

**Cultural Significance of Socio-economic and -demographic Variables with regard to
Indigenous education, pregnancy and childbirth among the Ndau People of
Zimbabwe**

Anniegrace M. Hlatywayo¹ and Hassan O. Kaya²

Abstract

The study used the case of the Ndau people to investigate the cultural meanings attached to socio-economic and demographic variables with regard to indigenous belief and practices on pregnancy and childbirth. Among the Ndau, age group, gender, marital status and education do not merely serve as statistical characteristics of research participants. They have cultural significance. For instance, Ndau women of the same age group tended to associate and share together information on privileges and responsibilities associated with pregnancy and childbirth. The institution of marriage defined the inception of the socially putative time for childbearing. The history and status of education among the Ndau was complete without the inclusion of indigenous ways of knowing and value systems. Ndau indigenous education had five philosophical foundations. These were preparationism, functionalism, communalism, perennialism and holism. The traditional education was predominantly informal using methods such as gender role play and folk media to inculcate cultural values. The Ndau also recognized the significance of Western formal education to meet the challenges of globalization. However, the study showed low levels of formal education among women and the elderly. This was attributed to the socio-cultural environment which favoured education of the boy child and the unstable political and economic environment during Zimbabwe's liberation struggle against colonial forces.

Key words: Age Group, Gender Relations, Marital Status, Education, philosophical foundations of education

¹ University of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa)

² University of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa); Email: kaya@ukzn.ac.za

Introduction

Pregnancy and childbirth are socially constructed events, marking an important period in the life of an African woman as they contribute to the continued existence of humankind. These two processes herald the beginning of a new life; the husband and wife are reproduced through their offspring and the living dead are reincarnated. As such, the period of pregnancy through to childbirth is marked by a myriad of beliefs and practices meant to preserve both the pregnant woman and the foetus. During this period of pregnancy through to childbirth, the pregnant woman is believed to be oscillating between life and death hence indigenous management models are put in place to protect the mother and to ensure the safe delivery of the child (Aubel, 2011).

Bassey (2012) emphasizes the importance of examining African reproductive cultural practices from the African perspectives. This is based on the observation that research in Africa on pregnancy and childbirth has conventionally been conducted from the disciplines of western medicine and pharmacology. Callister (2001) adds that within the disciplines of social sciences, the focus has been on the role of traditional birth attendants (TBAs) and the use of ethnomedicines in pregnancy and childbirth. As such, most of the findings pay specific attention to the risks involved whilst overlooking the important socio-cultural and therapeutic effects of indigenous practices for managing pregnancy and childbirth offer. Very little attention, if any, has been paid to the African indigenous cosmology on pregnancy and childbirth. The spiritual aspects pertaining to reproductive health which are an integral part and central to African indigenous knowledge systems tend to be marginalized. Chilisa (2012) looks at this marginalization within the context of postcolonial indigenous research as an effort to uncover, reclaim and bring to the fore the African cultural heritage in indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge production.

From a postcolonial perspective, Chinn (2007) has outlined that indigenous knowledge-based research is characterised by the following dimensions. Firstly, it targets a local phenomenon by focusing on local issues without using dominant Eurocentric theories to determine African concerns and perspectives. Secondly, it is context-sensitive, that is, it endeavours to create context relevant theories informed by local experiences. This advances the restoration and subsequent development of cultural practices, thinking patterns, beliefs, and values that were previously repressed but are still “relevant and necessary to the survival”

of African people. It is on the basis of the above considerations that this study concentrated on the experiences of the Ndau people of Chipinge District in Zimbabwe.

The study was motivated by the concern among the Ndau community that external researchers who have conducted research in the community have tended to view the community's socio-economic and demographic characteristics from a modern and Western perspectives. The cultural meaning and significance of these variables that are so much important to the Ndau people seem be ignored. These could only be understood through interaction with the community knowledge holders and practitioners. These perspectives were presented in the form of narratives which expressed local people's cultural experiences related to these variables. This study used the case of the Ndau people's indigenous knowledge systems to investigate the cultural meanings attached to socio-economic and demographic variables such as age group, gender, marital status educational levels and occupational status. This was examined within the context of beliefs and practices associated with pregnancy and childbirth.

