

THE SILENCED VOICE OF INITIATED VENDA WOMEN

By

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DECLARATION

I, Nkateko Lorraine Manabe (Student Number 206000885), hereby declare that the thesis entitled The Silenced Voice of Initiated Venda Women, is my own original work and that where use has been made of the work of others, it has been duly acknowledged in the text.

Signature.....Date.....

ABSTRACT

The lives of individuals in all societies are a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to the other. Among the Vhavenda, there are fine distinctions among age or occupational groups and progression from one group to the next is accompanied by special rituals enveloped in ceremonies which involve actions that are clearly regulated and guarded so that the entire society suffer no discomfort or injury.

The research explores and describes the lived experiences of Vha-Venda initiated women in the rural areas of Mashau, Mashawana and Shayandima village in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The perception that transition practices, otherwise known as initiation rituals or rites of passage, are only practiced in the 'traditional' societies because it is believed to be where the culture is embedded.

This study draws on qualitative research principles based on the ethnographic approach. This research explores and describes the lived experiences of initiation of Venda women that is practiced and currently being implemented in the three villages that is, Mashau, Mashawana and Shayandima village in Limpopo Province, South Africa. As a result, this study is informed by the qualitative data gathered during the initial stages of the research with the assistance of research guides. The core material in this study emerges from in depth, semi-structured interviews conducted during individual interviews and focus group interviews with fifteen initiated women and two research guides between the age of thirty and sixty. The research guides, with special knowledge of the culture assisted the researcher on the process and activities of the initiation and also informed the researcher about the venues where certain rituals take place and also assisted in translation of certain phrases for clarification. In compliance with research ethics, the identities of the respondents remain confidential through the use of pseudonyms. The research concludes that the lived experiences of women initiation are private and one is strictly prohibited to talk about them, especially with uninitiated women. The aim is to portray the traditional social and cultural ritual proposed to be learnt and preserved.

In this study, the researcher's findings are that:

Conformity, compliance and obedience with the initiation rituals can save a person from embarrassment in Limpopo Province where initiation is practiced. Participants reported that women are silenced and forbidden to talk about initiation outside 'dombani' with the uninitiated women. They reported that the initiation ritual is secret and thus a taboo to talk about it. Initiates are prohibited to disclose what happens during the initiation process.

In contrast, uninitiated women viewed the ritual as barbaric and promiscuous. The initiated indicated that they were forced to attend because of fear of rejection, discrimination and isolation by the community. Other participants agreed to have attended for the sake of acceptance, though they believed to have gained knowledge about understanding womanhood.

Most of the women mentioned that although it was some years that they had attended the initiation school, they still carried the burden of anger, shame, humiliation, frustration, low-self esteem, sense of helplessness and lack confidence and still find it hard to share their experiences or talk about them. The researcher concurs with the participants and Stayt (1968) that initiated women are denied freedom of expression. It is strictly prohibited to talk or share the initiation experiences with the non-initiated let alone discuss it outside *dombani*.

Thereby, the aim, and its concomitant 4 objectives, have been thoroughly explored and achieved.

Key words: initiation, menarche, puberty, rites of passage, musevhetho, domba and secrecy.

ACRONYMS

FC	:	Female circumcision
FGC	:	Female genital cutting
WHO	:	World Health Organization
HIV-AIDS	:	Human Immune-Deficiency Virus and Acquired Immune-Deficiency Syndrome
STDs	:	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
EM	:	Ethno-Methodology.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Most people go through elevated or heightened emotions during times of major life changes. These changes represent significant developmental transitions. For example, most societies consider life changes such as the birth of a child, puberty, marriage, and other associated life developmental events as culturally significant transitions. During these periods, in most cultural groups, rituals are performed to propel individuals into a new stage of life. These ritualistic practices are more prevalent in rural communities and are held dear by most people.

During the turn of the 20th century, a Belgian anthropologist, “Van Gennep, (1960)”, Stated that all cultures have prescribed ways of handling significant transitional stages. For example, different cultures perform initiation ceremonies to mark the transition from one phase of life to another. Van Gennep (1960) refers to these ritualistic ceremonies as “rites of passage.”

In most African countries, initiation ceremonies are performed as marks of passage into new transitional stages of life. In most ethnic groups in South Africa, both males and females, undergo certain rituals during certain stages in people's development. For example, there are rites of passage for girls entering womanhood or boys entering manhood. These occasions are usually a public announcement of the girls' or boys' eligibilities for adulthood and marriage. Almost every culture in the world ritualizes the important milestones that their people go through throughout their lives, because it is said to create a happy mood in the communities (Lincoln, 1981).

In terms of the indigenous knowledge system in most African countries, initiation ceremonies are rooted deep in the history of most traditional groupings. For Black African females, ceremonies are perceived as important because the event is seen as an entry into the realm of adults. For example, female initiation ceremonies are held in several countries of Africa. Initiations for girls are marked as important milestones in most societies of Africa.

Women initiation ceremonies, much like their male counterparts, provide instructions to females on what society will expect of them as responsible adults (Mlama, 1990). Through imitation and positive reinforcement by their mothers and elderly women, most girls are fully aware of what is expected of them as women in the Venda, Pedi and Tsonga cultures. Within the Vha-Venda community, an initiation ceremony is something a young girl eagerly looks forward to. This process is generally conceptualized as a practice that upholds the Venda culture and validates their Africa (ness) (Van de Walle ; Franklin, 1996). Many girls attend such initiation ceremonies to conform with the culture which subsequently leads to admiration and respect from the society. Furthermore, curiosity also plays a major role in

the attendance of these puberty rites of passage. For instance, most girls who choose to attend the rituals want to experience what it means to subject themselves to the initiation process.

This is so mainly because these rituals are generally characterized by secrecy and confidentiality regarding what happens inside the ceremonies. Women initiation or rites of passage experiences are not discussed in public, particularly in the presence of those who have not undergone the process. This is so mainly to safeguard the traditional norms and values of the initiation process (Beidelman, cited in Molnos, 1973).

Van Gennep (1960) proposed that the initiation ceremony conveys three sub-meanings, namely; a) separation from society, b) transition in the case of adolescence, from child to adult, and c) incorporation a welcoming back into society with acknowledgement of the adolescent's changed status. All of this may be summarized as social transition; these moratoriums are connected with personal transitions between different stages that occur during developmental stages. These changes are life crises from birth until death. However, rites of passage in many cultures are used to mark the socially recognized transition to sexual maturity (Van de Walle et al., 1996).

Richards (1956) in his study refers the initiation for girls as the menarche rites for initiating girls into adulthood. Lincoln (1981) describes female initiation as a process that women go through, resulting in a change of status and becoming 'fertile', productive, experienced and whole. The term initiation and "rite of passage" can be viewed as a ritual marking a transaction in the life of an individual from one state or status to another.

In societies with an adolescent rite, all young people must participate in the ceremony. Sometimes, a society will hold initiation rites for only one gender; in that case, only members of that gender take part as initiates. Members of the opposite sex may still act as participants in the ceremony. If both sexes undergo an initiation, the male and female rituals are held separately. In the rural areas initiation rites are somewhat more commonly held for girls than for boys, perhaps because menarche is such a clear and unambiguous mark of sexual maturity, to establish an appropriate time for the female's transition to adulthood.

According to Van de Walle & Franklin (1996), women are taught about future duties, about the obligation of fidelity to their counterpart (husband), the rules of etiquette regulating relations with her in-laws and that the proper place is one of subordination and to obey their husband. The forms of initiation may differ according to ethnic groups, but what is common to the practitioners is that the elderly ceremoniously welcome the young adolescents to their status by performing a communal ritual (Milubi, 2000).

Musevheho is the initiation rite for girls from a baby to the stage of puberty (i.e. before the girl starts menstruating). Small girls do not take part in any rites, except that they sing songs, which their mothers teach them. Stayt (1968), states that *Musevheho* has been introduced into Vha-Venda culture by the neighbouring Basutho, where it is called “*mula*”. The *Musevheho* is very popular among a small section of the people, particularly where *murundu* or circumcision lodge has the strongest influence. *Musevheho* is more in the nature of a secret society than a recognized feature of the social organization.

Nowadays, the girls often attend at *nonyana*'s hut for one day. They will see the spirit and return to their homes until there are enough initiates to warrant the operation. On the appointed day they are taken to a secluded place on the river bank, where an old woman performs the operation of cutting the clitoris. At the same time the girls are branded with a mark on the outside of the thigh; the brand is like two inverted U's joined together or sometimes it may be two round dots. This brand is seen as a password for the future occasions which will prove to the initiates that a person qualifies for entry and proves its possessor has undergone the operation (informants).

There are certain transition points in an individual's life which are imbued with psychological and socio-cultural significance because of self-identity change. For girls, first menstruation, or menarche, may be of importance, because it represents a concrete symbol of girl transition to a mature female. Most African cultures have moved from the old school of thought of forcing young girls and boys to initiation schools, but it is perceived as a constitutional human right and a person's choice.

The transition to adulthood for girls in early society was not as traumatic as male initiation rituals. Apart from a small initiation celebration of biological development, a young girl is introduced to womanhood without effort simply by having a mother and other female kin as mentors. Respect and other morals activities are acquired in a way that seemed easy and natural, by observing and imitating their parent's behaviours. These young girls would see exactly how their future and relationships would be (Berenice, 1994).

In actual practice, women initiation differs from one society to another. Sometimes the initiates' fast, some are isolated, some are seen as centre of attention; and sometimes they feast. It is also stated by other anthropologist that there are differences in the sanctions that apply to these practices: some threaten terrible consequences and some are promised great benefit (Brown, 1963).

Chapter one introduces and gives the background to the study. It also explains the motivation of the study, aim and objective and purpose of the study. The chapter further gives the problem statement, value of the study, limitation of the study and gives clarification of keywords.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This study sets the pace for understanding the silenced voice of Venda initiated women. It also makes a case for the creativity, adoption and transformation of existing initiation rites into practices that are more celebratory of initiated women. The Vha-Venda people saw the development of the individual as a series of phases of which puberty and marriage were most important. When a child reaches puberty, an initiation ritual is performed to mark the passage into adulthood, (Malina, 1990). The forms of women initiation may differ according to ethnic groups, but what is common to the practitioners is that the elderly ceremoniously welcome the young girls to their status by performing a communal ritual. During the initiation, the initiate is secluded, receives instruction on the sacred wisdom of the rituals and ethical norms including respect, dignity and sex education from the rightful and accepted people who have graduated from the ritual ceremony. There is a special time for admonitions of the initiate on the day she passes out and is freed from seclusion. When the initiates have successfully completed performing the rituals, they are applauded by a celebration (Stayt, 1968).

1.3 MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY

Limited research exists on the process and role of the Vha-Venda female initiation process. This is despite the fact that a substantial number of females within this ethnic group undergo the rituals. Furthermore, there is currently a raging debate about whether such schools should be recognized or discontinued. Some argue that democracy is destroying cultural practices. Some believe that the schools are an invasion of initiates' privacy and women's rights. This study will help in discovering the truth why female initiation is secretive.

Studies on women initiation rites have been conducted in several countries with different cultures, mostly by male researchers. However, these studies have different views and meanings, despite the fact that a substantial number of females within this ethnic group undergo the rituals. Furthermore, initiation rites, according to Rasing (1995), create solidarity among women and are used for sharing knowledge from one generation to another. While Krige and Krige (1947) suggest that during the initiation process the initiates go through harsh treatment which is looked upon as barbaric, others perceived it as discipline. Literature suggests that initiation rituals are secretive and it is difficult to get information if one is not initiated. Currently, there is a big debate about whether such schools should be recognized or discontinued, after the reported incidence from Limpopo Province where male initiates died of dehydration and health complications. Initiated women argue that democracy is destroying cultural practices, and that initiation schools are an invasion of initiates' privacy.

Therefore, the researcher was motivated to go through the initiation process in order to get access to the information and to a woman's perspective on this protected and guarded issue.

1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of Venda initiated women.

1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has numerous objectives which are here-under stated as questions:

1.5.1 What are the lived experiences of the Vha-Venda initiated women?

1.5.2 Why are the Vha-Venda women secretive about the initiation rituals?

1.5.3 What happens if the Vha- Venda initiated women disclose the initiation rituals?

1.5.4 Do the Vha- Venda initiated women take the cutting of the clitoris and the elongation on labia minora as barbaric and promiscuous?

1.6 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Initiation of females has been practised in several African countries and within different cultures. However, it has been perceived as barbaric and promiscuous by uninitiated females. Although some people argue that initiation is a cultural norm as substantiated by Krige and Krige (1947), in contrast, the perceptions and the speculations of uninitiated females are still that initiation is barbaric and promotes promiscuity. The harsh treatment which is looked upon as discipline, for example, the cutting of the clitoris and the enlargement of labia minora seems to perpetuate the perceptions and speculations. Therefore, the present researcher intends to clarify these perceptions and speculations by investigating the actual, lived experiences of the initiates with special reference to the Vha-Venda women.

1.7 VALUE OF THE STUDY

The expected theoretical contribution of the proposed project lies in building on the current knowledge base of available literature on the initiation of females or rites of passage. It is hoped that this would add value to the growing body of knowledge by inquiring and unpacking the ways in which initiated women negotiate their own experiences. Research in this area may provide valuable insights in understanding the initiation culture. Moreover, this research would help in understanding the male power dynamics in relation to female initiation. The researcher could help the initiated women to freely express how they feel and think about the initiation experiences. The researcher's semi-structured questionnaire and group discussion will encourage the initiates to share their experiences without fear. The researcher's participation will also add value to the study.

1.8 CLARIFICATION OF KEYWORDS

In this section, the following concepts are clarified as used in this thesis: initiation, circumcision, menarche, puberty rites, adolescence, rites of passage, *murundu*; *musevhetho*, *vhusha*, *tshikanda*, *thondo* and *domba*.

1.8.1 Initiation

Richards (1956) defines initiation as a rite of passage, usually performed during puberty. It is a cultural tradition that is practised in most communities in Africa. Lincoln (1981) concurs and goes further to define initiation as a process that a woman goes through, resulting in a change of status and becoming “fertile, productive, experienced and whole. Menarche is when a girl has “seen the moon” (i.e., started her first menstruation), she is claimed to be carrying danger because she can fall pregnant.

Women initiation is performed differently in other countries. For example, in Nigeria four lines are cut in the girl’s abdomen, to make her a woman and the mother would teach a girl to “love magic.” The initiated women could teach her of the female powers and the physical changes marking womanhood. However, it differs from the Japanese because when a girl sees her first menses, the family celebrates by eating red-coloured rice and beans. In India, a girl who has reached puberty is given a ceremonial bath, decked with ornate jewels and garments, and the girl’s kith and kin are all invited for a ceremony, in which it is announced that the girl has come of age and is celebrated. This culture is unique, but some families still hold on to this tradition. Like the Hindus and some Buddhists, at the onset of menarche it is believed that the goddess spirit vacates the girl’s body and returns to ordinary life after a series of rituals (Turner, 1987; Mönnig, 1967).

Initiation is culturally important in most communities and implies the beginning of new life. It is a ceremony by which a person is introduced into a society, which brings a man/ woman to the realization of the egoic aspect and to bring the lower nature under its control. It is a process of undergoing an expansion of consciousness, as part of the normal process of evolutionary development, viewed on a large scale, and not from a standpoint of an individual. Primarily, it involves the capacity to see, hear and comprehend, and to synthesize and correlate knowledge and recognize the purpose of pervading circumstances (Maluleke; Troskie, 2003).

