example, "shedding off" the educational component and concentrating on the role of boys' and girls' genitals in rites of passage with far reaching implications on the socialization of the young people in the community. In the same vein, the spontaneous elimination of the "institutional defense mechanisms", which traditionally served to provide individuals with the ability to adapt normally to psychological, social and physical environments and protect the society from disruption, has led to the disintegration of traditional family and marriage systems. This has led to a social crisis with all indications pointing to the emergence of a generation of young people totally unprepared to fit into contemporary society.

In Kenya, as in the other regions of the world, the combined impact of the local and complex phenomenon of globalization has been shaping the socio – economic and cultural environment, leading to the transformations of major social institutions, with that of the family becoming the most affected and the cultural norms, socialization processes and values also being affected. This article discusses the impact of social change on the institution of the family in

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south-western Kenya. It outlines the major changes experienced in terms of social organization and how these have worked in altering the “cultural terrain” which served to provide the prerequisites for adolescent socialization inherent within the traditional family system. This system is comprised of kin with mutual obligations and responsibilities whose inherent traditions served to maintain family life. It is hypothesized that the instability experienced due to the abrupt cultural changes is likely to have adverse implications for child and youth development (Sandstrom & Huerta, 2013). As a result, the role of configurations and trajectories towards functional adulthood are severely impaired, leading to negative outcomes in the important process of acquiring roles and values across the social, emotional, cognitive and personal domains.

Data for this article was obtained in a field study conducted in Masaba South Sub County during the period of May to August in 2013 and March and July, 2014. As one of the nine Sub - Counties that form the larger Kisii county, it covers an area of 161.9 Km² with a total population of 122,087 people, comprised of 57,653 males and 64,417 females (KNBS, 2013). The choice of the study area was informed by the paradox that whereas kisii county is considered to be among the most highly productive regions in the country, whose land is classified as high potential, the area continues to record high levels of negative socialization outcomes as demonstrated by the high school drop-out, unemployment and HIV infection rates among young people (Republic of Kenya, 2014). The study involved a total of 24 focus group discussions and key informant interviews among men, women and adolescents.

Background

At the beginning of the first decade of the twentieth century when the British colonialists began to establish their authority over Gusii - land around 1907 the social institutions were not as differentiated as they are today, but the community's social life was based solely on kinship and patriarchal authority (Mayer, 1974; Silberschmidt, 1999). Since then, the institution of the family has continued to experience strains and shortages with the home, hitherto regarded as being responsible for maintaining basic social order and a refuge of harmony, serenity and understanding, now becoming the site of confrontation between people of different ages and genders having diverse personal ideologies and social affiliations (Ocholla-Ayayo, 2000). The contemporary transformations have largely been attributed to industrialization, urbanization, educational expansion, demographic change and monetization, all of which have altered the structure of the family relationships in important ways (Dyson, 1987).

Popnoe (1998) has observed that, it is at the family level that the society feels more acutely the pain of change. In the 1970's, Shorter (1975) described the emerging postmodern family as characterized by, among other qualities, the youth's indifference to the family's identity. Similarly, Gergen (1991) has described the emerging family as the "saturated family", whose members feel their lives scattering in intensified "busyness". In addition to absorbing exposure to myriad values, attitudes, opinions, lifestyles, and personalities, family members have become embedded in a multiplicity of relationships. The technologies of "social saturation" have created turmoil, a sense of fragmentation, chaos and discontinuities. In Kenya, the family is the basic unit in which norms and values, beliefs, and practical skills are first imparted to the young members of the society for their future survival as functional adults. However, as Furlong and Cartmel (2007: 8-9) put it:

"Young people today are growing up in different circumstances to those experienced by previous generations; Changes which are significant enough to merit a reconceptualization of youth transitions and processes of social reproduction."

The role of the family is crucial in the development of young people as it provides the initial arena within which the needs of the individual and the requisites of the social structure are confronted. For instance, parents' influence over their children is highest when they are younger, with the influence reducing as they grow older and it is replaced by other agents such as the mass media and peers. Whereas today, television, radio and internet are the most prominent sources of information on sexual and reproductive health, 26.7 % of the country's young people have no source of reproductive health information (Omweno *et al*, 2015).