Methods

Taking into consideration the multi-transdisciplinary and culturally-based nature of indigenous knowledge, the research design was predominantly qualitative. This research approach was appropriate for soliciting in-depth opinions of the research participants with regard to the research questions. Qualitative research comprises a number of characteristics that makes it most ideal for a study situated within a framework of indigenous knowledge. These characteristics include positioning the researcher in natural settings in order to record natural occurring events. Durrheim and co-workers (2006) stated that qualitative research data are collected in the form of written or spoken language and/or through observations that are recorded in a language. The qualitative approach allowed for more spontaneity and flexibility in exploring the meanings attached by the Ndau people on socio-economic and demographic variables related to beliefs and practices on pregnancy and childbirth.

Working together with local community leaders as community-gate keepers, a purposive sample of 45 community members (35 women and 10 men) as community knowledge holders and practitioners including traditional midwives participated in this study. Emphasis was on women because they are the ones directly involved in pregnancy and childbirth. Interactive research methods and techniques such as in-depth interviews and focus group

discussions (FGDs) were used to allow interaction between/among the knowledge holders and the researchers in order to share knowledge and experiences. A questionnaire was only used to collect the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the research participants.

In terms of data analysis, a phenomenological approach was adopted. This was ideal for the study because it is premised on the understanding of social reality as grounded in people's experiences. Through personal experience, phenomenological analysis explores dominant cultural understandings of phenomena and is capable of producing 'thick descriptions' of people's experiences or perspectives within their natural settings"

Lindegger (2006) has the view that all people exist in a dialectical relationship with their lived world of experience, and there can be no clear separation of self and world, or subject and object. This means that phenomenological research is concerned with bringing to the fore the subtle world of personal experiences embedded in people's lives. Accordingly, this world can only be realised through tapping into the consciousness of the people. Hence, phenomenology also demands that we defer our dominant understanding of phenomena and reconsider our instantaneous experience of them to allow new meanings to emerge. Prevailing understanding of phenomena is suspended in order to diffuse our current misconceptions. If current misconceptions are suspended, the result will be a new, fuller and renewed meaning of phenomena (Gray, 2004). This elaborated by Dawson (2007) who explains that according to a phenomenological perspective, truth is derived from human experience; it is multiple but bound by time, space and context. Under phenomenological analysis, a belief or claim from a particular culture different from one's own is held to be consistent and true. Collected data were analysed through identifying and categorising various themes. In quoting the participants, they have been given names, not their actual names to provide context to the presentation.

Results and Discussion

This study on the Indigenous knowledge, beliefs and practices on pregnancy and childbirth among the Ndau of Zimbabwe recognises that socio-economic and demographic information of cultural community such as the Ndau people of Chipinge District, Zimbabwe, does not merely serve to provide statistical data on the study participants but endeavours to uncover

the indigenous cultural meanings attached to these characteristics. Therefore, this section presents their cultural significance and meaning within the context of the local people cultural perspectives as derived through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

Age group

Among the Ndaou people, age-group is not just a number but it has important cultural significance attached to it within the local cultural community. The understanding that arose from the research participants was the respect paid to one's mental as opposed to chronological age. In addition, the elderly participants spoke of their age according to certain major events (for example the year of the great famine, the year of the locust-stricken drought etc.) and referred themselves to those sharing the same age group. People in the same age group shared commonalities with regard to their conceptualisation of the socio-economic, political and religious worldview. For example, the 65 and above age group possessed knowledge of the pre-colonial period hence they were conversant with the pre- and postcolonial conceptualisation on managing pregnancy and childbirth. This age group contributed to the continuity of knowledge production and sharing through their interpretation of the old and the new ways of managing pregnancy and childbirth in the community. Even though some of the study participants did not live in the pre-colonial period, through the knowledge transfer of the elders, they were able to explain how the postcolonial knowledge of pregnancy and childbirth differed from that of the past.