Initiation rites comprise pro-social behaviours that build social relationships; understanding, empathy, civility and moral decision making. It is viewed as a major developmental task for a girl who is learning how to fit in and be accepted socially by her peers. Furthermore, it is equal for society to bestow and acknowledge the newly found status on the young initiate. When initiation rites are done appropriately, they meet teenagers' needs for a sense of belonging, and understanding the history and culture of her nation. It serves the purpose of building relationships and if not done properly can cause psychological harm to a girl's ego or self concept. Furthermore, initiation rites create solidarity among women and are used for passing knowledge from one generation to another (Rasing, 1995).

1.8.2 Menarche

According to Matlin (1987), menarche (pronounced “men-nar-kee”) is the first menstrual period. When a girl has “seen the moon” is when she started her first menstruation. Menstruation is defined as a period when a woman bleeds. It is commonly referred to as a menstrual period. Menstruation is called just a period. Both the information posted by Ussher (1989) and Beidelman (1997) concur that the onset of menstruation is marked with disempowering messages on the possibility of unplanned pregnancy, promiscuity, contraction of HIV-AIDS, as opposed to messages that affirm one’s newly acquired status as a woman who has power to give life. Menarche allows accommodation and assimilation of these changes to take place, as it is an event which cannot be ignored and for many mothers and daughters symbolizes the beginning for womanhood Shuttle and Redgrove (1986). Girls themselves have reported that menarche confirms their identity and characterized the leap from being a young girl and moving from matured early adulthood with the ability to reproduce, and means a profound effect on their relationships with their parents (Ussher, 1989).

Menarche tends to occur relatively late in puberty, following the beginning of the physical changes; the development of pubic hair, breast development and the gradual development of hips. According to Turner (1987), this physiological change characterizes the leap from being a young girl and moving from “not girl, not woman.” There is evidence that only twenty-five percent (25%) of girls are prepared for menarche adequately (Ussher, 1989). As a result, many myths and negative assumptions surrounding menstruation are frequently internalized.

From a medical point of view, when menarche occurs, it confirms that the girl has had a gradual oestrogen-induced growth of the uterus, especially the endometrium, and that the “outflow tract” from the uterus, through the cervix to the vagina, is open, and menarche may occur at an unusually early age average 10-11years, preceding thelarche and other signs of puberty. Thelarche is defined as the onset of breast bud development (Rosenfield, 2009).

On the first sign of menstruation, the girl will inform one of the elderly women of the kraal, of its occurrences (Beidelman, 1997). The elderly women will then approach and tell the girl’s mother, who then tells the father who will give consent for the girl to be initiated. There is a barrier of reserve that forbids the direct approach of the parent by the child concerning matters of intimacy. This behaviour occurs repeatedly among the Vha-Venda and other African cultures.

In other communities, such as the American Indian society, an adolescent female, at her first menstruation, is secluded for a number of days in a wigwam built by the girl herself “to cool herself.” (Beidelman, 1997). The isolation of the girl is due to the belief that, as a menstruating woman, she is seen as dangerous to the community, and must be protected from becoming pregnant. Among the Kaguru people in Tanzania, menstruation is viewed as a contentious, disturbing process; a source of pollution that has to be subdued by circumcision (Beidelman, 1997). During her seclusion, the girl is tutored by her mother on her future role as an adult woman. However, in Venda, a girl who has her first menstruation must hide any sign of blood. She must wear two pubic coverings “*maredo*; an old “*moredo*” is worn inside as a tampon, and a new one is worn outside, like an apron.

The husband will then know that the wife is menstruating and that intercourse is forbidden [<http://www.era.anthropology.ac.uk/Era-.resources>].

Many Native American societies also publicly celebrated a girl’s first menses. For instance, the parents of girls among the Indians of Southern California used to proudly announce to the community that their daughters were beginning to menstruate and thus becoming women. The girls were partly buried in heated sand to cool off at that time. They were not permitted to scratch themselves or eat salt. The girls are given instructions by older women about the physiological changes that were occurring and how to behave as a woman and wife. For most girls today, public announcements that they had begun menstruating would be considered humiliating (Molnos, 1973). However, it is a matter of personal and family pride in many cultures.

Beidelman, cited in Molnos (1973), states that the girls are taught by older women various riddles, sayings and singing songs with double meaning relating to proper sexual conduct and sexual hygiene. However, the songs and the content of the instruction may vary from performance to performance, but the style of execution involves common elements, that is, song, mime and dances backed by the beat of drums, and a characteristic dance step. However, in some African countries where puberty rites of passage have been researched, there is evidence of consistency in terms of the content, material, information and messages that are deemed necessary for girls and women initiates in their journey to womanhood.

1.8.3 Puberty rites

According to Erickson's and Freudian theory, puberty refers to the physical and sexual maturation of boys and girls. Puberty is the period of transition between juvenile state and adulthood during which secondary sex characteristics appear and fertility is acquired. However, the catalyst for puberty is unknown, but puberty occurs when there is maturation of the hypothalamo-hypophysical-gonadal axis, because gonads stimulate the production of testosterone/ estrogen for breast development and genital growth (Hall; Guyton, 2002).

These hormones stimulate the interest in sexuality and increase the natural will for affirmation. Oestrogen mainly promotes the proliferation and growth of specific cells of the body and is responsible for the development of the majority of secondary sexual characteristics of the female (Hall; Guyton, 2002).

Puberty is defined by van Warmelo (1932) as a transitional period, marking the entrance of the young girl into her new role as a woman. It is during adolescence and puberty that the discourse that locates the centre of a woman's being in her womb, in her sexuality, is first found, and the seeds of contempt and disgust towards a woman's body and her reproductive function (Ussher, 1989). A girl sometimes gets pimples on her skin before puberty. When the elders see this they say that the girl is menstruating internally. When a girl has her menses for the first time, it is said that she has "seized a baboon". This event is announced to the other girls, who receive an invitation to attend the puberty rites "van Warmelo, 1932; Nodin, 2001; Burbank, 1997". It is during this phase that young girls and boys become "a person", and become autonomous and they try to determine their positions in the world.

The researcher perceives puberty as presenting a potential for transformation, to be seen, heard and recognized as an important member of society. In most societies, a host of mixed messages are given to pre-pubertal girls about menstruation. Available information is often contradictory in that it congratulates girls on their entry into womanhood while at the same time suggesting that “it” be kept secret. For most young women, cultural beliefs that menstruation is associated with physical discomfort, increased emotionality, and disruption of activities and social interactions are well entrenched even before menarche. For example, advertisements in the media are promoting cures for backache, bloating, and cramps, thereby conveying the idea that menstruation is an illness.

Historically, menarche has been celebrated with detailed rituals. For example, the Ancient Greeks mixed corn with menstrual blood to celebrate fertility. The Hopi Indians secluded the girl during menarche and welcomed her back to the community five days later, as a woman (Van Gennep, 1960). Although many people today overlook menarche as an important stage in a young girl’s life, increasingly, more and more mothers are beginning to hold their own personalized menarche rituals, using music, jewellery, flowers, and dance to celebrate their daughter’s move into womanhood.

The transition to adulthood for girls in early societies was not as traumatic as male initiation rituals. Apart from a small initiation celebration of biological development, a girl is introduced to womanhood without effort simply by having a mother and other female kin to emulate. Chodorow (1974), states that the girl does not have to prove her femininity and independent identity or worth. Female manners and activities were acquired in a way that seemed easy and natural. By observing her family, a young girl would see exactly what her future life and relationships would be like (Berenice, 1994).

There are certain transition points in an individual's life that are imbued with psychological and or socio-cultural significance because they signal a need for change in self-identity. For girls, first menstruation or menarche may be of importance because it represents a concrete symbol of a shift from being a girl to womanhood.

1.8.4 Adolescence

Nodin (2001) states that Erickson and Freud's theory defines adolescent as the period of life between puberty and maturity, which is generally, accepted as the ages 12 through 17, inclusive. For example, it is the period of physical, psychological, social and moral/ethical growth following childhood and preceding maturity; a period characterized by intensified pre-occupation with issues of identity and autonomy; often associated with intensified pre-personal and inter-group competition. Nodin (2001) defines an adolescent as an individual living through the period of major change at various levels: physical, family, social, emotional and personal. It is during this phase that, in a way, the adolescent becomes a person tries to become autonomous and tries to determine her position in the world, something necessary to give some significance to her own existence (Heaven, 2001).

According to Heaven (2001), adolescence means to sprout, to grow. Generally, this also parallels the African cultural phenomenon. In the English language, originally, the term "teen", an abbreviation of "teenager", was used to indicate an age group from 11 to 19 years of age. However, the recent meaning of the word "teen-adolescent" came into use only during the 20th century (Rice, 1996). Erickson's developmental stage of adolescence is a stage that one is neither a child nor an adult. At that point, life is definitely getting more complex as the people attempt to find their own identity (Sue et al., 1994; Nodin, 2001).

It is during adolescence that the young woman first experiences a split between her body and her self; between her own experience and the archetype she is expected to emulate. In most societies, men and women develop very different attitudes towards their bodies and their sexuality. In general, the positive, almost proud, attitude of men contrasts sharply with the negative and often guilt-ridden feelings of many women. Puberty gives a man the knowledge of greater power, and gives a woman the knowledge of her dependence (Ussher, 1989).

Nodin (2001) postulates that Erickson's developmental stage of "Identity versus Identity Confusion", also corresponds to the genital stage of Freud's psychosexual stages of development that occur during adolescence. This is the period wherein young girls and boys ask crucial psycho-social questions, such as: who am I, in relation to society, a) what set of values or beliefs will guide my life and choices b) the onset of puberty results in bodily changes which always encourage adolescents to view themselves as adults and independent (Schiemberg, 1974).

According to Pestrana (1998), adolescence is characterized by moving from the blossom of one's family and subsequent immersion into the adult world. During this phase, the persona is influenced by the environment in a much more complex manner than before. For example, social links are established; a set of characteristics deemed necessary to be accepted by the group, even characteristics needed to express a style which pleases the self and others. The persona represents what the person will be for the other people, like a girl who is obliged to be initiated so as to be accepted by the group and the community.

Human development is a universal phenomenon, characterized by various stages. These stages differ from one culture to the other. Furthermore, each developmental stage tends to bring about expectations that are in accordance with the particular culture. In addition, in each culture there exist challenges that are specific to a given stage as well as to the manner in which these challenges are resolved. Like in many other cultural groups, these stages are accompanied by various expectations. For example, the system for assisting young women in making the transition to adulthood has been eroded in recent decades because various factors have contributed to this, including the transformation of gender roles, human rights and family structures Lemmer (1993). The modern South Africa, while Changing rapidly in the economic and social domains is unable to fill the cultural and social gaps that have arisen but with the previous systems are frequently maintained in concert with the new adaptations to a rapidly changing socio-cultural environment. In such a transitional state, adolescents and youth frequently find themselves caught between conflicting socio-cultural pressures, including those relating to initiation rites of passage, sexuality and marriage (Pestrana, 1998).

1.8.5 Rites of passage

During the early 20th century, the Belgian anthropologist, “Van Gennep, 1960”, observed that all cultures had prescribed ways for an individual and society to deal with these emotions charged situations (Van Gennep, 1960). Different cultures perform different ritual ceremonies to mark the transition from one phase of life to another. Van Gennep called these ceremonies rites of passage. Graduation from school, divorce, and retirement at the end of a work life are also major transitions in modern, large scale societies.

Diverse cultures throughout the world have heightened emotions during times of major life changes. These developmental changes may be physiological or social in nature. These moratoriums are connected with personal transitions between different stages that occur during developmental stages. They represent significant life changes such as, birth, puberty, marriage, life threatening illnesses or injury and finally death. However, rites of passage in many cultures are used to mark the socially recognized transition to sexual maturity (van de Walle; Franklin, 1996).

The term “rite of passage” refers to any ritual marking a transition in the life of an individual from one state or status to another. Mlama (1990) argues that all human beings experience a series of such transitions in the course of a lifetime. Transitions can reflect biological or maturational progressions. For example, transition from existence within the womb to life, social status and role assignment. Human societies tend to mark such life transitions with rites of passage. Mlama (1990) states that a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood for girls, in which experiences of womanhood are inculcated, are presented with the practical purpose of instructing the girls on how to fulfil their various roles as adults.

1.8.6 Murundu

The female initiation and rite of passage has similar cultural meaning to *musevhetho* and *murundu* within the Vha-Venda culture. *Murundu* is circumcision rites for boys. In some other areas it is called *mula/hogo*. The Vha-Venda people reported that this ceremony is attended by ordinary people not members of the royal family. It is said that the first person to be admitted is the son of the traditional doctor in charge of it. The reason why members of the royal family do not attend is because it is seen as having the Vhalemba origin.

The *murundu* circumcision is considered to be preparatory stage for boys to manhood and perceived as a preventative measure against sexually transmitted diseases. *Murundu* is hosted during winter in the bush far from the village. Milubi, (2000), states that boys at *murunduni* are taught certain behavioural expectations that the society will have on them as adult men. It is said that after boys have been circumcised, the elders tell them that they have sharpened the “spear” (spear refers to circumcised penis) and with the spear they would be able to strike the “*thulo*”/girl. This means that such a boy has permission to have sexual intercourse. This is understood as a way of preparing initiates for the future.

1.8.7 Musevhetho

Musevhetho is the initiation rite for girls that initiates a girl from a baby to the stage of puberty (i.e., before the girl starts menstruating) (Milubi, 2000). This rite is referred to as “*ukwevha*”, it involves elongation of the girls’ labia minora, which is sometimes called *sungwi*, and said to be equivalent to the *murundu*. *Musevhetho* initiation comes from the Bapedi tribe wherein the girl should perform the exercise of labia minora. The role of this initiation school among the Tsonga or Shangaan, according to Xitlhabana, cited in Milubi (2000), is referred to as “*mileve*” (i.e. sexual appetizer). This is said to harness men into a fulfilling relationship.

Women who have elongated labia minora are perceived and perceive themselves as having attained a higher level than those who have not. They perceive themselves as having an advantage of acquiring marriage and can sexually satisfy men better than those who have not elongated. Thus, those who have not elongated are always ridiculed by those who have elongated by calling them names such as *shuvhuru*, master-mistress and also through the usage of generic terminology (Milubi, 2000).

According to Stayt (1968), *musevetho* has been introduced into Vha-Venda by the neighbouring Basotho, where it is called '*mula*'. The *musevetho* is very popular among a small section of the people; particularly where *vhusha* or circumcision has the strongest influence in educating young girls and boys regarding the culture. *Musevetho* is believed to play an important role in reducing early sexual engagement amongst young girls and boys (informant). For example, girls who are not virgins are ostracized at '*musevetho*' initiation school. The practice is believed to encourage girls to abstain from sex and discourage girls not to lose their virginity before marriage. At these schools, girls' virginity status is checked by the older women (*vhomazwale*). *Musevetho* is believed to play an important role in preventing unplanned teenage pregnancies.

The most important part of the proceedings is the operation, which all the initiates must undergo. It is said by Vha-Venda people that children of all ages must attend and quite young children are brought to the ceremony by their mothers. The functions are held in a small hut outside the village known as '*nonyana*', which is the spirit of the '*musevhetho*'. The boys are sent all around and dance to perform antics for the amusement of the people. This is a fascinating event, because these boys never speak to any person, but carry on all communications between each other and not with those who did not graduate from the ceremony (Stayt, 1968).

According to Stayt (1968), the girls often attend at *nonyana*'s hut for a day and a night. They will see the spirit and be returned to their homes until they are considered to be enough initiates to warrant the operation. On the appointed day, they are taken to a secluded place on the river bank, where an old woman performs the operation of cutting the clitoris. At the same time, the girls are branded with a mark on the outside of the thigh. The brand is like two inverted U's joined together or sometimes it may be two round dots. The brand is seen as a password for the initiate to have access to attend when these ceremonies are taking place. Without being questioned if a person qualifies for entry, the brand serves as a proof for the possessor that she has undergone the operation (i.e. female genital mutilation).