Among the critical health problems young people face are those associated with sexuality and reproductive health. According to fertility data in Kenya, the total fertility rate increases from age 15 and peaks at 24 before it starts declining. Adolescents are up to three times more likely to experience pregnancy related complications than older women. Overall, the HIV prevalence rate among the youth aged 15-24 is high, and by age 24 women are 5.2 times more likely to be infected by HIV/AIDS. In Kenya, the age of first sexual intercourse has been rising consistently, while STI infection rates have been rising dramatically for men and women aged 15-24 years (KNHRC, 2012).

The family institution

As is explained above, families play a key role and a primary influence on the development of children. Thus, supporting parents to improve early childhood development has been identified

as a crucial step in improving adolescent health as health and healthy behaviours correspond strongly from childhood to adolescence and into adulthood (Brockman, 2003). Although it is during adolescence that young people transition from dependent children to young adults, who function autonomously, studies show that the primacy of the family continues to play a key role as a predictor of positive outcomes across cultures (Russel, 2002; Steinberg, 2001; Zarrett *et al*, 2006). In a study investigating the importance of the early years in establishing positive future trajectories among young people and the link between social capital and health related outcomes, McPherson *et al* (2013) found out that nearly half of all the investigated associations in relation to the family were positive. Specifically, it was indicated that children and the youth living in a two-parent household reported a better outcome. Moreover, children and adolescents benefit from having a positive relationship with their parents and being raised in a family where good communications are present and the young person feels supported and nurtured (Wang *et al*, 2011; Atkins, 2002).

However, with the onset of several dramatic structural changes unfolding in African family life over the past five decades, various scenarios have been witnessed. Chief among these include: single-parent families, higher divorce rates and female-headed households. An important question to ask is how these changes have influenced the adolescent-parent relations and wellbeing. Larson *et al*, (2002) observe that although public discussions worldwide take the form of “discourse on the disintegration of the family”, evidence indicates multiple trends that have both positive and negative implications alike. For instance, with regard to parent–adolescent relationships and exchange, there has been more economic investment in children, greater investment of time and emotional support in children, parents have become less authoritarian, and there is more equitable treatment of the boy and girl child, while reduced parental authority and control and family violence against children have persisted.

Be that as it may, popular literature and the media frequently attribute the high rates of teenage sexual activity, teenage pregnancy, alcohol, drug and substance abuse to “the inabilities of the family”, often citing low levels of parent-adolescent interaction and high levels of family conflict. Other studies show that marital dissolution and reconstitution disrupts the primary bonds between parents and children, thus causing severe physical, cognitive and behavioural problems for children (Harkonen, 2013). Similarly, marital disruption affects the academic progress and leads to behavioral and emotional problems among young people.

In developing countries, the responsibilities of taking care of the household are still commonly placed in the hands of women. Hence, the family circumstances of women as homemakers will definitely affect the wellbeing of the other co-residents, especially young people. With the exposure to western family norms, the traditional extended family systems that

supported unmarried mothers, such as those who never married, are divorced, or widowed, have virtually disappeared. This has led to the emergence of female-headed households and consequently put women in a more difficult financial situation and has caused more trouble in socializing children (Kayongo – Male, Onyango, 1984).

Some aspects and consequences of contemporary transformations of the family and Social change in Masaba region, Kenya

Prior to experiencing structural and organizational changes that not only radically altered the structures of society but also enlarged the scale of relationships, the rural communities had well-structured institutions with “each member of society’s position defined by formal rules of conduct with regard to each family member”. According to the well documented works of early anthropologists², the traditional family was essentially self-sufficient and effectively facilitated the process of socialization, specifically through initiation from childhood to adulthood by equipping the young members of society with necessary knowledge and life skills (Nyairo and Kamaara, 2010). However, due to the impacts associated with modern economic conditions, increased educational opportunities and the impact of mass media, the institution of the family has come under considerable pressure leading to changes in its fundamental cultural values (Shakeela *et al*, 2014).