The importance attached to age group of a community member was explained by Mbuya Mwahlupa, one of the research participants in Chinaa village, who pointed out that more respect is given to a person's character as opposed to the actual number of years one possesses. She thus elaborated;

MuChindau chedu vasharuka avanyanyi kukoshesha kuti number yemakore ako asi kuti unhu hwako ndihwo hunokombese kukura kwako. Zvinokone kuti umweni muntu une makore makumi mashanu asi soro apana nezviripo kubeni umweni mudoko pamakore asi unotofunga kudarika ena ane makore akawanda

This is literally translated as:

In Ndaou indigenous culture, the elders do not pay much attention to one's number of years but a person's character reflects one's maturity. A person might be fifty years old but empty in the head while on the other hand a younger person may have wisdom that surpasses that of a fifty year old.

This was also confirmed by Mbuya Kudzionera in Maria Village, who revealed that age is measured by one's wisdom which manifests in personal conduct, dealing with others and one's contribution to the family and the wider society. An elderly participant, Mbuya Ndangana, when asked about her age, responded as follows;

Tichambomaziya ere makore edu nekuwandisa. Esi ndinogonda kuti ndaguma pa71 asi kutonase kuziya makore acho ngezvekutsanzira ngekuti ndinoziya makore evamweni vendakaberekwa navo. Pataienda kootora zvitupa hondo yapera pamweni waitsanangura zvakaitika gore rawakabarwa vona voisa makore avanofunga. Vasharuka vazhinji makore ari pazvitupa andiopi emene. Vamweni vaitodzasira makore avo kuti vaite vadoko

This is literally translated as:

I am not very sure of my actual years but they are many. But I think I might be seventy-one (71) years based on the age of those I know that we were born in the same year. When we applied for our identity cards at the time of independence of the country, we would describe the events that happened the year we were born in a bid to determine the correct date of birth, but again the officials would just approximate our years. Most of the elders here have the wrong age on their identity cards. Some people also reduced their number of years when they had their identity cards.

Mbuya Ndangana was able to determine her age based on information obtained from her peers. This implies that among the Ndaou people an age group signifies a category of people sharing similar experiences.

Gender Relations

The study found that Ndaou women tended to associate themselves with people sharing the same age group. As such, one's age group and gender are tied to particular socio-cultural responsibilities regarding pregnancy and childbirth. Rites of passage served as markers for the coming of age and responsibilities as a future mother or father. The Ndaou people held utmost respect for both men and women who were deemed to possess complementary roles and responsibilities as mothers and fathers for the continued survival of the family and community. Every stage of growth came with its own set of responsibilities and the elders were tasked with educating the young on these social and cultural responsibilities. For instance, with the coming of the money economy in local communities, Ndaou men became responsible for the financial upkeep and protection of the family. Additionally, they were tasked with maintaining the family structure and relations. Both men and women were expected to diligently execute their duties with love, warmth and commitment as mother and fathers.

It was found that among the Ndaou people, it was commonly held that *musha mukadzi* – 'the woman is the cornerstone of the home'. This is elaborated by Afisi (2010) who explains that despite the patriarchal system in Africa, the woman holds power that binds the society together. However, according to Hlatywayo (2012) Western feminist theoretical paradigms misconstrued the status of African women and defined them from the viewpoint of the struggles of Western women against European patriarchy. This is contrary to African feminism as expressed by Musimbi (2002) that it:

is more inclusive than other forms of feminist ideologies....does not need the threat of nuclear war to initiate a struggle for the preservation of life; for survival has always been a central issue for the African woman.

It is against this backdrop that the Ndaou and other peoples in Zimbabwe referred to the woman as *mudzimai*, derived from the root word *mudzi*/root. The woman is likened to the roots of the tree and their responsibility of sustenance and stability. Ndaou women carry the multifarious roles of being wife, mother and worker. Their common responsibilities comprise the role of being homemakers which entails the management of the household inclusive of taking care of the children, cooking, laundry and participation in subsistence farming. Within the family structure, women are directly responsible for the upkeep of the girl child. This was explained by Mbuya Mhlanga, one of the women community elders who remarked;