1.8.8 Circumcision

Louw and Edwards (1997), state that female genital mutilation refers to female circumcision. The circumcision rite for girls is called by the Vha-Venda people as “*Hali, Sungwi.*” Female genital mutilation may be in the form of surgical removal of the clitoris called clitoridectomy. The procedures were once commonly referred to as female circumcision (FC) and are said to be now dominant throughout the international community. Some cultures are opposing the stigma of the word “mutilation” and prefer to use the term female genital cutting. The term female circumcision is predominantly replaced by the term female genital mutilation/circumcision (FGM/C). Countries like Kenya; Ghana and in Limpopo Province in South Africa, consider female genital cutting (FGC) as part of maintaining cleanliness as it removes secreting parts of the genitalia, preserving virginity and, maintenance of good health and prevention of promiscuity.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/female-genital_cutting].

After the circumcision ceremonies at the river, the girls should proceed to the kraal of the headman who has sanctioned the proceedings. Hence, the girls are given permission to socialise with the boys who went through *murundu*. The feast begins where dancing and singing; with beer drinking; feasting and sexual licence continues for a fortnight. After the festival, the girls are taken to the river bank and smothered with fat and red-ochre, and brought again to the kraal for a few days to rest, but later return to the river where they are washed, except the brand. The initiates mentoring the initiands would accompany the girls to their respective homes where the celebration continues (Stayt, 1968).

The senior elders are elders who represent tradition and wisdom of the past and their role is to teach and train the initiates (responsible for the initiation ritual).

Stayt (1968), states that the Vha-Venda transitional period supplements the teachings of the “*vhutambo*” “*vhutuka* and the *vhusha* for socializing girls and women. It is said that those who have taken part are full members of the tribe and are fully prepared for immediate marriage. However, the final act of these ceremonies is identical. All end with the washing at the river, combined with the cutting of hair and fresh adornment of the body. In this way, it is perceived as a graduation of the severance between the old status and the new status.

1.8.9 Vhusha

Vhusha is the initiation for girls. The ceremony is sanctioned by the royal family, because it is seen as the first initiation ceremony because it is held at the royal place, unlike *musevhethe*, which is attended by the commoners/*vhasiwana*. Stayt (1968) states this is one of the ceremonies that is attended by grown up females or matured girls. This ceremony takes place during winter and summer and during the school holidays. The Vha-Venda girls are expected to attend in order to learn good manners and regain their identity (Jeannerat, 1997).

1.8.10 Tshikanda

According to Stayt (1931) and Van Warmelo (1932), *tshikanda* is part of the *domba* pre-marital initiation school for boys and girls, which takes place shortly before *domba*. The ceremony lasts for one night at the beginning of *domba*. The ceremony is performed to provide the girls of the ruling families the opportunity to learn certain songs and dances. Dances are also employed in the treatment of people with certain conditions such as demon possession. This dance usually takes place in the courtyard of the king, who often supplies the musical instruments. During the initiation, the girls spend the whole week with "*luvhund*" all over their bodies and do not wash, even when they eat.

1.8.11 Domba

The *domba* is a pre-marital initiation. The preparations are made by the families for the girls to be ready and to prepare what is necessary to attend the ceremony. Entrance fee is paid before the girl's admission. The Vha-Venda people (cited by participants) believe that the ceremony has deep meanings, and it is not possible to witness what is happening within (teaching, ritual performance and bath) since it is a secret ceremony.

The Vha-Venda people believe that “*domba*” opens the door to full participation in the society. Seniority of age is an important principle amongst the Vha-Venda social organization, and as women grow older they become more powerful, respected and play a leading role in rituals and ceremonies, and are given a status as, “*mme a domba*” (the mother of the ceremony). Many informants said that it should be ‘set up’ during the time of reaping, when there is an economic surplus, and continue until the planting season of the following year, but others insisted that it should be both ‘set up’ and ‘burnt’ at a time when the maize is beginning to sprout (Young ,1965).

1.8.12 Thondo

In *the “thondo”*, the boys are, for the first time, brought into contact with some of the harder facts of life, learning respect, discipline and endurance, and the arts of war. However, at the *vhutambo* and *vhusha*, boys and girls receive their first lessons about sex. Stayt (1968) states the necessity for physical endurance, obedience, and humanity that are forcefully brought home for them. After these ceremonies, the boys and girls are seen as being responsible children and are accepted as members of an age set, occupying a definite position in the social hierarchy, and possessing spirits, which, in the event of death, for the first time have the power to influence their relatives.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the background history and the importance of female initiation practice in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province and the prevalence of female initiation in other neighbouring countries like Kenya, Ghana and Tanzania. It also clarifies concepts such as initiation, menarche, puberty rites, adolescence, rites of passage, *murundu*, *musevetho*, circumcision, *vhusha*, Vha-Venda cultural beliefs, socialization and gender, the cycle of initiation, tradition and secrecy, women education and initiation, ritual practices and cultural norms, disappearance of initiation rites of passage, implications and psychological trauma and women initiation.

2.2 BACKGROUND HISTORY

Most people go through elevated or heightened emotions during times of major life changes. These changes represent significant developmental transitions. For example, most societies consider life changes such as the birth of a child, puberty, marriage, and other associated life developmental events as culturally significant transitions. During these periods, in most cultural groups, rituals are performed to propel individuals into a new stage of life. These ritualistic practices are more prevalent in rural communities and are held dear by most people (Mlama, 1990).

Mlama (1990) further contends that the Vha-Venda people saw the development of the individual as a series of phases of which puberty and marriage were the most important. They believed that the external forces such as the ancestors and good and evil spirits could exert bad influences over people. To guide people through these potentially difficult phases, initiation schools were used to help adolescents handle the responsibilities of the next phase in their lives. Through dances and initiation ceremonies, the initiates were afforded the opportunity to break with past mistakes and to embrace the future. The ceremonies were also designed to obtain the support of the ancestors and to strengthen the initiates.

During the turn of the 20th century, a Belgian anthropologist, Van Gennep, 1960, stated that all cultures have prescribed ways of handling significant transitional stages “Van Gennep, 1960”. For example, different cultures perform initiation ceremonies to mark the transition from one phase of life to another. Van Gennep (1960) refers to these ritualistic ceremonies as “rites of passage.”

Most prominent theories around rites of passage have been Van Gennep (1960) and Victor Turner’s (1987). Both of these male anthropologists recognized the importance of rites of passage in helping people to prepare for the sense of identity that needed to run alongside the social status accorded to them. In most ethnic groups in South Africa, both males and females, undergo certain rituals during certain stages in development. For example, there are rites of passage for girls entering womanhood or boys entering manhood. These occasions are usually a public announcement of a girl’s or boy’s eligibility for adulthood and marriage. Almost every culture in the world ritualizes the important milestones that people go through throughout their lives as it is said, to create a happy mood in the communities (Lincoln, 1981).

This was taken by Turner in Mahdi et al. (1987) who, while researching and writing on the rites of passage among the Ndembu of Zambia, asserted that liminal or threshold times have a power of both the individual and the culture at large. Initiation rites he argued exemplify transition since they all have well marked and protracted liminal phases (Turner in Mahdi et al. 1987) Liminality in this context referred to: "a moment of suspension of normal rules and roles, a crossing of boundaries and violating norms, which enables us to understand those norms, even where they conflict and move on either to incorporate or reject them." (Van Gennep, 1960)

In terms of the indigenous knowledge system in African countries such as Kenya and Zambia, initiation ceremonies are rooted deep in the history of most traditional groupings. Beidelman cited in Molnos (1973), states that for Black African females, ceremonies are perceived as important because the event is seen as an entry into the realm of adults. For example, female initiation ceremonies are held in several countries of Africa. Initiations for girls are marked as important milestones in most societies of Africa.

Women initiation ceremonies, much like their male counterparts, provide instructions to females on what society will expect of them as responsible adults (Mlama, 1990). Through imitation and positive reinforcement by their mothers and elderly women, most girls are fully aware of what is expected of them as women within the Vha-Venda, Pedi and Tsonga/Shangaan cultures. Initiation information is communicated by the elderly women when a girl or boy reaches puberty and the girl or boy who is willing would eagerly look forward to go for initiation.

This process is generally conceptualized as a practice that upholds the Vha-Venda culture and validates their Africa (ness) (Van de Walle; Franklin, 1996). Many girls attend such initiation ceremonies to conform with the culture which subsequently leads to admiration and respect from the society. Furthermore, curiosity also plays a major role in the attendance of these puberty rites of passage. For instance, most girls who choose to attend the rituals want to experience what it means to subject themselves to the initiation process.

This is so mainly because these rituals are generally characterized by secrecy and confidentiality regarding what happens inside the ceremonies. Women initiation or rites of passage experiences are not discussed in public, particularly in the presence of those who have not undergone the process. This is done mainly to safeguard the traditional norms and values of the initiation process (Beidelman, cited in Molnos, 1973).

Van Gennep (1960) proposed that the initiation ceremony conveys three sub-meanings, namely; a) separation, b) transition, and c) incorporation. These changes are life crises from birth until death. However, rites of passage in many cultures are used to mark the socially recognized transition to sexual maturity (Van de Walle; Franklin, 1996).

Richards (1956) refers to the initiation for girls as the menarche rites for initiating girls into adulthood. Lincoln (1981) in his study describes female initiation as a process that women go through, resulting in a change of status and becoming 'fertile', productive, experienced and whole. The term initiation and "rite of passage" can be viewed as a ritual, marking a transition in the life of an individual from one state or status to another.

In societies such as the Vhembe District, places like Shayandima, Mashau and Mashawana in South Africa, adolescents and young women must participate in the ceremony. Sometimes, a society will hold an initiation rite for only one gender. In that case, only members of that gender take part as initiates. Members of the opposite sex may still act as participants in the ceremony. If both sexes undergo an initiation, the male and female rituals are held separately. In the Vhembe District, areas such as Mashau village, initiation rites are somewhat more commonly held for girls than for boys, perhaps because menarche is such a clear and unambiguous mark of sexual maturity, to establish an appropriate time for the female's transition to adulthood.

According to Van de Walle and Franklin (1996) women are taught about future duties, about the obligation of fidelity to their counterpart (husband), the rules of etiquette, regulating relations with her in-laws and that the proper place is one of subordination and to obey their husband. The forms of initiation may differ according to ethnic groups, but what is common to the practitioners is that the elderly ceremoniously welcome the young adolescents to their status by performing a communal ritual (Milubi, 2000).

Musevhethe is described as one of the four stages of preparation for adult, marriage life that all Vha-Venda girls must undergo Stayt (1968). *Musevhethe* is the initiation rite for girls from a baby to the stage of puberty (i.e. before the girl starts menstruating). Small girls do not take part in any rites, except that they sing songs, which their mothers teach them. Stayt (1968) states that *musevhethe* was introduced by the neighbouring Basotho people where it is called '*mula*'. The *musevhethe* is very popular among a small section of the people, particularly where *murundu* or circumcision lodge has the strongest influence. *Musevhethe* is more in the nature of a secret society than a recognized feature of the social organization.

Because of formal schools, girls often attend at '*nonyana*'s hut for one day. They will see the spirit and return to their homes when there are not enough initiates who warrant the operation. On the appointed day they are taken to a secluded place on the river bank, where an old woman performs the operation of cutting the clitoris. At the same time the girls are branded with a mark on the outside of the thigh. The brand is like two inverted U's joined together or sometimes it may be two round dots. This brand is seen as a password for the future occasions which will prove to the initiates that a person qualifies for entry and proves its possessor has undergone the operation.

There are certain transition points in an individual's life which are imbued with psychological and socio-cultural significance because of self-identity change. For girls, the first menstruation, or menarche, may be of importance, because it represents a concrete symbol of girl transition to a mature female. For a boy child who attended initiation, it symbolizes maturity and manhood (Wilson, 1991).

The transition to adulthood for girls is done from a small initiation celebration of biological development; a young girl is introduced to womanhood without effort simply by having a mother and other female relations as mentors. Respect and other moral activities are acquired in a way that seems easy and natural, by observing and imitating their parent's behaviours. These young girls would see exactly how their future relationships would be (Berenice, 1994).

Brown (1963) states that anthropologists through research have discovered that there are differences in the sanctions that apply to initiation practices; some threaten terrible consequences and others are promised great benefit (Brown, 1963).

2.3 INITIATION AND CULTURAL NORM

In African countries, such as Kenya, Ghana and Tanzania, female initiation rituals are widely practiced (Van de Walle; Franklin, 1996). These ceremonies are regarded as significant rites of passage for girls entering womanhood. They are usually public engagements that signify a girl's eligibility for marriage. The cultural norm ritualizes the important milestones throughout life; birth, marriage and death are typically marked by special ceremonies. The rite of passage from childhood to adulthood also figures prominently among various ethnic groups worldwide. For example, the Americans celebrate the sweet sixteen parties, 21st birthday party and graduation from college even entering into marriage (Van Gennep, 1960).

In terms of the indigenous knowledge system in most African countries, initiation ceremonies are deeply rooted because of the conservative traditions, that is, learning more about what should be passed from one generation to another. For most females of African descent, initiation ceremonies are perceived as important because the event is seen as an entry into the realm of adulthood (source) .It is the best interest of the public that announcement is made to the community that a girl or young adult woman is ready to be married. In Kenya, Ghana and Tanzania rites of passage revolve around the preparation of young girls for marriage and to be good wives and excellent mothers (van de Walle; Franklin, 1996).

Women initiation ceremonies, much like their male counterparts, provide instructions to females on what society will expect of them as responsible adults. Through imitation and positive reinforcement by their mothers and elderly women, most girls are fully aware of what is expected of them as women in most South African ethnic groupings such as Vha-Venda, Pedi and Tsonga/Shangaan culture. This practice is accepted by the community especially the traditional leaders (royal chief) and elders. Louw and Edwards (1997) confirm that initiation schools and traditional practices are rituals associated with adult life.

An initiation ceremony is something a young girl eagerly looks forward to, prepares for, and honourably takes part in. The ceremony is usually viewed as a cultural practice that upholds African culture. Furthermore, it functions as a form of entertainment, a place of fun and freedom that teaches respect and “ubuntu” to young girls (Milubi, 2000). Many girls attend in order to be accepted by the community, peers and to have a sense of belonging and to gain the respect from the society. Moreover, curiosity also plays a major role in the attendance of these puberty rites. Girls want to know what it means through subjecting themselves to the initiation process. However, initiation school issues are secretive and confidential. The elderly people who attend initiations stress that these matters are not discussed and it is taboo to divulge the information regarding what happens in these ceremonies (Blacking, 1969).

Haralambos and Heald (1980) define culture as the collection of ideas and habits which people learn, share and transmit from generation to generation. Kluckhohn’s (1951) cited in Haralambos and Heald (1980) elegant phrase, culture is a “design for living” held by members of a particular society. Without a shared culture, members of society would be unable to communicate and cooperate to avoid confusion and disorders.

Pare (1995) argues that a culture can be thought of as a community of individuals who see their world in a particular manner and who share particular interpretations as central to the meaning of their lives and actions. Culture also depicts a collection of people in terms of their world making practices, and thereby gives primacy to the interpretive, cultural and narrative aspects of lived experiences.

Women initiation rituals are the same as that of male initiation rituals in the sense that both boys and girls are taught about life; to be responsible, to cope with challenges and how to handle emotional and physical pain. For young girls who grow up in a well-functioning family, they are adequately socialized for work and marriage by the time they reach early adolescence, whereas, in communities where corporate families are typical, the girls must also learn to take part in the tightly organized group of women that dominate everyday affairs. This is regardless of any rule of residence that may take her to another group. Elders of initiation state that a girl must learn to submit to the authority of the older women and to contribute to the ongoing unit, while maintaining certain autonomy in her own hut and among her own children. Meanwhile, boys are taught to be responsible and brave (Young, 1965).