According to Kalu (1981), the aforementioned has largely triggered the occurrence of competition between those who ascribe to the traditional and modern family patterns respectively, with the majority of the older members of society defending the former, leading to a dichotomy. On one hand, there has been a race towards the abandonment of the traditional practices for modern ones, while at the same time tending towards merging them with modern norms and values (Inglehart and Baker, 2000). Whichever the case, the data obtained from the study’s respondents indicated difficulties with both. According to the local county director for culture, by abandoning the societies’ cultural values, the young members of society are at a disadvantage: He says: “*Modern educational institutions that have replaced the traditional methods for inculcating cultural values into the young members of society place a lot of emphasis*

² Among the ethnographical works that portray the indigenous and effectively functioning societies are those by: Wagner Gunter *The Bantu of western Kenya with specific reference to the vugusu and logoli*. Oxford, Oxford University press, 1949. Iona Mayer “The Gusii of Western Kenya” in Molnos, Angela. *The cultural Source material for population planning in East Africa*. Nairobi. East African publishing House, 1973. and Levine, Robert and Levine, Sarah. *Nyansongo: A gusii community*. New York, Willey publishers, 1966. and. Kenyatta, Jomo *Facing Mount Kenya*. New York, Random House. 1965.

on wealth acquisition and upward mobility in today's society at the expense of imparting morals and values"

On the other hand, blending the application of modern values is fraught with danger and has been found to be responsible for the many problems prevalent in society as far as adolescent socialization is concerned. For instance, among the Abagusii³, the initiation ceremonies that were conducted in society were accompanied by initiation ceremonies and rituals. For both sexes, the ceremonies were organized on the basis of "*risaga*"⁴ and, while it involved genital operations⁵, it consisted of a myriad of ritual teachings whose sole purpose was to introduce the young initiates into adult life. The initiation ceremonies emphasized education for self - reliance in boys and detailed sex education in preparation for marriage for girls. Additionally, as Monyenye (1977) puts it, "the rites were of great educational significance since they opened the door into the mysteries of life and enable the youth to learn co-operation, endurance, courage, communal living, tolerance and the secrets and mysteries of man – woman sexual relationships".

Today, while the aforementioned practice is universally practiced in the study area, it can hardly be said to have any slight semblance of its previous version. Thus, its utility has been considered ineffective. This was observed as follows: "*Today's children are secretly taken to hospital for the operation and left to go home like any other patient, without being taught important matters of life that previously used to go hand in hand with initiation. The initiates who are products of today's initiation cannot differentiate their mother and sister nor father and brother...* "⁶

Despite the existence of Kenyan laws prohibiting its practice, according to the KDHS (2008/9) data, Female Genital Cutting (FGC) has remained consistently high in the study area and recorded at 97%, 95.9% and 96.1 % in the periods 1998, 2003 and 2008/9 respectively (Republic of Kenya, 2011). However, the circumcision of boys, which is culturally and legally accepted, is universally practiced and when boys reach the age of eight, they undergo circumcision. In both cases, in spite of its near universal prevalence, the rites in the form of male circumcision and Female Genital Cutting is performed without any rituals nor serious social

³ This is the name of the ethnic affiliation of the Bantu speaking people inhabiting the study area. They are variously referred to as the Kisii tribe.

⁴ Literally translated to mean a "party" or involving everybody in the community and as Meyer (1952) observes in such a ceremony "nobody remained altogether unconcerned".

⁵ The boys underwent the act of circumcision involving the removal of the foreskin, while the girl child was subjected to the act of clitoridectomy. In his discussion of the reasons for the application of the initiatory pain, Monyenye (1977) justifies the necessity for the initiatory change into manhood but questions the fact that the rites of passage were to be such a terrible ordeal which in the modern world can be likened to "torture". Conversely, the subjecting of girls to the act of Female Genital Cutting has been found to cause unacceptable harm and has health, ethical and legal consequences.

⁶ Interview with a key informant at Suguta market on 8/ 7/2014.

training, with the majority of the young initiates being operated on at the hospital (Njue and Askew, 2004). According to a key informant, the operation of the genitals that is devoid of any form of teaching is a fatal flaw. He asserts: *“The physical operation (traditionally) was just but a stamp or certificate to ascertain that the young person has received the education necessary for adult living. In the skipping of the training while the initiates undergo the cut does not therefore serve any meaningful purpose but just an exercise in futility. The children are, therefore, made to grow ‘masomberera.’”*⁷

As for FGM, the major reason for the non-inclusion of the educational activities is because the practice has “gone underground” and is now performed in secrecy (Okemwa *et al*, 2014). During the field study, while the female respondents freely and proudly indicated that the practice of FGC was of utmost importance to their community due to its socio-cultural value⁸, nobody was willing to disclose that it was presently being undertaken in the society. This is mainly due to fear of apprehension by the authorities as the practice is criminalized under Kenyan law. However, once the respondents gained confidence in me due to my prolonged stay in the field site, they all confided in me that the rite was going on normally in the villages, but without the fanfare and the prolonged seclusion that was characteristic of the ritual in the past.