Kana pamuzi pane ndombi dziripo, mai vanosisa kutora mushando wekuchengetedza nekupanga kuti vasaite zviresha. Nguva ino yotorarama vasikana vanongomitiswa wotame shwiro yakona. Zvinodhanisa mhuri yeshe. Hino kuti mai vakaite zvekupata vanodzifumura nemhuri yeshe mwana amita. Mai vanosisa kutozva kuti zvinoizvi mwana ode kufundiswa kuti aasisi kuata nemukomana asina kumuroora uye anokone kubata mimba asikazi kuroorwa. Kana uri mai vakangwara unotozviona kuti mwana ave kupfimbwa, unotoziyazve kuti mwana watanga kuteera mwedzi. Saka nguva iyoyi inotoda kugara pasha kwaakufundisa mwana zvinosisa kuizwa. Kudaya vanatete ndivo vaisisa kufundisa vana vevakoma vavo asi zvinoizvi hazvichanyanyokoshesha and pamweni vanhu vanogara kundau dziri kuretu maningi. Asi kana mwana aroorwa zvakanaka unoona atete kuema ema nekutoti ndakakone kupanga kubeni apana zvavakaita.

This is literally translated as:

If there are girl children in a homestead, the mother is tasked with guiding them lest they become like foolish girls. We are now living in a harsh and cruel world where we see many girls being impregnated and this becomes a disgrace for the whole family. The mother should be vigilant of all the stages of her daughter's maturity. She should be able to tell when her daughter starts dating as well as when she begins her menses. During such times, the mother should find time to sit down with her daughter and give her proper advice. This used to be a task for the aunties but now with the erosion of our traditional culture and practices, the mother has to step in lest her daughters go astray. Additionally, due to modernisation, the aunties may be staying far and may not even be interested in assuming their role. But if the niece gets married, the aunties will be on the forefront taking undue credit for having nurtured the girl well. However, not all aunties are like that, sometimes distance is a barrier as the aunties may be staying in locations distant from their paternal homes.

In supporting the important role of women, Afisi (2010) asserts that in traditional African societies, women were also looked upon to contribute to the economic and financial

well-being of the family through various types of work inclusive of farming, pottery, crafts etc. They were responsible for most of daily food security and nutrition needs of the family such as growing vegetables and taking care of small animals such as goats, sheep and chicken. Badejo (2008) states that in contemporary times the traditional role of women as wives and mothers has been compromised because they have to compete for employment positions with men outside the home for the financial upkeep of the family, women seeking gainful employment outside the home is a reflection of their ability to equal participation in the formally recognised economically paid sector.

An elderly research participant, Mbuya Kushekwa, raised her observation regarding contemporary gender relations in marriage that many parents among the Ndaou people are urging their sons to marry women who are able to financially contribute towards the family's upkeep. She explained that some families discourage their sons from marrying 'goalkeepers'; a common adage given to women who are homemakers. Mbuya Kushekwa further elaborated that it is believed that unemployed wives are always at the goal post catching what the husband brings home without making any effort to make a 'monetary' contribution. However, this perception of viewing women homemakers as 'goalkeepers' undermines the importance of women's unpaid labour in contemporary society which give more value to the monetary economy and wage labour. It undervalues the importance subsistence economy where most women, especially in the rural areas are engaged for the survival of the family and community (Cash, 2003).

The study also observed the cultural significance and relationship between age and gender among the Ndaou people in relation to pregnancy and childbirth. The study observed the role of elders, especially women, in the Ndaou society as knowledge holders and practitioners in the management of issues related to pregnancy and childbirth. Reproductive health is one of the main domains of Ndaou women as it ensures the welfare and continuity of the society. Whilst every married woman is introduced to the beliefs and practices on pregnancy and childbirth during the traditional marriage initiation period, one's age represents the quality and quantity of experience and wisdom one holds in regard to local knowledge on pregnancy and childbirth.

The elderly women were held and regarded as custodians of Ndaou traditional knowledge on reproductive health and cultural values. One of the participants, Mbuya

Kudzionera remarked that as women mature in age, their knowledge and wisdom also ripen because they became more experienced in matters of pregnancy and childbirth. She revealed that an experienced midwife, through observing a pregnant woman, was able to tell beforehand, whether a birth is going to be easy or problematic. Similarly, another research participant, Mbuya Muusha, remarked that by feeling the tummy of the pregnant woman, one is able to feel the calmness or restiveness of the foetus. The elderly women are conversant with the prohibitions, violations, rites and rituals that ought to be adhered to. They are regarded as our negotiators, moderators, counsellors and teachers. For instance, in the case of a homebirth, the senior grandmothers were called upon to be present while the midwife assisted with the birthing process. These senior women were there to ensure that both the midwife and the birthing mother were performing well and that the birth process did not pose any risk to either the mother or the baby.