The expectations of the adult role and the education of girls in early society are different from those of boys although initially they are both engaged in the primary and domestic educational milieu. Boys are physically part of this essentially female milieu, but psychologically apart, since their future departure for the all male hunting, ceremonial and public sphere is a given. However, girls are informally taught the main perspective on life by older females and are considered to be the future adults. Moreover, when a child reaches puberty, (puberty, which gives man the knowledge of greater power, and gives a woman the knowledge of dependency) an initiation ritual is performed to mark the woman's passage into womanhood (Van Gennep, 1960).

Van Gennep (1960) and Delaney (1995) state that the initiation ceremonies are divided into three sub-meanings, namely; a) separation from society, b) transition in the case of adolescence, from child to adult, and c) incorporation a welcoming back into society with acknowledgement of the adolescent's changed status. All of this may be summarized as social transition; which are moratoriums connected with personal transitions between different stages that occur during developmental stages, from birth to death. However, rites of passage in many cultures are used to mark the socially recognized transition to sexual maturity (Van de Walle; Franklin, 1996).

According to Ussher (1989) initiation is also a deeply religious practice where an animal is slaughtered and the blood is perceived to bind the initiated to the departed of the clan. These forms of initiation may differ according to ethnic groups, but what is common to the practitioners is that the elderly ceremoniously welcome the young adolescents to their status by performing a communal ritual (Milubi, 2000)

During initiation, the initiated is secluded and receives instruction on the sacred wisdom of the rituals and ethical norms. These include respect, dignity and sex education from the rightful and accepted people who have already passed the stage. It is in recognition of these changes that communities took away girls for a period of seclusion to teach them about sexuality, femininity and the responsibilities that come with being a grown matured woman (Van Gennep, 1960).

Within the Vha-Venda culture, young girls who are confirmed to be sexually matured are expected to attend the *domba* initiation ritual. The *domba* is not a tourists' attraction but a ceremony with deep meanings, which is not possible to witness all parts of its teaching and ritual bath. The public is only allowed to see the dancing, which is the special occasion for men to choose future wives for their nephews and sons. Older women from the various initiates' respective households come to watch these dances so as to check that their initiates are doing well (Milubi, 2000).

Domba is an initiation school for young men and women. The people who attended “*domba*” initiation have their own linguistic variety which helps them to maintain their social identity. If a person belongs to the Vha-Venda or Tsonga/Shangaan culture, he or she should be able to speak the *domba* variety. They should know how to use it, or have a joint knowledge of norms of lexical terms, expressions and norms of use. Mulaudzi (1999) and Wardhaugh (1992) argue that it determines how speakers perceive and organise the world around them, both the natural world and the social world.

Female initiate rites, even when limited by definition, are by no means all similar in character. In the actual practice, they differ from society to society: For example, sometimes the initiates fast, some are isolated, some are seen as centres of attention and sometimes they feast. It is also stated by other anthropologists that there are differences in the sanctions that apply to these practices; some threaten terrible consequences and others are promised great benefit (Brown, 1963).

Other initiated women see the easy transition to female adulthood in a positive light even though more was made of the initiation of boys to manhood. However, initiated girls and women claim to know how power is used positively during the initiation process. The possible explanation lies in the relationship between male and female initiation rites, which limits the definition of male initiation rites to only those ceremonies characterized by both genital operation and seclusion. A strong relationship emerges between these male rites and those initiation rituals that subject the initiate to extreme pain.

Female initiation practice is celebrated in many cultures around the world as a rite of passage, a time to recognize that a girl is moving into womanhood. However, some sources agree that the average age of menarche in girls in modern societies has declined due to environmental exposure to chemicals (Wallace, 2003).

2.4 STATISTICS

The statistics around the initiation of women is estimated as 100 million and 140 million women are believed to have been subjected to the practice in Africa and an additional three million girls face the threat of female genital mutilation every year. The type of mutilation practised in Africa has three levels of severity. The first level involves removing part of the clitoris; second level is the excision which involves the removal of the labia minora and thirdly, part of the labia majora. Amel Fahmy a researcher on female circumcision at the World Health Organization (1994), reports that in Africa it is a very common practice which is deeply rooted in tradition whereas in other societies it is a sign of cleanliness (Wallace, 2003).

2.5 THE VHA-VENDA CULTURE AND BELIEFS

Pedersen (1991) defines culture as an ideological dimension of human condition that guides and motivates behaviour. Culture broadly includes “demographic variables for example, age, sex, place of residence as well as ethnographic variables such as nationality, ethnicity, language and religion.” This researcher’s view is that culture provides the “lens” through which we view the world and make sense of it. Culture shapes who we are and helps us understand ourselves and others.

Rites of passage mark each stage of development in the Vha-Venda people. Through sexual education, older women pass on culturally accepted norms of sexual behaviour and gender identity to girls and younger women in initiation schools. Corey (1956) reported that the rite of passage is a way of conveying to the initiates a sense of the important social values of the tribe. The ceremonies aid in the moral education of the young, teaching them to take their duties seriously. The initiate learns the importance of conformity to tribal customs and of respect for elders and the value of food. “The ceremonies teach the youth or girls to realize what is implied in being a member of the society. The elderly understand rites as an orderly; expression of feelings appropriate to a social situation.” (Informants). Young (1965) supports the idea of taking part in the performance of rites as serving to cultivate in the individual sentiments.

2.6 SOCIALIZATION AND GENDER

Socialization is the process by which individuals learn the culture of their society. In western society, other important agencies of socialization include the educational system, the occupational group and the peer group. For example, groups whose members share similar circumstances and are often of a similar age. Socialization is not, however, confined to childhood, but it is a lifelong process (Haralambos; Heald, 1980).

The relational theory contends that women have traditionally built their sense of identity and self-worth on activities that involve caring about and giving others. These roles are not given value which gives women a pervasive sense that what they do is not as valuable as what men do. Let us look at what women go through during initiation; they succumb to the cutting of the clitoris and extension of their labia minora only to value the men's sexual pleasure. It has been researched that women cannot even value their own feelings, actions and thoughts leading to tolerate the negation inherent in physical and emotional abuse. The researcher's perception about socialization is that girls and women often deny their own aggression, confidence, assertiveness and the need to be independent seems unfeminine and females fear of acting powerfully may alienate them from traditional and cultural norms and beliefs system.

During the initiation socialization, the initiates are forced to succumb to abuse; they are deprived to raise their voices. If they dispute the instructions, they are rejected, insulted and humiliated. The reason behind the voicelessness is that no woman talks back to her husband or in-laws. The same rules and conditions are applied to those who discuss with the 'outsiders' what happens during initiation Haralambos; Heald (1980).)

Gender refers to the way females and males are brought up or socialized as women and men. Social, cultural and contextual factors allow patterns of behaviour generally associated with girls or boys, women or men, to emerge (Truscott 1994; Okin, 1989). The term gender rather than non-sexism also provides a deeper understanding of how the initiation system treats females differently from males (Truscott, 1994; Okin, 1989).

Gender is a socially acquired characteristic, and includes psychological, social and cultural characteristics, such as ideas about "masculinity and femininity". Seedat, Duncan, and Lazarus (2001) define gender as the characteristic practices that are regarded by society to be appropriate to women and men.

Due to the expectation of the adult role, the education of girls in early society is different to that of boys, although initially they both dwell in the same primary and secondary domestic educational milieu. Boys are socialized to be independent and to brave their future on the public sphere is a given. However, girls are socialized and taught their main perspectives on life by older female participants in the primary educational milieu, which is also to be their future adult milieu (Sampelle, 1992).

Gender socialization teaches people that males and females are responsible for different tasks. For example, males are breadwinners, responsible for the family's monetary and physical survival. They are warriors and should be able to protect themselves and their families. They hold the position of authority in all social institutions; in religion and work. In contrast, females are homemakers and nurturers. They manage and direct the affairs of the household by cooking, cleaning and taking care of the children. Mackenzie (1992) states that gender socialization shape how people experience themselves and others.

Van de Walle and Franklin (1996) state that women are taught about; future duties, about the obligation of fidelity and their partners (husbands), the rules of etiquette regulating relations with their in-laws and that the proper place is one of subordination and to obey their husband. The idea of gender difference, not characteristic of women and men in position, helps keep the reality of male domination in place. The challenges that females being initiated face are not individual problems but institutional and intended to oppress women.

During the process of socialization, young girls are taught morals and family values, for example, how to relate and respect the people and their family members. The emphasis is about learning life skills and a right to passage in participation in the social, political and juridical activities of the community. Rites of passage are proposed to serve as the strategy devised by human societies to mediate whatever social upheaval and personal turmoil are associated with life's transitions (van de Walle; Franklin, 1996).

The graduates (initiates) of initiation schools perceive initiation to be a high degree of solidarity, brotherhood and sisterhood. The importance of socializing with one another brings unity towards each other. During the process of initiation, the initiates accept and treat each other with respect. Respect is understood as a spirit of unity and humanity towards each other in respect of their particular schools. That is, the graduates from *'musevhetho, 'vhusha', 'domba' and 'vhutamba vhutuka' and 'murundu'* are related humanely towards each other after they have realized that they have gone through a similar experience together. The initiates believe that initiation teaches them tolerance, discipline and responsibility (Stayt, 1968).

Some people in Limpopo Province view initiation as a culture and an initiation school as a place of socialization. It is perceived as a safe place for women to learn about their cultural beliefs and to admire and understand their respective roles, learn to develop a sense of self, receptive, responsive and initiated girls learn to gain power and position through their personal relationships within their communities and during the initiation ceremonies (informants/ *Vho-Makhadzi*).

According to traditionally, Venda women did not have the same inferior position and status in society as in many other African groups. In fact, women played an important role in educating the youth through stories they told around the fire. The Vha-Venda women are entitled to own property. Their fathers usually give the property to them and if there is no male heir, the eldest female relative could inherit. Within her own courtyard, a woman had total control.

2.7 THE CYCLE OF INITIATION

The cycle of women initiation is to bring about symbolically a transformation of physical bodies of young girls into the social body of the adult community. This transformation is achieved by three elements in the initiation cycle, namely; a) movement of the bodies in space and through time, (b) corpus of songs and dances and c) a series of spoken pairs of concepts which are only understood by the people who graduated from the Vhavenda initiation school (Van de Walle; Franklin, 1996).

2.8 TRADITION AND SECRECY

Secrecy can, therefore, be loosely defined as deliberately hiding information from other people (Kelly, 2002). Secrecy also has been called “active inhibition of disclosure” labelled as self-concealment. The researcher’s definition is that “secrets” refer to knowledge permitted only to those who have been initiated. However, secrecy calls attention to pain, guilt, frustration and shame. Gilligan (1982) points out that the female voice has been silent in the narrative adult maturity and these voiceless females have created distortions in the understanding of the stages and the sequences of women’s developmental stages of initiation. The “different voice”, the feminine voice, which had been kept silent for so long, made itself heard primarily through the work of Gilligan (1982), but continued to resound in the works of other feminist writers, particularly Nancy Chodorow and Janet Lever.

Initiation schools are secret ceremonies and the knowledge is not supposed to be shared with the uninitiated and outside initiation premises, except at “*dombani*” because to speak about ‘*dzingoma*’ the traditional practices - outside ‘*dombani*’, is taboo. Yet, the *domba* itself is believed to be educational.

2.9 WOMEN INITIATION AND EDUCATION

Education is defined as the process of learning or acquiring new skills. People can learn in a formal or an informal education scenario. Whatever particular social structural features may account for the presence of adolescent initiation rites in different societies, all such rituals seem to also have one purpose in common, and that is the function of educating the young person. Initiates are given detailed instructions about their roles, responsibilities, and privileges as adults in the culture in which they live. They are also instructed in the culture’s mythology and system of ethics, the manner in which they should conduct themselves and others, (i.e. to respect the boundaries when sharing initiation information with uninitiated women and adulthood life) (Young, 1965).

Initiation ceremonies, whether simple or elaborated, seem to occur in many communities. The fact that human beings across historical times and place, mark life transitions in a similar way, points to the likelihood that the rites of passage may serve a similar function. The function of initiation rites is viewed as a technique of socialization for the people who participate in them. For example, rites allow the young person's knowledge and mental outlook to grow and to be made compatible with some features of his or her culture. Culture increases group solidarity and a sense of belonging (Brown, 1963).

Kluckhohn cited in Haralambos and Heald (1980) states that culture is a “design for living society to operate effectively.” These guidelines must be shared by its members. Culture, therefore, has two essential qualities: a) it is learned; and b) it is shared. Without it, there would be no human society. Since human beings have no instincts to direct their actions, their behaviours must be based on guidelines, which are learned for the society to operate effectively. However, formal and informal education empowers girls and boys to make informed decisions concerning their future roles and understanding the culture, social norms and cultural ritual practices. Culture is shared from one generation to another.

2.10 RITUAL PRACTICES AND CULTURAL NORMS

La Fontaine (1985) in his study defines a ritual as a social action that requires organization and the co-operation of individuals directed by a leader. Rituals are hierarchical in nature and entail admission to a secret society. For example, the people who have gone through initiation ritual take an oath not to tell outsiders. The activities and rituals are not shared with uninitiated people called *mashuvhuru*.

According to Haralambos and Heald (1980), every culture contains a large number of guidelines which direct conduct in particular situations. Such guidelines are known as norms. A norm is a specific guide to action which defines acceptable and appropriate behaviour in specific situations. They are enforced by positive and negative sanctions which may be formal or informal. For example, within the Vha-Venda culture and in other African countries, it is a norm for girls and boys to be initiated and it is considered to be appropriate. Positive cultural practices such as initiation schools are validated in contributing to the young person's well-being and social integration. However, initiation rites of passage are gradually disappearing due to socio-cultural change in other neighbouring countries to South Africa.

2.11 DISAPPEARANCE OF INITIATION RITES OF PASSAGE

Initiation knowledge is found mainly with the older generation because adolescent initiation rituals tend to be found in rural communities. The young generation is likely to move to urban areas for education and view initiation of women as old fashioned. In urban areas and big cities, the knowledge residing in the older generation is less likely to be relevant to the younger generation. In the big cities, where initiation rites are not considered important, adolescents may be left on their own to construct their own adulthoods, including what they want to become, what they believe, how they will behave, where and with whom they will live, what moral standards they will follow, and so on. In westernized urban areas where initiation rites exist, they no longer serve the function of educating the young generation in his/her future roles or conferring adult status. The result of this is that the young generation today have freedom to pursue their own interests and develop their own talents and believe that adolescents from deep rural communities do not enjoy life

[<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/288310/initiation-rite>].

2.12 PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA AND WOMEN INITIATION

Means (2000) defines trauma as a state of being overwhelmed. This means more than what one can normally tolerate physically and psychologically. Trauma involves bodily injury and psychological and emotional reactions looking at bodily harm in terms of, cutting of the clitoris, and psychological trauma in terms of insults and humiliation in front of others.

The women who went through the process of genital mutilation consider initiation as traumatic. Trauma Centre at the University of Illinois (2007) operationally defines “*psychological trauma as caused by experiencing a traumatic event that overwhelms a person’s ability to cope and leaves them fearing death, bodily injury or psychological damage*”. The two definitions speak to emotional encroachment. The definitions both put emphasis on the overwhelming nature of the intrusion which makes it impossible for the ego to cope. Experience is a central theme of psychological trauma; as a result depending on different personality make-ups people may experience similar “traumatic events” differently. Experience alone will never constitute as traumatic until the object [experiencer] make personal sense of it. The final meaning brought forward by the object on whether the experience is traumatic or not is dependent on many other subjective intra-psychic processes. Yet, traumatic and violent experiences have a common effect; they disintegrate one’s sense of security. The informants said they were prone to be psychologically traumatized, because they often avoided engaging in the discussion. Some would reflect by saying: “If I have to turn the clock back, I would not have accepted such brutal experience to happen.”