In their detailed account of the social organization of the Gusii community, Levine and Levine (1959) portray a situation of male domination and female subordination as a cultural rule governing husband–wife relations in the community. They write: *“Ideally a wife should obey her husband at all times and be deferential to him.... She should consult him before she takes any important decision.”*

However, in her recent analysis of male–female relations generally and specifically on how gender identities are formulated, Silberschmidt (1999) discovered that socio-economic and cultural change has had an immense impact on gender relations in modern Gusii households. Disputing the commonly held contention among social scientists that rural women have suffered more severely from the negative impacts of modernization compared to men (Karani, 1987; Gray & Kervane, 1999), in Kisii, the “changes have affected men more deeply than women with their roles and identities challenged and undermined with those of women strengthened in some ways”. The dismantling of the “male hegemony” is as a result of the breakdown of the traditional cultural base and social institutions that supported it.⁹ At the family level, the men are unable to

⁷ Interview with Mzee James Matundura Araka at Kiamokama Village on 29/07-/2014. “Masomberera” literally implies “not well-formed or standing on a shaky ground”.

⁸Culturally, it served in forming social and sexual identity and is assumed to destroy the sexual excitability and prevent loose behavior.

⁹According to Silberschmidt (2001) the patriarchal system resides in the fact that male authority requires a material base and that male responsibility is culturally and normatively constituted.

pay the much prized bride wealth and cohabitation is now the norm rather than the exception. Partly due to the lack of guaranteed right to inherit ancestral land, chronic unemployment and the inability for men to automatically assume the role of the breadwinner, men have been reduced to just “figure heads”. This has resulted in: *“women (being) the sole providers of the material needs of the household (and) the men’s identity coming under threat as their social value, identity and sense of self-esteem comes under threat. Antagonism between men and women is rife.”*

Among others, the negative consequences of male disempowerment have been the failure by local men (fathers) to provide for basic needs of their families. In the words of a female respondent: *“most of our husbands (men) do not bother to provide for our daily needs (food, soap etc). It is we (women) who are left to struggle on our own to fend for the needs of the entire family, including those of our husbands(men).”*¹⁰

Overall, the changes have been brought about by the expansion of the small holder production, with the agricultural tasks left solely in the hands of women, thus displacing men from the livelihood structural framework, whilst holding the title of the acknowledged household head. These findings resonate well with those obtained earlier by Silberschmidt (2001) in her study in the locality in which women respondents aired their concerns that *“a woman is better off without a husband ...a husband is like an extra baby in the house Our sons have nobody to take as a model”*

On their part, the male (men) respondents complained bitterly that their wives (women) had become difficult to govern and hence, ruined their homesteads. In my interviews with the male respondents (fathers), there were recurrent assertions to the effect that: *“The women of today have lost respect for their husbands, women of today are always trying to usurp the powers of the head”*, *“women forget that since the time of our forefathers, the man is the head while the woman should be satisfied with her position as the neck”*. The above state of affairs was blamed on the younger men, whom the older men accused of having let their wives dominate their homes. Our informants (both men and women) told us that such individuals did not voluntarily give in to assisting their wives, but were doing so as a result of the influence of a local concoction (secretly administered on them by their wives), locally known by the name *“Kababa”*. It was specifically of great concern to their mothers and such men were the subject of ridicule and were, in most cases, excluded from the company of their peers in the region. This is interesting as it shows how individuals can go to great lengths to interpret social change within the prism of superstition, which as Geschiere (2000) and Green (2005) argue are a reaction to modernization and discourses emerging mainly from contemporary inequalities.