The descriptive word *madzeyo* for elders among the Ndau people is laden with meaning. It refers to one assuming the multiple roles of counsellor, protector, advisor, and teacher. *Madzeyo* were likened to a protective wall that ensures the family and community remain intact, despite challenges that may occur. The elders as *madzeyo* are the custodians of the way of life of the Ndau people—hence a society with elders is expected to be harmonious and progressive under their guidance. *Madzeyo* assume the important title of wisdom holders. The wisdom is imparted through teachings which are mostly undertaken through stories accompanied by riddles, proverbs and folktales. The elders also teach symbolically and instil harmony in families and communities. The following section discusses the cultural significance associated with marital status on pregnancy and childbirth among the Ndau people.

Marital status

The Ndau people accorded respect to the institution of marriage which is highly revered. The institution of marriage was a rite of passage that marked the progression into adulthood and of forming a family. It was also a rite of passage that officially separated individuals from the parental unit to being parents on their own right. The institution of marriage also defined the inception of the socially putative time for childbearing. In addition, marriage was regarded as the institution that ascribes honour and dignity to both women and men in their families and the wider society. Outside of marriage, the honour of women of marriageable age was highly compromised.

More than 80% of the research participants indicated that one's marital status carried a number of cultural privileges and responsibilities that are otherwise unobtainable outside marriage. Marriage rituals were done during and after the traditional marriage ceremony. It was after these ceremonies that the new bride was taught about motherhood. The teachings were inclusive of beliefs and practices related to pregnancy and childbirth. If a woman got pregnant out of wedlock, it was rare for her to receive proper guidance with regards to motherhood. A woman who begets a child out of wedlock was considered a shame to the family and she lost her respect in the community.

African Indigenous Education

One of the research participants had the view that no history and status of education among the Ndau people is complete without the inclusion of indigenous ways of knowing and value systems. Many people relied and still depend on this form of knowledge for livelihood in the absence of western formal education. During focus group discussions five important philosophical foundations of African indigenous education for a member of the extended family and community as a mother or a father, were cited: The first philosophical foundation is preparationism which is aimed at enabling the young to fulfil socially and culturally defined gender roles in the family and community. Among the Ndau people, it is commonly believed that the physical birth of a child is followed by the ritual and/or religious birth which initiate the child into being a social member of the community. With the passage of time, several rites of passage to initiate the child to the varying stages of growth to maturity and responsibilities thereof are undertaken. In these processes and rites of passage, the child is educated and socialised into particular culturally acceptable feminine and masculine roles and responsibilities.

The second philosophical foundation is functionalism whereby the young are taught to be productive in their respective families and communities. This is a primarily utilitarian principle that teaches the young how to contribute to their wider society through partaking in various chores expected of them. Hence, African indigenous education is regarded as citizen formation and responsibility. According to the Ndau indigenous education and culture, girls are educated on how to become effective homemakers. They were taught household management skills as future mothers and wives inclusive of food and nutrition, as well as the welfare of their husbands and children. On the other hand, boys were educated on becoming

fathers and breadwinners. They are socialised into being the economic anchors of their future homes. The aspect of functionalism therefore prepares the young adults for their socially and culturally prescribed roles as men and women. However, with the current money economy and the incessant calls for gender mainstreaming, these socially and culturally prescribed roles have been usurped as it is now common to find situations whereby the wife is the breadwinner with the husband being the homemaker. One of the research participants pointed out that this modern situation has its own gender relations complications resulting from bruised masculine egos and often leads to gender-based violence.

The third philosophical foundation is communalism. Like in most African traditional societies, among the Ndaou people, there is communalism in social practices including childbirth and rearing, based on the Ubuntu philosophy; “I am because you are and you are because I am”. In this respect, children also belong to the extended family and community as a whole. This implies that all adults are bestowed with the honour of raising and educating the child into socially and culturally acceptable values. The fourth philosophical foundation is perennialism. This principle is concerned with preserving the cultural heritage as well as the status quo of the family and community. The fifth philosophical foundation is holism which recognises that learning is not only confined to the four walls of the classroom but recognises the community as the larger classroom where practical issues of life are taught to the younger generation.