The hardship of genital mutilation and humiliation created psychological distress such as the sense of helplessness, terror or fear, feeling of anxiety and phobias and depression. Some are likely to have long-term emotional effects on the girls and boys who went through the hardship of genital mutilation and the cutting of the clitoris. All these psychological symptoms can lead to sadness, frustration and guilt feelings. Low self-esteem is also damaging (Gilligan, 1989; Milubi, 2000).

2.13 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Vhusha*, *domba* and *tshikanda* initiation have been practised for decades by people in Limpopo Province including people in Venda, to impart knowledge and culture to the young women and men before marriage. The initiation school is perceived as a cultural norm that enables the new and old generations to cope with life, childbirth, marriage and taking good care of the family. Men are taught to be responsible for their wives, property and to know their identity and how their bodies function. It is believed by the people in Limpopo Province that initiation schools help in reducing divorce, teenage pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, drug abuse and HIV and Aids. *Vhusha and domba* are rites of passage associated with physiological processes of human development.

Female initiation rites are different by definition as mentioned above. They are by no means all similar in character. There are differences from society to society in the actual practices. For example, sometimes the initiates are isolated, sometimes they become the centre of attention, sometimes they feast, and at other times they starve. It is evident that there are differences in the sanctions that apply to these practices; some are perceived to be dangerous games and others promise great benefits.

This chapter has discussed the significance of the initiation of women in Limpopo Province within the Vha-Venda culture. The process of women initiation has been discussed and explained in detail. The next chapter explains the methodology used for the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

It is an inherent human nature to attempt to make sense of every human experience with or without affirmation. The study is meant to be qualitative in design and employs, questionnaires, focus group interviews and participant observation to see the participant's activities, as well as hearing how participants interpret their initiation lived experiences in the interview, field notes and audio tape recordings as methods of gathering data. This chapter focuses on the population and sample of the study, data collection procedure and the instruments used to collect data, the ethical considerations and explains how data was analysed.

Patton (2001) and Bailey, (1987) regard methodology as the more practical branch of the philosophy of science that deals with the methods, systems, and rules for the conduct of inquiry. In this study, the rationale for the selection of qualitative methodology for the study is explained. The qualitative research approach is an appropriate and useful method for examining and understanding the research topic as it seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The Vha- Venda initiation ceremony is a complex and secretive phenomenon which cannot be studied quantitatively but could best be studied by using questionnaires, focus group interviews, participant observation,

field notes and audio- tape recordings which are suitable for collecting qualitative data. These methodologies help researchers to interpret, explain, explore and describe and, ultimately, understand the topic that is researched and also gives structure and helps researchers to systematically find answers to what is researched.

This perspective is emphasized by Denzin and Lincoln (2000), who view qualitative research as a situated activity that locates the observer in the world and it consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews conversations, recording, and memos to the self and field work. Although field research does not regard theorizing as restricted to a research project but also accommodates participants' views or perceptions and flexibility (Creswell, 1994; Mason, 2002).

Qualitative researchers do not regard themselves as collectors of facts about human behaviour that will lead to verification and the extension of theories, but enable researchers to determine causes of, and to predict, explain and interpret the natural settings, norms and cultural issues of people under study. Instead, the emphasis is to understand human behaviour and experiences. Hence, qualitative research offers opportunities not only to learn about the experiences of others but also to examine the experiences that the inquirer brings to the inquiry; experiences that will, to some extent, affect what is studied and help shape, for better or for worse, what is discovered. The idea of acquiring an "inside understanding of the actors' definitions of the situation is a powerful central concept for understanding the purpose of qualitative research." (Patton, 2001; Bailey, 1987; Borg & Gall, 1989).

Qualitative research methodology provides descriptions and accounts of such a process of social interaction as the voices of the participants speak and carry the story through dialogue and the researcher also talks about his or her experiences in conducting the study.

The flexibility within the qualitative approach allows the researcher to plan generally for emerging issues that develop in a field of study. As to how one deal with such issues shapes the form of qualitative narrative. Borland (2001) and Neuman (2006), emphasizes that in spite of the different approaches to creating knowledge, both quantitative and qualitative research characteristics reflect legitimate and valuable forms of disciplined or systematic inquiry that can result in stronger decision support than when used independently. Knowledge is within the meanings people make of it, and that knowledge is gained through people talking about their meanings; that knowledge is laced with personal biases and values also that it evolves, emerges and is inextricably tied to the context in which it is studied. It, therefore, means that the researcher in his or her plan strives to understand and describe how people create and maintain their social world.

3.2 SAMPLE AND SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

Sampling is “the process of selecting a portion of the population to represent the entire population.” (Polit and Hungler, 2001). The population refers to the “individuals in the universe who possess specific characteristics or a set of entities that represents all the measurements of interest to the researcher.” (de Vos, Strydom; Fouche & Delport, 2004).

In this study, the researcher used an accessible population (initiated women) to represent a targeted population. The researcher used purposive sampling to select the respondents. This was done to ensure that the sample adequately represented the target population, to obtain the most relevant information, adequacy and appropriateness of data.

The sample was drawn from a population of middle aged Venda initiated females, age between 30 and 60, who volunteered to participate in the study. To prevent bias, three groups from different villages; Shayandima, Mashau, and Mashawana in Limpopo Province, South Africa, were selected.

Kruger, Mitchell and Welman (2005), state that researchers rely on their experience, ingenuity and previous research findings to deliberately obtain units of analysis representing the population. In this study, the researcher relied only on her experiences and ingenuity because of no research findings on the study in question. Since population refers to all the possible individuals under study. The population of this study was all the initiated Vha-Venda women in Mashau, Mashawana and Shayandima in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

3.3 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURE

A sample is a subset of the population. As Moustakas (1994) rightfully says, all the participants in the sample should have experienced the phenomenon, and were interested in the meaning and willing to participate in the study. The current researcher took all the aforementioned into account and came up with the following sample from the entire population.

3.3.1 Research Participants

Table 1: Research Instruments:

Name of the Village	Number of the participants
Shayandima Village	8
Mashau Village	4
Mashawana Village	3
Research guides	2

3.4 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE AND INSTRUMENTATION

Collection of data is a systematic process in which the researcher collects relevant information to achieve the research purpose and objectives (Burns ; Grove 2005).

This study was conducted in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa.

The researcher was responsible for data collection, and entered the research contextual situation with her own personality and history, being a Black South African female. Ample opportunity was, however, provided to clarify any issues with the participants and/or field workers where there seemed to be uncertainty, as multiple meanings were probably ascribed to the realities that the research was focussing on.

In 2006 and 2007, the researcher collected data and developed an interest in learning more about the Vha-Venda culture and language and started learning the language for communication purposes. The researcher frequently associated with the Vha-Venda speaking people, went even to the point of socializing with them. This enabled the researcher to closely observe how they did things, how they communicated with elders, and what they did for their daily chores, especially women in the villages. The researcher had difficulty in gaining entry and obtaining permission to conduct the study.

A letter was submitted to the traditional leaders to seek permission from the gatekeeper. Traditional leaders are custodian of the culture and responsible for the operation of the initiation schools. (These are the persons who give any person access to the initiation school).

The gatekeeper is a data collection term and refers to the person who the researcher must visit before entering a group or cultural site. A “gatekeeper,” is an individual who is a member of or has insider status with a cultural group. The gatekeeper is the initial contact for the researcher and leads the researcher to other informants. To gain access; the researcher must receive this person’s approval (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). The proposal was rejected and was also not accepted by the initiated elderly women because they indicated that they could not communicate with ‘*shuvhuru*’, meaning that the researcher was half a woman and [mistress] because she had not been initiated. The senior females suggested and recommended that the researcher be given a chance to go through the initiation process first, before they could share any information or allow her to conduct the study. Senior females are older women who have long completed initiation

training and promoted to a more advanced status of training the initiates. Their role is to facilitate and impart knowledge to the initiates.

The researcher agreed to be initiated, although it created anxiety and stressful moments for her. The participants were reluctant because of the sensitive nature of the topic. It is said by the Vha-Venda people that it is a taboo for individuals who have not yet undergone the initiation to have any knowledge of the subject.

The researcher thought about the proposal but it was a scary situation to come up with a sound decision. The researcher communicated with the family about the application to attend the initiation. It became a joke because at some point they thought the researcher was joking. Later on, they gave support and words of encouragement to accept the proposal by the senior initiated females. Engaging the gatekeepers and the elderly initiated people from the royal family for guidance, assisted the researcher to be considered and accepted to attend the initiation process.

In 2008, the researcher made a follow up on the date to be initiated after waited for six months for an answer. She was told by one of the gatekeepers to be patient because they wanted to see if there was commitment from her side. In August 2008, the researcher was informed that initiation would be in progress during the school holidays in September.

In the same month of August 2008, the researcher visited the nearby villages and the same information was given to the researcher that initiation schools would be held during school holidays. In the beginning of September 2008, she went back to the three villages, namely, Shayandima, Mashawana and Mashau, to confirm about the ceremony. Permission was granted but the appointment was rescheduled because some of the traditional leaders were not informed. Due to frustration and long waiting, the researcher became discouraged because it took almost two years and six months for her proposal to be positively considered.

In September 2008, the researcher accidentally discussed her frustration with one of the traditional leaders from a royal family and he advised the researcher well, and proper channels and arrangements were followed. She was again invited to the community meeting in the "*tribal village*" where she received positive feedback and a date was set for the researcher to be initiated. The traditional elders demanded the registration fee and it was paid to avoid further delay.

On the 6th of October 2008, the researcher was informed to come in the village at 17h00. She was also informed about the time and dress code. On the 7th of October 2008, she finally attained admission and initiation was successfully performed. The initiation took one week and, thereafter, the researcher became officially accepted. The collection of data began and the researcher managed to both set boundaries for the study and collect information through interviews. Interviews with focus group played a major role in the data collection process. The data collected included the perspectives and voices of the people being studied (Morse, 1994).

3.4.1 Conducting the interviews

Semi- structured and structured interviews were used as a means of data collection. In some instances the researcher extended the standard questions depending on the articulation level of respondents. The researcher followed Kvale's (1996) metaphor of the interviewer as a traveller. The interviewer allowed the interview to be a journey to unknown destination. The interviewees were afforded space to guide the tour, as the researcher believed they were more experienced in the way they view their world. Interviews were conducted mostly in the afternoon when is cooler and quieter. Participants were requested to identify locations and provide suitable time for the interview meeting. The researcher hoped that affording participants a chance to take charge would empower them and provide confidence which would be harnessed for the benefit of the research.

These are methods in which information is collected through personal interaction with respondents to obtain their views (Brink, 2006). The researcher took into account the following advantages of interviews:

They allow face to face encounter with respondents;

Large amount of expansive and contextual data can be obtained quickly;

They facilitate co-operation from respondents as well as access to follow up data collected for clarification and omission;

Data are collected in natural settings

(Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Kvale, 1996; & Morman, 2000)

3.4.2 Questionnaire

A standardized questionnaire was employed as an instrument to guide the interview. But as already alluded to, different participants were approaching questions differently. Depending on the kind of answers the participant was giving, some of the questions were follow-up and others clarified. The interview schedule allows objective data collection from respondents and eliminates diversion from the topic. It prevents bias or subjective judgement on the part of the researcher. In addition, all the respondents were asked the same questions, which allowed an objective comparison of results (Brink, 2006).

The purpose was to ensure that all participants were asked the same question in the same sequence.

1. Explain, at what age you experienced your menstruation period?
2. Explain, how you reacted when you had your first menstruation period?
3. Explain, what makes the elderly women applaud the girls' first menstruation?
4. Are you initiated? If yes how old were you?
5. Did you voluntarily attend the initiation school or were you forced?
6. What makes initiated women to be secretive about female initiation?
What is your opinion?
7. How do you feel about the myths around female genital cutting and the elongation of the labia minora that it promotes exquisite sexual pleasure?
8. Explain how you feel about the speculations made by uninitiated women that the initiates are prohibited to talk about the initiation ritual?
9. Do you have children who are initiated? If yes, did you encourage them to go to the initiation school?
10. Would you encourage others to attend initiation school?
11. Some believe that initiation school encourages girls to maintain their virginity.
What is your response?
12. What is your opinion about initiation of women being speculated as a barbaric act?

3.5 Participant observation

Creswell (2004) in his study states that participant observation is one of the strategies used to facilitate and collect data ascertained by, (Bernard, 2000). (Participant observation is defined as events through participating and observing). Researchers as observers look at places and people in their natural settings. However, participant observation allows the researcher to be part of the event to experience, observe, and get a clear, comprehensive understanding of the complexities of that event. There are two types of participant observation, namely, structured and non-structured and unstructured observation was used in this study (Polit & Hungler: 2004). Observational learning entails learning through watching others. The learner may have a personal experience; learn through the environment or through the media, to increase its likelihood of reoccurring

The researcher was actively involved in the daily situation of respondents while observing their behaviours, making field notes and recording actions, interactions and events in an unstructured or semi-structured manner (Creswell, 2003; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). This method was employed because it enables the researcher to understand the meaning of the data collected and make valid statements about the culture being studied. It reduced the speculations and myths about the initiation ritual and empowered the researcher with knowledge of knowing the initiation process and its advantages. It also enabled the researcher to understand the process, events, norms and values within the context of that particular culture.

Participant observation was conducted in the three villages; Mashau, Mashawana and Shayandima where permission was granted. The researcher stayed in the village in order to understand the people daily experiences and more so, to gain access to the events, and activities in the life of initiates. The researcher spent most of the time in these three villages. During the initiation process the researcher was not allowed to use an audiotape but permission was granted to shoot photos of the venue and the drums.

By only observing, the researcher would never gain the full experience of being part of the community in which the research takes place. Validity can be a major concern, because, in such a case, observers would be forced to rely almost exclusively on their own perceptions. This could cause major obstacles in participant observation, since a researcher forms a close link with participants and actually becomes part of the total situation to experience, to get a clear understanding and exposure to that situation.

The researcher went through the following stages in doing her participant observation:

3.5.1 Initiation ritual preparedness

On the first day of *domba* the traditional doctor makes a big fire with a stick known as *tshiregu*, meaning “the female piece of wood in which fire is drilled.” The fire should not be extinguished as it can bring bad luck in the hut of the initiates. It was confirmed by the initiation elders that the lighting of fire in the hut of initiates symbolizes the beginning of new life for the initiates. If the fire burns well, it is believed to be a sign of acceptance. Fire is one of the most appropriate symbols of life. This is seen in the colour that resembles blood,

the flaring action and alarming rapid growth as well as the coldness, which follows when it expires. The initiation elders and *vhadabe* would be eating and drinking to show appreciation of the initiates' beginning of new life. "If a fire burns well it is perceived as a sign of acceptance by ancestors and God." (Kriel, 1989).

1. Initiation dress code/Zwiambaro

The researcher was dressed in Tshivenda attire *minwenda* [traditional clothes]. Later she was isolated and kept inside the initiation hut and was told that she needed to be quiet, and not to talk to anyone or dispute the instructions from the initiation key informants. As a prospective, the researcher was allocated a mentor (*mutei*) by *Mme a domba* [mother of the initiates] for induction. Then she was told to perform and follow the instructions carried by *mutei*/mentor.

2. Admission and entry into the initiation/ u wela

The researcher was officially admitted into the *domba* hut after she had paid R500-00 (*tshitandza*) admission fee to gain entry into the *domba* ritual. After receiving the money, the supervisor of the initiates (*nyamatei*) and the initiation elders would be ululating this is a sign of appreciation. They shouted "*u wela*" meaning to be admitted to the *domba* institution for the first time. The ancestral blessing was performed by the traditional healer to ward off the bad spirits and to prevent the initiate from being bewitched.