¹⁰Focus group discussion participant for women at Giensembé village on 16/07/2014

Generally, most men are upset with the prevailing situation and this has given rise to the heightened scale of domestic oppugnancy characterized by men's loss of control over their households. In retaliation, the men have often resorted to aggression, and domestic violence is the norm rather than the exception. In addition, to make up for the supposed humiliation suffered in the hands of their wives, our respondents informed us that the men have resorted to extra marital affairs and excessive drinking of local liquor. This trend has also been reported in central province of Kenya, where high levels of alcohol consumption have been linked to mental disorders among household male heads (Nacada, 2010; Basangwa *et al*, 2006). In situations of perpetual disharmony within the household as shown by our data, the emotional climate of the family remains unfavorable for child and adolescent upbringing, thereby exposing young people to adjustment difficulties. According to Cummings and Davies (1994), the family is an important context in which young people learn to manage emotions. Frequent and aggressive parental conflict is detrimental to the smooth acquisition of problem solving strategies in young people and conflict within a marriage often leads to aggressive behavior among young people. All in all, the outcome of the socialization experiences of infants, children and adolescents will depend on whether a harmonious or conflictual marital relationship exists at the household level (McHale *et al*, 2002).

Moreover, the spontaneous elimination of the "institutional defense mechanisms"¹¹ due to the rapid socio-economic, cultural and demographic processes has led to the disintegration of the traditional family and marriage systems. This has resulted in further vulnerability of women and children as new forms of family organization have arisen. In rural Kenya, this clearly manifests itself in the form of increased elopements and informal unions. Opposing Silberschmidt's theory, Hakkansson (1994) sees the "detachability" of female gender from their natal lineage of birth and their consequent attachment to the husband's lineage as only serving to accord her an ambiguous identity. This situation is most critical in the Gusii society in which "proper marriage"¹² is imperative to women's gender identity as the payment of bride; wealth accords the woman's status as a wife and sister. In the present circumstances, therefore, majority of the women (mothers) cannot exercise their rights in their natal family. More so, in the absence of the accomplishment of the aforementioned, the women(s) social network for managing family crises are completely absent and they can, therefore, not effectively provide for the wellbeing of the

¹¹For a detailed discussion of this concept see, Akonga, J. "Psychosocial and institutional defense mechanisms in times of social change". In *African families and the crisis of social change*. T. Weisner, C. Bradley & P. Kilbride, PP 11- 17. London: Bergin and Garvey, 1997.

¹² Here I mean for a marriage to be sanctioned, customarily, the payment of dowry in the form of livestock or money from the husband's family to that of the wife socially defines the "woman" and "man" as "mother" and "father" respectively. My respondents confirmed that, although many of the social relationships that were traditionally regulated by customary law and norms have been discarded, this particular one has been quite resilient.

members of their households, especially the young offspring. This is attributed to the fact that when masculinity is undermined, the status of women is made more fragile. Kaplan (1992), a feminist theorist, attributes this to the “see-saw effect”, which in its nature allows women to succeed in one arena but suffer backlash in others. Thus, while the current socio-economic transformations have worked to the advantage of women, the community’s patriarchal culture, which recognizes men as the owners of land and monopolizes cash crops, makes their position in society precarious.

The impact of social transformation of the family on adolescent socialization in Masaba

So far, we have seen that the rapid socio-economic and cultural changes taking place globally have been felt locally and hence their impacts on the major social institutions have had far reaching consequences. In the subsequent section, we examine the effects that these changes have brought about and the impact that they have had on raising young people in the Gusii community.

Parent-adolescent interaction

According to Daniel Bell (1968), sociologically and intellectually, no individual is able to live in the same kind of world as that inhabited by their parents and their grandparents. However, in the past, the traditions and cultural values of the communities were handed down from one generation to the other through initiation and established ritualized routines. In most societies, there existed a common body of knowledge and morality that was passed down from one generation to the other. With rapid modernization and social change, the present generation of young people have experienced a radical rupture with the past. Furthermore, the task of preparing the young members of society for life in the future is laden with challenges. The parents believe that today’s norms are not worthy passing on to the young members of society. These sentiments were echoed in the words of a respondent: *“Today’s culture is foreign and what is not yours will destroy you as it is not appropriate to serve your needs. The problem is that in most cases the child finds himself exposed to a mix of cultures leading to confusion.”*¹³

Hence, the challenge lies in an older generation preparing a younger generation for an “unknown future”. As Tallman *et al* (1983: 3) argues, the current generations of parents are not well placed to prepare today’s young people the future life.