Ndaou indigenous education was predominantly based on informal teaching and learning methods. These included learning through role play, whereby children were from an early age, given gender specific toys to play with. The toys were made from local materials. It was common for young children, both girls and boys, to use mud and clay for moulding toys and engaging in “make-believe play activities which could be described as imitative, imaginative, and symbolic”. In this regard, the kids’ plays were based on imitating the elderly whereby the girls could assume the role of being mothers as they cooked using mud while the boys imitated being fathers. Learning through role play initiated the young into their socially and culturally defined feminine and masculine roles. In cases where a child learned through play but is interested in the games of the opposite sex, the parents got worried and they took time to indoctrinate the child into the “proper” role that he or she should play.

Informal indigenous education included teaching and learning through myths and tales. These myths and tales gave an account of the gods, local phenomena, the sacred and the transcendent. The myths included tales about the local legends and spoke about real events that took place in time immemorial. Precisely, myths were fragments of actual history. Oral literature included folktales which were shrouded teachings based on day to day events of the local community. They were considered as “vehicles of moral life lessons”. Folktales were, and are still used as a medium of sharing life experiences with its strides and setbacks but mostly conclude with triumph over the difficult challenges encountered. They were used for basic socialisation into a community’s beliefs and practices. This socialisation process included initiation, instruction, and spurning anti-social behaviour within the community. Folktales incorporated cultural beliefs and values for marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, peaceful co-existence within extended families and communities, and many other important aspects of Ndaue life. Additionally, embodied in these folktales was a link to the past, the present and the future. The important lessons contained in folktales include respect for fellow human beings. Folktales also served as a tool for educating the young on various aspects inclusive of instilling discipline, equipping them with various talents and skills, and teaching them traditional rhythmic songs.

Among the Ndaue, dancing and folk songs were also important tools of indigenous education. Like in other African traditional communities, among the Ndaue people rites, ceremonies, feasts and festivals were always accompanied by music and dancing. In this regard, these various activities were and are regarded as indigenous forms of teaching and learning. Religious doctrines, practices and experiences including those associated with pregnancy and childbirth, were passed from the old to the young through ceremonies conducted within the family and/or community. Most songs sung at the different ceremonies had a meaning attached to them while others maybe for entertainment.

Proverbs as tools of socialization among the Ndaue were mostly used in day to day conversations. They were regarded as “condensed wisdom of the great ancestors”. They also contained moral ideals that refer to the socio-economic and political environment of the community. A person possessing a judicious use of proverbial language was deemed to possess strong wisdom and intelligence. The older generation made use of proverbs to convey specific teachings to the younger generation and they carried specific lessons inclusive of educating the young on the importance of co-operation, personal and human qualities,

domestic life and the regulation of proper behaviour. Proverbs were used as moral teachings and as a medium of instruction because they were believed to have a greater and lasting impact than the use of ordinary language.

Ndau Indigenous modes of learning included the use of deterrence or inculcating fear in children. This was done in order to teach them to conform to the morals and customs of the family and the broader community. They were part of discouraging the young from engaging in unruly behaviour and disobedience including pre-marital pregnancy. In cases of disobedience or bad behaviour, verbal warnings were given and if there was no change, punishment were instituted. The severity of the punishment was dependent upon the severity of the offence committed. In extreme cases, severe beatings or the infliction of physical pain was used as a way of instituting reformatory behaviour. In contemporary African societies characterised by modernity and the adopted Western culture, severe beatings and inflicting body pain are regarded as a form of abuse that can even enable a child to report a parent to relevant authorities for abuse.

Another important method and social practice of educational training the young was through engaging in productive work. This particular type of teaching was a crucial as it enabled the young to attain their respective feminine and masculine roles in the family and community. Whilst this type of education and training prepared the young into being productive adults, the learning process also accorded the young and the old to work together. This therefore served as an opportunity for the elders to teach the young about other aspects of life as they worked together. The process of engaging in productive work served as particular rites of passage as the young were being trained through differing stages, to be capable and responsible future husbands and wives.