3. Seclusion/ hiding of initiates/U dzumba Khomba

The researcher, as an initiate, was hidden outside the hut. The supervisor and initiates' mentors were later instructed by the elders to go and look for the initiate. The hiding created adrenalin push and anxiety for the initiate (i.e. the researcher) who was found and was escorted back into the hut. The interesting part was when the initiate's supervisors and elderly women continued to sing and dance. Each song had its own meaning and message. The initiate's mentor greeted others by lying on her side (*losha*), putting the palms of her hands together and resting her head on them. The elders showed gratitude by ululating and dancing and singing songs, backed by the beat of drums.

4. Undressing the initiate/ U shangula or U tona Khomba

The initiate was instructed to keep standing as the mentor was instructed by the elders to undress me. This was done inside the initiation hut. The mentor folded her arms across her chest, head facing down. She moved closer to me and undressed me while others were singing. Then the elders started ululating and I was instructed to go down my knees and salute to show appreciation for the job well done by the mentor.

The big drum was played and the elders started singing for the mentor to dance (*thaga*) fast walker. The initiate would also imitate everything done by the mentor. This is a difficult dance, because, later, the feet were swollen and painful. The researcher hated to be undressed, especially in front of everyone. However, it was said that one should learn to appreciate and know one's body. It is said by initiation elders that the ritual symbolizes the leaving behind of the old life and entering into a new life, which is also associated with the fire burning throughout the night.

5. Making the initiate cry/ U lilisa khomba

The elders reprimanded the researcher when she had cried. They insulted and provoked her to be emotional, but she could not cry. They started singing and continued saying "aren't you ashamed to leave your kids and husband behind and come and make a fool of yourself?" They further said: "You commoner, you don't even have parents." they continued to insult and humiliate her to make her cry.

6. The initiate salute the elders/ U losha vhakegulu

The researcher was informed that it was important for the *vhatei/* initiates to bow and salute after an activity had been performed or demonstrated by *mudabel/* mentor. The elders showed appreciation by ululating, or by blowing a horn to say well done to the initiate. The initiate's position when saluting the elders was to lie on her left side, body positioned in a foetal position. The elders simultaneously said 'he wuu' and started singing. The elders then encouraged the initiate and the mentor to shake their buttocks up and down. Immediately both the mentor and initiate would again salute by putting together their hands and lay their heads on their hands facing down. The elders continued to ululate to show appreciation.

7. Choosing a fictitious husband/ U nanga munna

The initiate was asked to choose a fictitious husband. The initiate should loudly respond by telling the elders the name and surname of the fictitious husband. They made the initiate repeat by saying "*a rongo zwipfa ambela nth* meaning;" we cannot hear you speak louder; are you ashamed of your chosen husband." They would start laughing, and, later, there was ululating and the blowing of the horn. The mother of the fictitious husband is expected to buy presents for the initiate. The mother of the chosen husband demanded to be informed well in advance for proper preparations.

It is important for the initiate to listen to “*Nyamatei*”, which a title is assigned to a woman who supervises the initiates. *Nyamatei* provides the basics of life to the initiates. Both “*Nyamatei and Nyamungozwa*” should make sure that the *domba* or *vhukhomba* is properly run, and that all initiates carry out all the instructions of the institution until they graduate. It is said that they perform these duties like all parents who look after their children at home. At the same time, initiates are taught to endure hardship. During the first lesson in the python dance, an ornament is presented to “*Nyamatei*”. The presenting of the ornament is an honour to *Nyamatei* and a symbol of motherhood.

8. The python dance/U haka deu



When the *domba* is in session the *vhatei* or mentors *vhadabe* form a queue known as *deu* (meaning queue) and perform the python dance. As the initiates dance, it is said that they are imitating the movement of a python. Milubi (2000), states that the python represents and is associated with a woman. Males are warned not to have sexual intercourse with a woman if she has experienced an abortion or miscarriage. If they do, they would die.

In contrast, some ethnographers state that the python symbolizes life to Vha-Venda people and no one would kill the snake, should they happen to come across it. However, during this practice, it was said by the initiated elderly women that it symbolizes a “penis”, “domineering”, “manhood” and “malehood”, without which life becomes meaningless. Women from Mashawana Village reported that the python dance refers to a woman. The woman is equated with the python swallowing an animal or human being. The swallowed animal or person dies inside the belly of a python, meaning that males are warned not to have sexual intercourse with a woman who has aborted because they would die. Therefore, the python serves to affirm the standing of men in relation to women in the society (Milubi, 2000).

9. Virginity testing/ u tola Khomba

Some participants, during interviews, reported the stigmatization of females if they are found not to be virgins. This is a clear indication that culture plays an important role in encouraging teenagers to remain virgins until marriage. When a girl gets married, her virginity status matters most and it will prove to the in-laws that she was raised in a proper way and, hence, she can become a good wife. In cases such as *vhusha* and *domba*, if the girl is found to be deflowered, she would be decorated with black beads and those who maintained their virginity would be decorated with white beads, the latter symbolizing purity. The initiation elders would be ululating and showering the girl who is pure with gifts.

10. Learning the cultural customs and rules/*milayo*

The most fascinating time during initiation is when *milayo*/rules are taught to the initiates. The initiates were taught the techniques of spacing children, as a means of family planning and to avoid unplanned pregnancy especially when you are a teenager. '*Musevhetho*' initiation also encourages teenagers to maintain their virginity. If a teenager is discovered to be deflowered, she is humiliated in front of others. It was mentioned during the initiation that if a woman needs to give birth to a baby boy or a baby girl, she should know which side of the breast would be effective for choosing the gender or sex of the baby. It was also said that a woman who gave birth to a newly born child should stay with the elders for a period of three months without sexual intercourse with the husband. More so, the husband should not fool around because it is said that the child could become ill.

The information and knowledge shared during initiation is seldom known by uninitiated people. The researcher was one of the lucky ones to be taught the following lexical items, though it was stated that some of the lexical items and expressions are characterized by shift of meaning, like *U vala khoro* (“to close the gate”) means pregnancy and *u vula khoro* means to give birth. The initiation elders indicated that *khoro* of *domba* or *vhukhoba* is a sacred place and should be respected by all people who attended the institution. If the *khoro* is half open it means the woman had a miscarriage.

After graduating from the initiation, the researcher was given permission and access to attend other initiation rites of passage, such as *‘Musevhetho’*. The researcher stayed in the village for a period of one week with “*Mme a domba*”, the key informant, learning more of the *‘Milayo’* rules that were not included during the researcher’s initiation ceremony. The researcher, at first, was not allowed to use the audio-tape to record the proceedings in the initiation. However, she was later given permission to take photos of the *‘khoro’* (i.e. the place where the initiation is held). Snap shots of different drums were also taken.

During the process of initiation, the researcher was forced to participate in all the activities such as dancing while imitating the mentor and singing songs. The researcher participated and imitated what the mentor was doing, at the same time learning and observing the activities. Bernard (2000) concurs that participant observation is an all encompassing strategy and does not single out certain individuals in the situation, and includes all participants, not just the role player. Through observation and participating in the ceremony the researcher became part of the experience, and gained more insight and understanding and the importance of Vha-Venda culture.

Another important point to mention is that the research assistant was multi-lingual, could speak Xitsonga, South Sotho and Tshivenda and Zulu. The language barrier could have had an impact on the data collected during the research process. It was observed during the researcher's initiation that, usually, uninitiated females would not understand what is said by initiated women. For example, "*U tona khomba*" means undressing the initiate. Thus, the researcher became part of the situation by participating in the entire process and while others were singing and ululating in appreciating the initiates' compliance, she observed and even contributed to it.

The following insights were gained through participant observation:

- i) It enabled the researcher to understand the meaning of the data collected and to make valid statements about the culture being studied
- ii) It reduced the speculation and myth about the initiation ritual
- iii) It empowered the researcher's knowledge of knowing much more about the process, its advantages and disadvantages
- iv) The researcher gained first-hand experience of the daily living experiences of people
- v) The researchers followed a naturalistic approach
- vi) The researcher became part of the situation and participated during initiation process.
- vii) The researcher participated and collected information during the initiation process
- viii) The researcher respected the instructions that were given
- ix) The researcher participated in all the activities as directed by the initiates.
- x) The researcher managed to develop a close relationship with participants who also played a more active, egalitarian role.
- xi) The researcher entered the research process not knowing the reaction from the key informants (participants with access to the culture under study). It is important for the researcher to build rapport with the participants, remain neutral and objective. The researcher should be in a better position to reduce the fear and suspicion in order for the participants to feel comfortable in sharing their experiences (Gravetter & Forzano, 2003) .

3.6 Bracketing of the researcher's prejudices

In order to avoid influencing the description of the participants, the following presuppositions are what the researcher felt needed to be bracketed so as to minimise interference with the analysis of the data: i.e. researcher's belief that most initiated females protect their cultural norms and beliefs; the researcher's assumption is that telling tales of initiation is a taboo; researcher's own view that males have the final say when it comes to the cultural beliefs; women are not involved in decision-making; researcher knows that if females become non compliant when it comes to the initiation customs they are rejected, isolated, ridiculed, prejudiced and humiliated. The researcher knows initiated females are scared to devalue the culture; the researcher knows that initiated females are denied freedom of speech when it comes to sharing the experiences, thoughts and feelings regarding initiation. The researcher knows that initiation of women is secret and that the uninitiated women believe that the initiation of women is barbaric and abusive.

The researcher was attracted to the phenomenon under investigation because of her all time belief in becoming a socially relevant professional. As a result of the "fixing mentality" the researcher feels she might influence the outcome of the results. The following are the researcher's initial biases:

The researcher assumed that the initiates were reluctant in disclosing some of the information because the researcher did not belong to the culture under study.

The researcher also thought that some initiated women wanted to discourage the researcher.

It was the researcher's opinion that the initiates were having a general problem breaking the silence in discussing some of the information. They wanted to comply with the rule that women initiation is not a public discussion, but sacred and private.

The researcher also thought that the level of functioning of most initiates was low because of the sensitivity of the study.

3.6.1 Focus Group Interviews

Berg (1998) describes focus group interviews as "either guided or unguided discussions addressing a particular topic of interest or relevance to the group and the researcher."

Focus groups are group discussions organized to explore a specific set of issues, such as, people's views and experiences of women initiation (Krueger, 1994). The focus group discussions were held with each group on different days to prevent the groups from influencing one another. An audio tape was used to collect the data and was later transcribed by the researcher.

The researcher chose initiated women as focus groups because they were a means of better understanding how people feel or think about the issues discussed. The total of fifteen initiated women was conducted; Shayandima with eight initiated women, Mashawana with three initiated women, and Mashau village with four initiated women. The researcher encouraged the participants to share perceptions, points of view, experiences, wishes and concerns, without pressurizing one another (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

The focus group were initiated women who participated when the researcher was inaugurated. It would have been better if the focus group discussions had taken place when the initiation was in progress, but it was difficult as the researcher had to comply with the rule of taking instructions positively. The challenge was that after the activities, all the women hurry to get home to do other chores and the only solution for the research was to make appointments with the different groups and conduct focus group discussions.

Since the other initiated women participated, the researcher introduced herself and the purpose and aim of research was introduced. The participants were assured that the data collected would be kept confidential and would not be discussed with anyone except the supervisors.

3.6.1.1 Focus group discussion

Focus group discussion is described as “a group discussion with people who have been selected because they share common knowledge and experiences relevant to the topic to be discussed” (Cresswell, 1998; Krueger, 1994).

Focus group discussion was conducted with the initiated women from Mashau, Mashawana and Shayandima village. The focus discussions were held with each village groups and were scheduled in different days to prevent groups from manipulating one another since the research topic is sensitive and secretive.

The participants were invited and scheduled to attend the discussion. Focus group interviews were conducted with people who had knowledge about the initiation of women (key informants). The informants were well respected by the community at large; they possessed special knowledge regarding the research study. More so, these were the elderly women who agreed to share the information with the researcher after she had gone through the initiation herself. Elderly women represent tradition and wisdom and deserve high praise and respect during the initiation school. Their role is to teach and impart information to others. These research assistants had access to the culture under study more than the researcher herself (Hudelson, 1994).

The researcher was assigned two research assistants as mentors for the entire process. They were initiated elderly and were nominated by the community leader as contact persons for the researcher. Their role in the study was to guide, teach and provide information to the researcher on the process and activities of the initiation and to inform the researcher about the venues where the rituals would take place. They also assisted the researcher in the translation of certain phrases.

The participants (initiated women who participated in the study) were informed before hand about the interviews. They were informed that the conversation would be tape recorded and that it was important that the interviewers knew what they were asking, what to expect and how to respond, with the reason to expect feedback from the interviewee. The interview sessions were conducted in a relaxed fashion with minimal intervention by the researcher. They were permitted to set the priorities. The researcher was actively participating and showed mutual support to the participants (initiate women) In essence, the researcher and the assistants explored on how to probe, how to ask the right questions and how to motivate key informants to speak more. The researcher became aware that there was no right way to ask questions and there was no wrong question. Participants agreed to be tape recorded and recorded data was transcribed after the data was collected. Interviews were recorded, later transcribed and analysed.

According to Breakwell, Hammond and Fife-Shaw (1995), language is a form of discourse and is seen as constituting the building blocks of "social reality." The researcher considered how the participant initiates used language to construct and present their perceptions and beliefs regarding the value of traditional schools.

The interviews were conducted until sufficient data was gathered. Morse (1994); Leedy and Ormond (1998), stated that data saturation is the process of collecting data in ethnographic study, to a point where a sense of closure is achieved because new data yields redundant information. In this study, saturation was reached when the participants repeatedly gave the same information about women initiation.

The interviews were transcribed as well as all verbal information; verbalizations, tone, facial expressions and bodily gestures as perceived by the researcher. Notes of the sessions were recorded shortly after the interview, which included the researcher's observations and general impressions of the participants; the participant's mood, attitudes and body language during the interview; as well as queries and comments the researcher made at the time. Significant non-verbal gestures were placed in brackets. The transcribed interviews, together with original auditory tapes, constituted the raw data on which the researcher conducted the analysis (DVD, audiovisual and tape recordings available).

The feedback discussion with the participants was scheduled to give the participants an opportunity to review and criticise the findings and allow new contributions if any. Broerse (1998) states that feedback to participants served as a means of loyalty and engaging them in the development of the research and strengthening the relationship between the researcher and participants. Feedback sessions were conducted in Shayandima, Mashau and Mashawana villages. In Mashau village corrections were made on the song lyrics; in Mashawana, additional information was added and in Shayandima all was confirmed to be a true reflection of what was discussed during the focus group discussions.

A structured focus group discussion guideline was used to ensure that all relevant issues were covered to avoid rescheduling of other discussions. The researcher respected the culture and belief systems presented during contact with the focus groups.

The advantages of a focus group interview as a qualitative technique, enables the researcher to observe and note the process of interaction among the participants, and to have access to the substantive content of verbally expressed views, opinions, ideas, attitudes and experiences. In contrast, the disadvantage of focus groups is that they allow for more detailed pursuit of content information than is possible within the context of the focus group interviews, producing less data than would have been obtained in the case of face- to face interviews. Morgan (1997) highlighted the following strengths:

Exploration and discovery

Context and depth

Interpretation.

The researcher showed responsibility by providing competent and ethical services for the benefit or interest of the respondents. This responsibility goes beyond doing harm and beyond mere avoidance of negligence and misconduct. In this study, the researcher considered ethical guidelines for research as discussed below.

The two research guides allocated to the researcher were initiated women. They were nominated by the senior initiated women (elders) responsible for the initiation school and with initiation knowledge experience to guide the researcher. The reality is that one does not move into communities for research without a research guide who has access in connecting the researcher with the gatekeeper. The gatekeeper is the people who help the researcher to gain access to the people under study. In this case, the gatekeeper was well experienced in terms of skills which could benefit the researcher.