Earlier, Kingsley Davis (1940) observed that among other sociological factors, the rate of social change was the single most important variable related to the extra-ordinary amount of

¹³ Interview with Mzee James Matundura Araka on 29/07/2014 at Kiamokama Village.

parent–adolescent conflict. He pointed out that “parents in a relatively static society would have less difficulty than those in one in which social change is rapid and deep and that in such a society parents could be closer to their children, since the generation gap could be minimized”. Moreover, parents could only need to produce children like themselves as the models do not change so often and in such a drastic manner as they do (in contemporary society). Surprisingly, it emerged that the current crop of parents are not equipped at all to provide guidance to their children. According to one of the respondents: *“The current generation of the parents (of these children) have also grown up without information. They have nothing much to offer to their children and it’s like a blind person given the task of leading another blind person”*¹⁴

Similarly, in a rapidly changing and pluralistic society, young people often question the parents’ prescription of what ideally constitutes “morally acceptable” and “good” behavior due to “parent–adolescent (dis)similarity” (Cashmore *et al*, 1985). In their study among 547 Israeli adolescents aged 16-18 years, Schwartz *et al* (2003) set out to empirically test factors that determine acceptance of parents’ values as they are imparted to the young people. The findings of the study indicated that the inaccuracy of the perception of parents’ values correlated positively with value conflict and the parents’ autocratic and indifferent parenting. The value conflict is attributed to the differences in the “social content”, which leads to “loss of mutual identification” and the parent is unable to “catch up” with the child’s point of view. The parents of adolescents expressed their sentiments thus: *“as the children of today do not lend an ear to the advice from us (their parents) we have given up and left them on their own because they do not heed the advice of the elders (parents).”*¹⁵

Additionally, the prevailing standards within the generations become confusing. Kingsley (2011) observes that in the end *“faced with conflicting goals, parents become inconsistent and confused in their own minds in rearing their children and the acceptance of parental attitudes is less complete than (previously)”*. This loss of the parents’ niche” is mainly attributed to the rise of the mass media (Walker *et al*, 2012).

Traditionally, socialization and child upbringing were the preserve of the larger kin group as well as parents. Today, the function is increasingly being taken over by the educational institutions (schools and teachers). As already pointed out, another important change being experienced today is the proliferation of single-parent families. In the modern context, the single parent family is becoming a common phenomenon and as Usdansky (2009) notes, the transformation of the single-parent family from a marginalized rarity to an established family form was one of the most important transformations of the twentieth century. Young adults raised

¹⁴ Focus Group Discussion participant at Sosera dispensary grounds on 15/07/2014.

¹⁵ Focus Group Discussion with parents at Geteri primary school on 11/7/2014.

by single parents tend to have lower educational, occupational and economic attainment, and have an increased likelihood that their marriages will fail (Olson, 2011). Furthermore, the absence of a parent results in inadequate parental guidance and lack of attention and places a double burden on the single parent who has to cope both as a mother and a father.

Multiple socialization agents and dissonance

The family institution, which was traditionally considered as playing the dominant role as well as the sole agent in an individual's interpersonal life, has undergone tremendous changes in terms of size, composition and connections to other social institutions (Caldwell, 1982; Dolan, 1995; Taki, 2001). In modern society, the competing authorities of the family, educational institutions (schools), the peer group and the media all tell the youth "what and how he or she should think and behave". Worse still; fathers and mothers are always in competition among themselves in seeking to influence their children (LeMasters and Defrain, 1989) providing contradictory information to the young people. According to a male focus group participant at Ichuni area: *"The mother(s) are always struggling to win the children to their side, especially the boys and when this happens (as it always does), the boys look down upon the fathers' advice and engage in bad behaviours of all types in the community."*¹⁶

