

Cultural Continuity as a  
Determinant of Girls  
Sexual Health Education

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# Introduction

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- Cultural continuity is the spread of cultural heritage from one generation to another and includes the means by which that transmission is done.
- It stems from cultural connectedness and it explains the importance of ‘inter-generational cultural connectedness, which is maintained through intact families and communities and the engagement of elders who pass traditions to subsequent generations’

# Problem Statement:

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- An indigenous initiation school is defined as a type of institution that offers education which is sacred and symbolises the end of being a teenager and an entry into adulthood
- Initiation schools serve as institutions where teenage girls and boys are taught morals, life skills and sexuality health education
- South Africa indigenous initiation schools started decreasing during colonialism around 1822 due to the introduction of western schooling.
- In African culture, it is a taboo for parents to discuss issues of sexuality with their offspring these issues are left to be discussed at indigenous initiation schools as custodians of such knowledge.

# Problem Statement

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- The valuable guidance provided for adolescent girls going into adulthood is conducted by contemporary institutions such as the church, schools, non-profit organisations (through peer education) and the media.
- This has created a vacuum as the sexual health education offered by these institutions is not targeted and inclusive.

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## Research Question

- What is the role of indigenous initiation schools in promoting cultural continuity and as a determinant of girls' sexual health education?

## Research Objectives

- To explore and describe the indigenous practices promoting sexuality health education.

# Research Method

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Leininger's Theory of Culture Care



Qualitative Approach



Ethnonursing Design

# Research Method

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## Context:

- The study was conducted in the Vhembe district located in the northern part of Limpopo

## Entry into the setting:

- Community of practice
- Gate keeper

## Sampling:

- Purposive and snowballing sampling were used in this study.

# Data Collection

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- Rational for using the ethnonursing method
- Willingness to (un)learn
- Capturing of information
- Reflections
- Research mentoring

# Discussion Of The Findings

Theme	Sub themes
The role of indigenous initiation schools	Purposeful teachings
	Promoting abstinence
	Sexual health education

# The Role Of Indigenous Initiation Schools- Purposeful teachings

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- Young women were taught by the elders at the initiation school to guard their virginity.

‘Yes, the teachings at initiation school were very useful and essential. The main thing was to teach girls to stay away from boys when it comes to sexual matters.’ (Key informant 1)

- The young girl was prepared for marriage and the act of sexual intercourse:

‘The common purpose was to prepare girls for adulthood ... mostly issues of intercourse in order to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies were discussed.’ (Focus group 2)

# The Role Of Indigenous Initiation Schools- Promoting Abstinence

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- Initiation schools promoted abstinence through teachings, instilling fear and conducting regular virginity tests.

‘The most important rule was that we shouldn’t play with boys.’ (Focus group 2, Focus group 3, Key informant 2, Key informant 5 and Key informant 6)

- Abstinence from sexual intercourse was encouraged within the home.

‘This will start with your parents when you are still young, they would say don’t play with boys as they will injure you down there.’ (Key informant 9)

Girls abstained from sexual intercourse due to fear of being found to be non virgins at the initiation school.

# The Role Of Indigenous Initiation Schools- Sexual Education

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Sexual education was done through symbolism, metaphors, simulation and songs.

- The use of symbols such as clay pots and beads were used to teach girls about sexual purity.

‘When they accompany the initiate back home from **vhushani** they have a calabash full of beer inside. When the calabash lid is closed it means the girl is a virgin.’ (Key informant 4)

- Metaphors were also used to teach girls about the act of sexual intercourse.

‘The door is closed, which meant that a woman is pregnant. The door is half open, it means that the woman was pregnant but miscarried. When the door is wide open it meant that a woman has given birth.’ (Focus Group 1)

# The Role Of Indigenous Initiation Schools- Sexual Education

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Simulation was also used as a form of sexual health education:

- During **Ludodo** (a form of initiation school), girls were made to abduct their legs for long hours. Key informants verbalised that this was preparation the act of sexual intercourse and eventually child birth.

‘**Ludodo** is preparation for labour when a woman eventually falls pregnant after getting married.’

# Recommendations:

## 1. Culture care preservation or maintenance:

- Keeping the family at the center of sexual health education
  - Teaching young girls not to let people touch them beyond their thighs.
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## 2. Culture care accommodation or negotiation:

- Elders need to partner with midwives and nurses to give sexual health education in our health care facilities.
- Partnership between indigenous institutions and the church

## 3. Culture care repatterning or restructuring:

- Virginity testing

# Conclusion:

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The role of indigenous initiation schools for girls is to provide purposeful teachings, promote abstinence from sexual activities before marriage and sexual health education of girls. The continuity of initiation schools is threatened by modernisation. Indigenous leaders such as chiefs are central to the preservation of indigenous initiation schools. Collaboration between indigenous leaders and the church in teaching young girls about sexual health in an indigenous context is important to ensure cultural continuity. Promotion of this institution to young people involves educating young people about the significance of indigenous initiation schools for girls in sexual health.

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Thank You