Interviews and focus group discussions also revealed that formal methods of teaching and learning were characteristic of Ndau indigenous education system. These comprised theoretical and practical inculcation of skills. Formal education was mostly attained through sending children for apprenticeship or occupational training, .For instance, in cases of hereditary occupations such as traditional healing, midwifery, fishing, blacksmith, carpentry, etc. The parents were tasked with training their own children. The herbalist, who was training his /her child to take over the profession, would have to reveal all the different herbs and their medicinal properties as well as the methods of preparation. It combined both theory

and practice. This would have to be done over a period of time to enable the student to properly grasp the different types of herbs and their proper use.

In-depth interviews and focus group discussions revealed that the Ndaou people also recognized the significance of western formal education in order to meet the challenges of globalization of the 21st Century. This was shown by the popular adage among the Ndaou that says “*vaNdaou vayungu*,” literally translated is that the Ndaou people are just like the white people, they are educated. They strongly believe that indigenous education interfaced with western formal education is the most important tool for self-emancipation from poverty. One participant, Mbuya Simango pointed out that formal education is a valuable asset in the current labour market as it increases one’s chances of being gainfully employed and it also promotes social mobility.

However, the study showed seemingly low levels of the formal educational levels of the female research participants due to a number of factors: the older people with age groups ranging from fifty-five years and above, possessed low levels of education created by the unstable political and economic environment during Zimbabwe’s liberation struggle against colonial forces. Additionally, the socio-cultural environment favoured the education of the male child as opposed to the girl child. Mbuya Chamwaita, one of the elderly research participants emphasized that during the earlier times; there was a strong cultural preference for educating the boy child who was regarded as the economic provider whilst the girl child was considered a liability since it was believed she was raised to become someone’s wife in the future. She explained her own situation in chiNdaou language as follows:

Zvekufunda zvainetsa. Vabereki vangu vakandifundisa kusvikira grade 5. Asi vakoma vangu vakapedza primary school vakaenda kusecondary zvese nekucollege. Vabereki vangu vaiti kufundisa mwana musikana kupedze mari kubeni uchade kuroorwa. Vaingoda kuti ndikone kunyora zita rangu rekuzoerenga tsamba kana majaya otanga kuganga! Saka ini ndakatokasira kuroorwa, chimweni chendaizofunga kuita chiinyi ndakagare pamuzi vakoma veinda kuchikora. Asi ndakati ndapedza kufundisa vana vangu ndeishandira fees yavo nekuita magau nekutsvaka mascholarship ndakatotanga kuenda kuchikora chemasikati chevasharuka kutangira grade 6. Ndakapasa grade 7 ndikaenda kusecondary form 1 kusvika 4 ndikapasa.

Hino zvinoizvi chonesa ngechekuti ndadarika 60 years' saka azvichabatsiri kuenda kucollege akuna kwandichaona mushando nekuti retirement age i65 years. Ndinodada kuti ndakakwanisa kuzadzikisa chishuwo changu chekuenda kusekondari. Vana vangu vamwe vari kuuniversity and wese ndinovakurudzira kuti varambe vachifunda kugadzirisa ndaramo yavo.

This is literally translated as:

It was a challenge to go to school. My parents sent me to school only up to grade 5. However, my brothers went as far as secondary and tertiary level. My parents believed it was a waste of time to educate the girl child because she would eventually get married. They just wanted me to be able to read and write in preparation for being able to read love letters when boys would begin courting me. Therefore, I got married at an early age because I could not think of anything else besides staying at home while my brothers went to school. But when I finished putting my children through school, I went back to school under the adult literacy program and started from grade 6, wrote and passed my grade 7 and proceeded to secondary school from form 1 to 4 and I passed well. Now the main challenge is that I am above 60 years of age and it's useless for me to go to college because I won't find employment as the retirement age is 65 years. However, I am proud of my achievement; I fulfilled my yearning to have a secondary education. Some of my children are now at university and I always encourage them to continue furthering their education in order to pave the way for a good life for themselves.