The researcher became part of the situation but at the same time was actively involved in the daily situations of participants while observing their behaviour, emotions, and making field notes.

The researcher observed what others do and see through the eyes of the members of the culture rather than those of an insider. The researcher's involvement was to observe, from complete observer to active participation. This was a crucial factor which was considered during interviewing and participating at the same time (Babbie, 2001).

In this study the initiated women were interviewed from three different places. The study was undertaken in three different villages in Limpopo, i.e. the Shayandima, Mashawana and Mashau areas. The selection of the areas was not predetermined and neither were they adopted as the spatial territorial boundary for the study. The three villages were selected because of the history that they hold in terms of women initiation. The research guides also took the researcher to the three places where women initiation is held bi-annually and also to introduce the researcher to the people who are perceived as specialists in the initiation of women. It was suggested by the research assistants and the elders responsible for initiation that the researcher should consider initiated women who were between the age of 30 and 60 because the researcher would be in a better position to get information that is reliable and valid and also that looking at the age of the researcher, communication would be effective rather than talking to young initiated women. Interviews were conducted in the Mashawana, Shayandima and Mashau areas in Vhembe District, South Africa.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Webster's New World Dictionary defines "ethical" as "conforming to the standards of conduct of a given profession or group." Ethics in a day to day life is a matter of agreement among members of a group. The Professional Board for Psychology of Health Professionals Council of South Africa incorporates clear ethical guidelines for research in its "Ethical Code of Professional Conduct." (Cohen, Minion ; Morrison, 2000).

Ethical considerations pertaining to research and publication as outlined in chapter 10 of Health Professional Council of South Africa [Professional Board for Psychology] were all observed. The researcher made a submission through a proposal to the Ethics Committee of the University of Zululand. Participants were given information regarding the research project and their role was defined. It was also explained to them that the study was conducted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The researcher ensured that participant dignity was respected and protected them against any possible harm.

The researcher also promoted transparency to ensure that participants could feel safe in sharing their experience of the phenomenon. [Professional Board of Psychology, Rules of conduct pertaining specifically to the profession of Psychology. Government Gazette, 04 August 2006].

3.8 CONCLUSION

The chapter outlined the step by step procedure on how the current study was conducted. The qualitative design was employed because it allowed the researcher to get an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon that was being investigated. The data collection was done through interview schedule and participant observation. The next chapter presents an analysis of the data collected as explained in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents literal transcriptions of each participant's oral discourses drawn from the original interviews. The emerging themes are captured after every response given by participants to the research questions. The common emerging themes of all the narratives are outlined at the end of this chapter.

The participants narrated their initiation experiences in their natural setting. All the narrations were tape recorded. The researcher had the opportunity to ask for clarifications on misconceptions, interpretations, as well as giving the participants a voice, by using the participant's own words to convey a sense of what it was like to express their freedom of speech, concerning their feelings and thoughts regarding their cultural rituals. She listened to and transcribed the tapes and read the transcript to familiarize herself with the data. Each transcribed interview was coded and broken down into categories, and themes were reviewed according to the context of each interview. The emerging themes, therefore, reflect the real experiences of the initiated females in Thohoyandou, South Africa.

4.2 BIOLOGICAL DETAILS

Table 2: Senior females: Shayandima village (Domba)

Names	Marital Status	Gender	Language	Education	Initiated girls within the family
Vho-Mashudu	Married	Female	Tshivenda	Std 6	2 girls
Vho-Masindi	Married	Female	Tshivenda	Std 2	1 girl
Vho-Makhadzi	Married	Female	Tshivenda	Std 6	4 girls
Vho-Mphephu	Married	Female	Tshivenda	Std 3	6 girls
Vho-Khathu	Married	Female	Tshivenda	Std 6	None, only boys
Vho-Sara	Married	Female	Tshivenda	Std 1	3 girls
Vho-Vhayi	Married	Female	Tshivenda	Std 6	2 girls
Vho-Marta	Married	Female	Tshivenda	No formal education	3 girls

Table 3: Senior females: Mashawana village (Vhusha)

Names	Marital Status	Gender	Language	Education	Initiated girls within the family
Vho-Elisa	Widower	Female	Tshivenda	No formal education	4 girls
Vho-Dora	Widower	Female	Tshivenda	Std 1	5 girls
Vho-Mbilwini	Married	Female	Tshivenda	No formal education	1 girl

Table 4: Senior Females Mashau village (Musevhetho/ Domba)

Names	Marital status	Gender	Language	Education	Initiated girls within the family
Vho-Rosi	Widower	Female	Tshivenda	No formal education	2 girls
Vho-Mercy	Widower	Female	Tshivenda	No formal education	1 girl
Vho-Julia	Widower	Female	Tshivenda	No formal education	2 girls

Table 5: Research Guides: Thohoyandou

Names	M/Status	Gender	Language	Education	Initiated girls within the family
Vho-Lettie	Married	Female	Tsonga	Educator	1 Girl
Vho-Lufuno	Married	Female	Tshivenda	Educator	None

CO- RESEARCHER: Vho-Mashudu

The data collection schedule used was composed of twelve items. So, in this section, ‘I’ stands for item and ‘R’ for response. Co-researchers in this study refer to the fifteen initiated women who participated in the study.

Explain, at what age you experienced your first menstruation period?

R: 14yrs.

Explain how you reacted when you had your first menstruation period?

R: I was very scared.

What makes elderly women applaud the girls’ first menstruation?

R: It means she has entered into the stage of being a woman and that she could get married.

Are you initiated? If yes how old were you?

R: 15yrs

Yes, the very same year that I started menstruating. However,

I was exposed to “*Vhutamba vhutuka*” when I was 6yrs old. I was taught how to stretch my labia minora. We were encouraged to do it as a group of girls, and it was fun, because we never understood what we were doing.

Explain whether you voluntarily attended the initiation school or you were forced?

R: It was a must and I did not want to shame my parents

In your opinion, what makes initiated women to be secretive about female initiation school?

R: I am telling you all this because you attended. The reason is that, in Venda, the traditional leaders believe that it is a norm for every woman to attend; it is a taboo to tell tales about “*dzingoma*” with uninitiated, because they are considered to be young children. My opinion is that I am still afraid to talk about it, because if they discovered that I have revealed the secret I will be fined money and will be removed from the village, more so, ridiculed and rejected by the community. Even during the process of initiation I was warned several times that I dared not share with anyone about what was happening in there.

How do you feel about the myth around female genital cutting and elongation of Labia minora that it promotes exquisite sexual pleasure?

R: Yes, no. I don't want to discuss this. Do you really want to know?

I do not want to get into trouble. What I can say is from the male perspective they prefer the woman with these qualities. Maybe, it enhances their sexuality. About the cutting of the clitoris, I do not have a clue what the reason behind this was.

Explain, how you feel about the speculations made by uninitiated women that the Initiates are prohibited to talk about the initiation ritual?

R: I feel good because I also want the culture to be respected.

Do you have children who are initiated? – If yes did you encourage them to attend?

R: Yes, two girls and I did not encourage them

Would you encourage others to attend initiation school?

R: No. Nowadays it is difficult because girls go to school and for me initiation was the only place where I was taught “things”.

Some believe that initiation school encourages girls to maintain their virginity. What is your response?

R: I would say yes, because during initiation the elders do virginity testing and if you are found not to be a virgin, it is a shame to the family and you will be labelled, laughed at, and no man will marry a girl who has been sleeping around.

The initiation elders will put black beads around the girl’s neck as a sign to tell others that you are not clean.

What is your opinion about initiation of women being speculated as a barbaric act?

R: I do not understand what you mean by barbaric?

Clarification: I mean all the humiliation that girls go through, for example, eating with dirty hands, girls have their clitoris cut, forcibly immersed in cold rivers, forced to crawl on their tummies like moving snakes, fingers being squeezed with sticks, being smeared with cow dung or velvet itching beans “*vhulada*” those are some of the shocking experiences and abuse initiates experience.

R: Yes, all this is part of the game and in the name of culture.

CO- RESEARCHER: Vho-Masindi

Explain at what age you experienced your menstruation period?

R: I was 16 yrs of age when I saw my first menses. At that time I was scared and afraid to tell my mother that I saw blood in my panties. I went to my aunt who said she would go and break the news to my mother, who in turn would then tell my father that I was then a woman. It was a scary situation because the people around you would not explain a thing but talk in parables as if you have done something wrong. Later I was called and told that I should be taken to “*vhusha*” or be seen by the women elders.

The funny part is that I was told not to tell anyone because it is dangerous. I was so scared thinking that something bad was happening or I was sick and they did not want to tell me. After three months; it was in June 1948 and very cold, I was told that I would be joining others in the chiefs' house to be with other girls who also washed their panties because of blood. It was so confusing because everyone was telling you what to do but still being kept silenced, because my mother said I did not need to question anything because this was how things should be. The only time I knew what was happening was when I was told by the *vhusha* elders that *vhusha* is an informal school to caution girls about the danger of engaging in sexual intercourse, which can lead to unplanned pregnancy.

Before I was released to go back, one of the *vhusha* elders came with a burning stick "*lunonya*" my thigh was branded and I was told that I have passed the first stage and needed to prepare my self to attend "*musevetho*". The day I was taken back home I was told "not to share with other girls who did not attend *musevetho*. I was threatened that if I told or shared the experiences, I would become "mad". So, I was silenced forever and I was scared even to socialize because I was scared that the other girls might ask a lot of questions.

Explain how you reacted when you had your first menstruation period?

R: Confused.

In your opinion, what makes the elderly women applaud the girls' first menstruation period?

R: I believe that it is a way of celebrating and feasting, because menstruation is a natural sign that I have developed to be a woman, not to be humiliated and be scared.

Are you initiated? If yes how old were you?

R 17 years

Explain whether you voluntarily attended the initiation school or you were forced?

R: I attended voluntarily. I felt it was the right thing to do.

What makes initiated women to be secretive about female initiation school? What is your opinion?

R: If you are threatened definitely you will die with the secret

What is your opinion about the myth around female genital cutting and the elongation of the labia minora that they promote exquisite sexual pleasure?

R: My belief is that men prefer to marry initiated women.

Explain, how you feel about the speculations made by uninitiated women that the initiates are prohibited to talk about the initiation ritual?

R: I don't know, but it is painful and stressful to be silenced.

Do you have children who are initiated? If yes, did you encourage them to attend?

R: Yes, one girl. And I encouraged her.

Would you encourage others to attend initiation school?

R: No.

Some believe that initiation school encourages girls to maintain their virginity. What is your response?

R: Yes, I think so.

What is your opinion about initiation of women being speculated as a barbaric act?

R: Yes, I would say it is because the activities that take place there is really barbaric.

CO-RESEARCHER: Vho-Makhadzi

Explain at what age you experienced your menstruation period?

R: If I can recall well I was nearly 18 years of age.

Explain how you reacted when you had your first menstruation period?

R: Very scared and I thought something was wrong, because I was never Prepared psychologically of what to expect next. I thought my mother would think I was sleeping with boys; it was an unbearable moment filled with confusion

Explain, what makes the elderly women applaud the girls' first menstruation?

R: I don't know, maybe initiation.

Are you initiated? If yes how old were you?

R: Yes, not sure about the age.

Explain whether you voluntarily attended initiation school or you were forced?

R: Yes, I had to attend.

What makes initiated women to be secretive about female initiation school? What is your opinion?

R: Hey, a lot of things, I think you know.

How do you feel about the myths around female genital cutting and elongation of labia minora that they promote exquisite sexual pleasure?

R: I think it does.

Explain how you feel about the speculations made by uninitiated women that the initiates are prohibited to talk about the initiation ritual?

R: I felt bad, because now that I understand things better. I could have made my own decision and as it is my right to do so. I don't know, but it is painful and stressful to be silenced.

Do you have children who are initiated? - If yes did you encourage them to attend?

R: Yes, one girl.

Would you encourage others to attend initiation school?

R...No

Some people believe that initiation school encourages girls to maintain their virginity. What is your response?

R: Yes, I think so.

What is your opinion about initiation of women being speculated as a barbaric act?

R: Yes, I would say it is because the activities that take place there is really barbaric.

CO-RESEARCHER: Vho-Mphephu

Explain at what age you experienced your menstruation period?

R: I don't know.

Explain how you reacted when you had your first menstruation period?

R: I did not know what was happening, I was scared to tell anyone.

What makes the elderly women applaud the girls' first menstruation period?

R: Initiation and marriage.

Are you initiated? - If yes how old were you?

R: Sixteen

Explain whether you voluntarily attended initiation school or you were forced?

R: I think during those times I had no option but to comply with what the culture demanded.

In your opinion, what makes initiated women to be secretive about female initiation school?

R: I was scared to inform others because it was one of the rules not to talk about what had happened in the initiation school with the uninitiated women.

How do you feel about the myth around female genital cutting and elongation of labia minora that they promote exquisite sexual pleasure?

R: Some women say that female genital cutting, elongation of labia minora is done to harness man sexuality, if yes did they cut your clitoris and how do you explain this.

Explain how you feel about the speculations made by uninitiated women that the initiates are prohibited to talk about the initiation ritual?

R: It feels so bad inside and fear of being discovered and the secret needed to be guarded to protect culture, maybe it is meant not to discourage others.

Do you have children who are initiated? - If yes, did you encourage them to attend?

R: Yes, but I can't encourage them. They also have rights

Would you encourage others to attend initiation?

R: Yes, the culture demands that every girl should be initiated.

Some people believe that initiation school encourages girls to maintain their virginity. What is your response?

R: Yes, because '*musevhetho*' is believed to play an important role in preventing an unplanned pregnancy and also in encouraging girls to remain virgins before marriage.

What is your opinion about initiation of women being speculated as a barbaric act?

R: It's not barbaric.

CO- RESEARCHER: Vho-Khathu

Explain at what age you experienced your menstruation period?

R: 17 years.

Explain how you reacted when you had your first menstruation period?

R: Confused and scared.

Explain what makes the elderly women applaud the girls' first menstruation period?

R: "*Khomba yo hula*", meaning the girl has become a woman.

Are you initiated? - If yes how old were you?

R: Yes. I was fourteen.

Explain whether you voluntarily attended initiation school or you were forced?

R: I think during those times I had no option but to comply with what the culture demanded.

What makes initiated women to be secretive about female initiation school?

R: I was scared of rejection.

How do you feel about the myth around female genital cutting and elongation of labia minora that they promote exquisite sexual pleasure?

R: Yes, because initiated women have first preference in terms of marriage, maybe it is true.

Explain how you feel about the speculations made by uninitiated women that the initiates are prohibited to talk about the initiation ritual?

R: The speculation is true..

Do you have children who are initiated? - If yes, did you encourage them to attend?

R: No.

Would you encourage others to attend initiation school?

R: No.

Some believe that initiation school encourages girls to maintain their virginity. What is your response?

R: Yes, because '*musevhetho*' is believed to play an important role in preventing unplanned pregnancy, by encouraging girls to remain virgins until marriage.

What is your opinion about initiation of women being speculated as a barbaric act?

R: I think it is a violation of a person's right.

CO-RESEARCHER: Vho-Sara

Explain at what age you experienced your menstruation period?

R: I think I was 20 years old.

Explain how you reacted when you had your first menstruation period?

R: I was confused and did not understand what was happening.

What makes the elderly women applaud the girls' first menstruation?

R: I think they are celebrating because the girl has reached the stage of maturity to be a woman.

Are you initiated? - If yes how old were you?

R: Yes at a very early age, can't remember well.

Explain whether you voluntarily attended initiation school or you were forced?

R: Yes, I would say forced because it was not my liking.

