

AN EXPLORTION INTO THE FAMILY
RELATIONSHIP PATTERNS OF THE
AGIKUYU BASED ON THIR
CUSTOMARY CHILD NAMING
SYSTEM

By

Summie Mwai

MA UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

INTRODUCTION

- **Naming systems are common in the world and they are determined by a community's customs and or their religious beliefs**
- **The Agikuyu(people of the Kikuyu community in Kenya)name their children after their ancestors.**
- **The first two sons are named after the parents' fathers while the first two daughters are named after the parents' mothers, starting with the father's side. Subsequent children are named after parents' siblings**

Justification and motivation of the study

- **The Agikuyu have viewed each other as literal representations of those they are named after. This significantly influences family relationships but not much attention has been paid to the impact the naming system has on this relationships.**
- **The study was driven by personal experience of the impact of the child naming system on relationships**

Objectives of the study

- **To establish what influences if any, the Agikuyu child naming system has in the way the Agikuyu relate with themselves and others**
- **To explore the views of the Agikuyu on the continuity of their child naming system into the future**
- **To establish whether counselling has a place among the Agikuyu with regards to their naming system**

Methodology

- **Qualitative research with a inclusion of a qualitative approach for generality and better understanding of the situation**
- **Focus Group Discussion with three female and three male respondents between ages 25 to 65.**
- **Email questionnaire which received 23 responses**

Findings

- **All FGD participants admitted to having positive or negative experiences because of their Kikuyu names. Their relationships with their parents and their relatives were somehow determined by whom they were named after.**
- **Those who experienced the naming system positively exhibited a high self esteem while those who experienced it negatively had struggled with a general poor self concept**

Findings cont...

- **The FGD participants who have children have followed the customary child naming system and all apart from one claimed to relate with their children equally without consideration of whom the children were named after. One of them said he wanted to prove that it is possible to use the naming system and love your children equally**
- **One of the participants said he had a very special relationship with his last born son, named after his late brother with whom he had a very special relationship.**

Findings cont...

- **One FGD respondent strongly supported the continuation of the naming system into the future saying it offered a connection to the family and the tribe**
- **One other respondent said he did not find anything wrong with the naming system in itself but the significance, value and meaning attached to it.**
- **Another respondent having experienced both positives and negatives of the naming system desired that people be free to choose how to name their children without obligations to the naming system.**

Findings cont...

- **Two of the respondents were adamantly against the continuity of the customary naming system saying it had very little good to offer the Agikuyu.**
- **The other respondent said she did not think the naming system connected the Agikuyu to the tribe claiming one does not belong to a particular tribe because of a name.**

Questionnaire responses

- **67%** **Would like the naming system to continue**
- **29%** **Did not want the naming system to continue**
- **4%** **Did not care whether it continued or not**

Outcomes of the study

- **The naming system has had a strong impact on one's self concept**
- **Many family divisions could be attributed to the naming system**
- **There remains a strong attachment to the naming system for the Agikuyu**
- **Many Agikuyu desire that the naming system continues into the future**

Counselling

Counselling as an intervention did not feature in the FGD. Most members chose to deal with their issues on their own.

The respondent who had the worst experience of the naming system chose to heal himself by reaching out to his father and loving him inspite of his rejection of him.

Counselling cont...

The emailed questionnaire respondents dealt with their issues as follows:

8% thought through it on their own

4% talked to their parents about it

4% discussed it with their relatives

83% did nothing about it

Counselling as an intervention

- **Healing for the individual**
- **Empowerment**
- **Confronting irrational beliefs**
- **Family therapy for healing and reconciliation**
- **Group work for various community groups**

Conclusion

The study found out that generally the Agikuyu value their naming system for:

- **Posterity for the tribe**
- **Unification and ethnic identity**
- **Connects the living to the living dead**
- **Continuity of family lineages**

Majority of them desire the continuity of the naming system into the future

Thank you