However, she was also quick to point out that the gendered nature of western formal education was prevalent in the colonial period. The post-colonial period has seen improved educational levels for both the girl and boy child. The study also observed that the low levels of literacy among the older research participants (50+ years) was also attributed to socio-political instability during the period of liberation struggle against colonialism. During this period in the rural areas where the liberation struggle was mostly concentrated, schools were disrupted and some were shut down. In most of the villages in Chipinge District, people were living in camp sites for protection against enemy forces. Movements outside these

concentration camps were limited. These factors rendered a number of people unable to further their formal education. Most people began to acquire meaningful education after the country gained its independence. However, by the time independence was attained in 1980, some of the research participants were already of marriageable age and were expected to get married therefore they were not able to continue with their education.

Conclusion

The study used the case of the Ndaou people of Chipinge District in Zimbabwe indigenous beliefs and practices on pregnancy and childbirth to investigate the cultural meanings attached to socio-economic and demographic variables such as age group, gender, marital status educational levels and occupational status. It appears that the socio-economic and demographic information among the Ndaou people did not merely serve to provide statistical variables of the research participants but endeavours to uncover the indigenous cultural meanings attached to them.

This study has revealed that among the Ndaou people, age, gender, views of marriage, pregnancy and childbirth; as well as education have important cultural significance attached to them based on the five philosophical foundations of Ndaou indigenous education, namely, preparationism, functionalism, communalism, perennialism and holism.

The findings emphasize the importance of interfacing knowledge systems by combining the modern quantitative approach and interpretation of socio-economic and demographic characteristics of research participants with the cultural meanings attached to these variables in the study communities. These will enhance the relevance of research in these communities and research participants. This will also contribute greatly to global pool of knowledge.

References

- Afisi, O.T. (2010). "Power and Womanhood in Africa: An Introductory Evaluation." *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 3, no. 6 (2010): 229-238.
- Aubel, J. (2011). The roles and influence of grandmothers and men: Evidence supporting a family-focused approach to optimal infant and young child nutrition." *Washington, DC: Infant and Young Child Nutrition Project/PATH* (2011): 1-80.
- Badejo, DL. (2008) "African Feminism: Mythical and Social Power of Women of African Descent." *Research in African Literatures* 29, no.2 (1998): 94-111.

- Bassey E.J. (2012) "Becoming a Mother: The meaning of childbirth for African-Canadian women." *Contemporary Nurse* 41, no. 1 (2012): 28-40.
- Callister, LC. (2012) "Culturally Competent Care of Women and New-borns: Knowledge, Attitude, and Skills." *JOGNN* 30, no. 2 (2001): 209-215.
- Cash, (2003). Knowledge systems for sustainable development. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 100, no. 14 (2003):8086-8091.
- Chilisa, B. (2012). *Indigenous Research Methodologies*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Chinn, P.W.U. (2007). Decolonizing Methodologies and Indigenous Knowledge: The Role of Culture, Place and Personal Experience in Professional Development. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching* 44, no. 9 (2007): 1247-1268.
- Dawson, CA. (2007). *A practical guide to research methods: A user-friendly manual for mastering research techniques and projects*. United Kingdom: How to Content. www.howtocontent.com .
- Durrheim, K. (2006). "Research Design." In *Research in practice: applied methods for the social sciences*, edited by Blanche, Martin Terre, Kevin Durrheim and Desmond Painter, 33-59. South Africa: University of Cape Town Press (Pty) Ltd, 2006.
- Durrheim, K and Desmond, S. (2006). In *Research in practice: applied methods for the social sciences*, edited by Blanche, Martin Terre, Kevin Durrheim and Desmond Painter, 131-159. South Africa: University of Cape Town Press (Pty) Ltd, 2006.
- Gray, D. E. (2004). *Doing Research in the Real World*. London: SAGE Publications, 2004.
- Hlatywayo, A. 2012. *From The Marriage Bed to The Graveyard: Towards a Bold Community Praxis in Reducing HIV Infection Amongst Married Women in sub-Saharan Africa*. (Unpublished Masters Dissertation. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu Natal, 2012).
- Musimbi. R.A. (2002). *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective*. New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002.
- Lindegger, G. (2006). Research methods in clinical research. In Terre Blanche, M. *et al.*, (eds.) *Research in practice: applied methods for the social sciences*. (South Africa: University of Cape Town Press (Pty) Ltd, 2006): 455-475.