An important trend among adolescents is that they spend increasing large amounts of time using electronic media (Chaves and Anderson, 2008: 279). The mainstream media (television, music, magazines, movies and the internet) rarely depict sexually responsible models. On their part, schools have been found to contribute to the ineffectiveness of sexuality education by concentrating on the provision of information about the dangers of sexual activities. Monk (2001) argues that such messages reinforce the notion that sexuality is risky and is something that should not be freely enjoyed, and "positions young people as lacking in agency and is unlikely to appeal to their sense of exercising power". This denies the young people a sense of empowerment and a positioning as autonomous sexual subjects capable of negotiation of safer sex practices (Allen, 2007). Noting that the media brings forth a multitude of good with it in such areas as education and research, a key informant asserted that "the major problem in Kenya has been the failure on the part of the parents to take up their role in guiding their children on how to harness the benefits of the media".¹⁷ However, as explained by participants in a study examining the use and impact of digital and social media among adolescents in Kenya, the parents were reported to have done so by "instilling fear" instead of informative conversations without providing explanations for their restrictions. Thus, "the more the parents try to control the young people, the more the adolescents get attracted to what is prohibited, as they do not provide them education on their

¹⁶ Focus group discussion participant at Ichuni parish grounds on 9/07/2014

¹⁷ Interview with Dr. Selvam Sahaya at Tangaza College, Karen on 04/12/2014.

“digital safety”. Moreover, partly due to the digital knowledge divide between the young people and their parents, the parents become fearful (especially those of girls aged 12 to 14); consequently, the young people feel a greater need to rebel and entrench their digital use.

Adolescents' self-socialization

As explained above, an important development in the socialization of young people in society is the emergence of the internet, which has stepped in to partially replace the usual traditional “adult socialization” agents, effectively resulting in a “self-socialization process” and identity development. Studies have shown that the self-socialization on the co-constructed world of adolescents' social space is fraught with “risky behaviours” (McCabe *et al*, 2012). Among the harmful effects are those touching on: violent behaviors; alcohol, drug and substance use (Slatter *et al*, 2010); sexual activities (Jochen *et al*, 2008) and child obesity (Beaudoin, 2014). What is more, as adolescents have greater control over their media choices, they end up choosing from a diverse range of media materials. Consequently, as they often lack integration in their socialization, they end up receiving different socialization messages from the media and peers than they do from the adult socializers in their environment (Arnett, 1995).

Research has shown that the media provides young people with material that has contents which conflicts with the basic values of society, at least as is believed by parents, and an unrealistic portrait of the world. For instance, violent acts are rampant in television commercial advertisements with majority of those camouflaged by the simultaneous presence of humour (Gulas *et al*, 2010). Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of this is that the youths draw inspiration from these and attempt to replay such in real life, with some instances, involving murder (Dogra, 1994). The “profit motive” has been the main reason for its commercial nature with the ultimate test for their effectiveness being how “much money they make and not what they do to people” (Ganesh *et al*, 2005). The result has been the proliferation of media and its accompanying consequences on the life of the young members of society. Hence, left on their own, and relying mainly on the media and the peer group, the young people are forced to design their own world and a separate system which, according to Clark (2004), has created the most serious and yet unstudied social crisis in the contemporary world.

Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, it has emerged that the ongoing cultural and social changes negatively impact on the socialization of young people in South - Western Kenya. The society has been shown to respond to the said transformation by either attempting to abandon the prevailing traditional norms and customs, replacing them with modern ones or, in some cases, adopting part

of the norms and values, while simultaneously abandoning some aspects of the age-old practices. Nonetheless, the adopted alternatives have served to negatively affect the normal functioning of the institution of the family in its socializing role, effectively leading to a situation in which children and young people are growing up without benefitting from the necessary guidance and information as they move towards adulthood. Moreover, the impacts of the said unprecedented socio-economic and cultural changes have worked to undermine and erode the society's institutions' capacity to enhance resilience and continuity. It is recommended that any strategies geared towards improving youth empowerment must take into account how socio-economic changes have affected the traditional socialization pathways.

Five decades since the country attained its independence Kenya has not had a single explicit family policy, save for the development and adoption of a population policy and numerous other sectoral policies which seek to integrate population concerns into development, a feat that has remained far from being accomplished, especially at the grassroots and regional levels (Rombo *et al*, 2014). The devolution of relevant portfolios, such as those of culture and social services accords the respective regional governments an opportunity to prioritize and actualize the initiatives necessary for engaging the key institution of the family in empowering the young people so as to enhance their contribution to development.

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