What makes initiated women to be secretive about female initiation school?

R: Scarred of rejection.

How do you feel about the myth around female genital cutting and elongation of labia minora that they promote exquisite sexual pleasure?

R: I believe it's a myth. I won't encourage anyone because children can learn everything at home.

Explain how you feel about the speculations made by uninitiated women that the initiates are prohibited to talk about the initiation ritual?

R: I feel my rights have been violated; I have been controlled and feel sad; and sometimes feel ashamed for pretending that everything is fine.

Do you have children who are initiated? - If yes, did you encourage them to attend?

R: Yes, I did.

Would you encourage others to attend initiation?

R: No.

Some believe that initiation school encourages girls to maintain their virginity. What is your response?

R: In a way, yes, because you need to be pure when initiated.

What is your opinion about initiation of women being speculated as a barbaric act?

R: I think it is not; it teaches cultural values.

CO-RESEARCHER: Vho-Vayi

Explain at what age you experienced your first period?

R: 19 years

Explain what makes the elderly women applaud the girls' first menstruation period?

R: To celebrate womanhood.

Are you initiated? If yes how old were you?

R...Yes, at 20.

Are you initiated?- If yes how old were you?

R...Yes, at 20.

Explain whether you voluntarily attended initiation school or you were forced?

R: No, I was forced by my mother and grandmother; they said it was a good thing to do.

In your opinion, what makes initiated women to be secretive about female initiation school?

R: I think it is about respecting the culture and tradition.

How do you feel about the myths around female genital cutting and elongation of labia minora that it promotes exquisite sexual pleasure?

R: Some say elongating the labia minora makes sex more pleasurable for men.

I think it is sexual control, abuse, and torture in the name of culture.

Yes my clitoris has been cut out of my free will.

Explain how you feel about the speculations made by uninitiated women that the initiates are prohibited to talk about the initiation ritual?

R: I was angry and helpless, because of the power which is exercised over my rights to speak, but silenced and threatened by being punished.

Do you have children who are initiated? - If yes, did you encourage her to attend?

R: Yes, but they volunteered to attend.

Would you encourage others to attend initiation school?

R: No ways.

Some believe that initiation school encourages girls to maintain their virginity. What is your response?

R: Yes, because you do not want to be embarrassed, especially the family. Although people have the right to privacy.

What is your opinion about initiation of women being speculated as a barbaric act?

R: Yes, at some point it is barbaric because of the harsh and brutal acts during the initiation process.

CO-RESEARCHER: Vho-Marta

Explain at what age you experienced your menstruation period?

R: 5 years.

Explain how you reacted when you had your first menstruation period?

R: Confused because I did not have an idea what was happening, remember in the olden days parents would not openly discuss such things.

Explain what makes the elderly women applaud the girls' first menstruation period?

R: Marriage.

Are you initiated? - If yes, how old were you?

R: Yes, but cannot remember.

Explain whether you voluntarily attended initiation school or you were forced?

R: I would say it was a norm and I had no choice.

In your opinion, what makes initiated women to be secretive about female initiation school?

R: Power, control forces women to be silenced.

How do you feel about the myths around female genital cutting and elongation of labia minora that they promote exquisite sexual pleasure?

R: Yes, because of sexual control girls succumb for torture.

Explain how you feel about the speculations made by uninitiated women that the initiates are prohibited to talk about the initiation ritual?

R: I feel pain, sad and frustrated.

I needed to comply with the instruction.

Do you have children who are initiated? - If yes, did you encourage them to attend?

R: Yes, 3 girls. if I knew then I would not have allowed my children to suffer the pain I experienced.

Would you encourage others to attend initiation?

R: ...No, because I will not wish it to anyone.

Some believe that initiation school encourages girls to maintain their virginity. What is your response?

R: ...When a girl gets married, her virginity status matters most and it will prove to the in-laws that she was raised in a proper way and hence she can become a good wife.

What is your opinion about initiation of women being speculated as a barbaric act?

R: ...Yes, there is nothing good about the practice.

The vulgar language used, the insults and abuse are barbaric.

CO-RESEARCHER: Vho-Elisa

Explain at what age you experienced your menstruation period?

R: 16 years

Explain how you reacted when you had your first menstruation period?

R: I was surprised and confused

Explain what makes the elderly women applaud the girls' first menstruation period?

R: Celebrate the girl's new stage of womanhood.

Are you initiated? - If yes how old were you?

R: Yes, I was 18 years.

Explain whether you voluntarily attended initiation school or you were forced?

Yes, forced by the circumstances, and I did it for the community not that

R: I wanted to.

In your opinion, what makes initiated women to be secretive about female initiation school?

R...Scared.

How do you feel about the myths around female genital cutting and elongation of labia minora that they promote exquisite sexual pleasure?

R: These days it is difficult because of rights.

Explain how you feel about the speculations made by uninitiated women that the initiates are prohibited to talk about the initiation ritual?

R: I feel bad, and can do nothing.

Do you have children who are initiated? - If yes, did you encourage them to attend?

R: Yes, four girls.

Would you encourage others to attend initiation?

R: If they want yes, but I would not encourage anyone.

Some believe that initiation school encourages girls to maintain their virginity. What is your response?

R: I believe so.

What is your opinion about initiation of women being speculated as a barbaric act?

R...Yes, only cutting of the clitoris and elongation of the labia minora are barbaric.

CO-RESEARCHER: Vho-Dora

At what age did you experience your menstruation period?

R: At 15 years.

Explain how you reacted when you had your first menstruation period?

R: It came as a shock.

Explain what makes the elderly women applaud the girls' first menstruation period?

R...I think it means the girl will soon get married.

Are you initiated? - If yes, how old were you?

R: Yes, I think I was 16years because it's long.

Explain whether you voluntarily attended initiation school or if you were forced?

R: Yes, voluntarily; I was not forced.

What makes initiated women to be secretive about female initiation school? What is your opinion?

R: I think they do not want to scare others.

How do you feel about the myths around female genital cutting and elongation of labia minora that they promote exquisite sexual pleasure?

R: I don't know, maybe. What I know is that initiated women have the first preference in terms of marriage. Men prefer to marry those who are initiated.

Explain how you feel about the speculations made by uninitiated women that the initiates are prohibited to talk about the initiation ritual?

R: I feel sad.

Do you have children who are initiated? - If yes did you encourage them to attend?

R: Yes, five girls. They thought since the others were doing it, they also had to do it

Would you encourage others to attend initiation school?

R...This time things have changed, I think I would.

Some believe that initiation school encourages girls to maintain their virginity. What is your response?

R: Yes, because getting married with illegitimate children is bad.

What is your opinion about initiation of women being speculated as a barbaric act?

R: I think not everything; some activities are good, like learning morals and values, this is very interesting.

CO-RESEARCHER: Vho-Mbilwini

At what age did you experience your menstruation period?

R: I think 14 years.

Explain how you reacted when you had your first menstruation period?

R: I did not know what to do. Then I told my sister who said I should calm down because it was normal.

Explain what makes the elderly women applaud the girls' first menstruation period?

R: I think womanhood and preparation for initiation.

Are you initiated? If yes how old were you.

R: Yes, I was 15 years.

Explain whether you voluntarily attended initiation school or if you were forced?

R: I wanted to attend because all my friends were attending.

In your opinion, what makes initiated women to be secretive about female initiation school?

R:I supposed it is meant not to scare people and for fear to be discriminated against

How do you feel about the myths around female genital cutting and elongation of labia minora that it promotes exquisite sexual pleasure?

R: Yes, remember women suffer oppression in the private and public sphere, so it is possible that all this is done to devalue women as they are treated as objects.

Explain how you feel about the speculations made by uninitiated women that the initiates are prohibited to talk about the initiation ritual?

R: I feel sad and helpless because I have being silenced for decades.

Do you have children who are initiated? - If yes did you encourage them to attend?

R...Yes, my child thought it was fashionable.

Would you encourage others to attend initiation?

R: Yes, is not as bad as some people are speculating about women initiation.

Some believe that initiation school encourages girls to maintain their virginity. What is your response?

R: Yes, because it is good to celebrate honeymoon while you are a virgin.

Even the in-laws appreciate how you maintained yourself. However, if one loses her virginity before initiation or marriage, the person would be continuously mocked and will suffer social pressure by being labelled, isolated and rejected.

What is your opinion about initiation of women being speculated as a barbaric act?

R: I know nothing about that.

CO-RESEARCHER: Vho-Rosi

At what age did you experience your menstruation period?

R: 16 years.

Explain how you reacted when you had your first menstruation period?

R: I was lucky because I was prepared before hand, and I new it was a confirmation of my identity and that I was no longer a girl but a woman.

Explain what makes the elderly women applaud the girls' first menstruation period?

R: It is milestone on the journey towards the preparation of marriage.

Are you initiated? -If yes how old were you?

R: Yes, because in the olden days, heavy stigma was put on men who married an uncircumcised woman

Explain whether you voluntarily attended initiation school or if you were forced?

R: Yes, I attended because I wanted to attend.

In your opinion, what makes initiated women to be secretive about female initiation school?

R: Yes, the culture should be respected.

How do you feel about the myths around female genital cutting and elongation of labia minora that they promote exquisite sexual pleasure?

R: Yes, as I have mentioned, people have rights and initiation has moved to a new paradigm of respecting rights of people, so there are boundaries that are considered during initiation of females and males.

Explain how you feel about the speculations made by uninitiated women that the initiates are prohibited to talk about the initiation ritual?

R: Bad, but talking about 'dombani' or 'dzingoma' is a taboo.

Do you have children who are initiated? If yes, did you encourage them to attend?

R: Yes, two girls

Would you encourage others to attend initiation?

R: Yes because initiation is a status marker and has a great social influence.

If one does not conform with the culture one is regarded as an 'outsider' and would not initiate or take part in any activity within the community.

Some people believe that initiation school encourages girls to maintain their virginity. What is your response?

R: I think is a prerequisite for honouring marriage.

What is your opinion about the initiation of women being speculated as a barbaric act?

R: I believe it is not; it is only that it was done that way, maybe if it is practised now I might consider it as barbaric.

CO-RESEARCHER: Vho-Mercy

At what age did you first experience your menstruation period?

R: Somewhere in the twenties, but I was still young.

Explain how you reacted when you had your first menstruation period?

R: I was really scared and confused.

Explain what makes the elderly women applaud the girls' first menstruation period?

R: I think it is about marriage.

Are you initiated? - If yes how old were you?

R: 15 years.

Explain whether you voluntarily attended initiation school or if you were forced?

R: No.

In your opinion, what makes initiated women to be secretive about female initiation school?

R: Control and oppress women.

How do you feel about the myths around female genital cutting and elongation of labia minora that they promote exquisite sexual pleasure?

R: Yes. People say so.

Explain how you feel about the speculations made by uninitiated women that the initiates are prohibited to talk about the initiation ritual?

R: ...I feel ashamed and helpless.

Do you have children who are initiated? -If yes did you encourage them to attend?

R: Yes, one girl. I did.

Would you encourage others to attend initiation?

R: Yes, because initiation brings solidarity, unity and identity among the initiates.

Some believe that initiation school encourages girls to maintain their virginity. What is your response?

R: No. When a girl gets married, her virginity status matters most and it will prove to the in-laws that she was raised in a proper way and hence she can become a good wife.

What is your opinion about initiation of women being speculated as a barbaric act?

R: I think it is inhumane.

CO-RESEARCHER: Vho-Julia

At what age did you first experience your menstruation period?

R: 14 years.

Explain how you reacted when you had your first menstruation period?

R: I was scared; I did not know what to do. I washed all the panties because I thought I would hurt myself.

Explain what makes the elderly women applaud the girls' first menstruation period?

R: I think it is a girl milestone or marriage.

Are you initiated? If yes how old were you?

R: Yes, I think I was 16 years old.

Explain whether you voluntarily attended initiation school or you were forced?

R : No, I was not given a choice. I had to attend because of the culture.

In your opinion, what makes initiated women to be secretive about female initiation school?

R: Fear, if threatened you will learn to shut your mouth.

How do you feel about the myths around female genital cutting and elongation of labia minora that they promote exquisite sexual pleasure?

R: It is done for one purpose only to sexually control the women.

Explain how you feel about the speculations made by uninitiated women that the initiates are prohibited to talk about the initiation ritual?

R: Bad and is painful to be oppressed.

Do you have children who are initiated? If yes did you encourage them to attend?

R: Yes, two girls.

Would you encourage others to attend initiation school?

R: No.

Some people believe that initiation school encourages girls to maintain their virginity. What is your response?

R: There is no such thing. It is only that girls are scared to disappoint the family and being humiliated by the initiated elders.

What is your opinion about initiation of women being speculated as a barbaric act?

R: I think it is the same as abuse. People who are still practicing this should be arrested.

CO-RESEARCHER: Vho-Lettie

At what age did you first experience your menstruation period?

R: 18 years.

Explain how you reacted when you had your first menstruation period?

R: I was lost, because I did not know where to start, scared to confront my mother.
It was a scary moment if I think about it.

Explain what makes the elderly women applaud the girls' first menstruation period?

R: They think of wealth, marriage and preparation of initiation.

Are you initiated? - If yes how old were you?

R: Yes, I was 19 years of age.

Explain whether you voluntarily attended initiation school or if you were forced?

R: No, it was compulsory or I will be called names.

In your opinion, makes initiated women to be secretive about female initiation school?

R: Fear, you don't talk about the cultural ritual, it is taboo.

How do you feel about the myths around female genital cutting and elongation of labia minora that they promote exquisite sexual pleasure?

R: Yes to control the woman's body.

Explain how you feel about the speculations made by uninitiated women that the initiates are prohibited to talk about the initiation ritual?

R: I felt cheated and denied my rights.

I feel I have been silenced for good, and it is painful because I cannot share my thoughts.

Do you have children who are initiated? - If yes, did you encourage them to attend?

R: Yes, two. One decided to attend and the other did not want to have anything to do with it.

Would you encourage others to attend initiation?

R: No.

Some believe that initiation school encourages girls to maintain their virginity. What is your response?

R: No. it is people's assumptions.

What is your opinion about initiation of women being speculated as a barbaric act?

R: I concur because it is male torture.

CO-RESEARCHER: Vho-Lufuno

At what age did you experience your menstruation period?

R: 17 years.

How did you react when you had your first menstruation period?

R: Surprised.

Explain what makes the elderly women applaud the girls' first menstruation period?

R: I think the elders want to celebrate the new stage of a young girl to womanhood.

Are you initiated? - If yes how old were you?

R: ...17 years.

Explain whether you voluntarily attended initiation school or if you were forced?

R: Forced by situation and respect of the tradition.

In your opinion what makes initiated women secretive about female initiation school?

R: Fear.

How do you feel about the myths around female genital cutting and elongation of labia minora that it promotes exquisite sexual pleasure?

R: I personally believe that there are many who lost their virginity because their fathers or relatives or strangers sexually abuse them. These girls already feel guilty, and thus exposing them to virginity testing might further damage their self- confidence, self respect, and self worth. This also applies to those who have willingly lost their virginity, as they might be feeling guilty or ashamed that they have done something wrong. So I don't believe this crab.

Explain how you feel about the speculations made by uninitiated women that the initiates are prohibited to talk about the initiation ritual?

R: Angry, stressed, pain and shame.

Do you have children who are initiated? - If yes did you encourage them to attend?

R: No.

Would you encourage others to attend initiation?

R: No, no, and no.

Some people believe that initiation school encourages girls to maintain their virginity. What is your response?

R: Yes. "I heard that if you did not stretch your labia minora sex is not as pleasant as when you have stretched your labia minora."

What is your opinion about initiation of women being speculated as a barbaric act?

R: Yes, the initiated elders must show respect to people's rights.

Co-researchers Vho-Sara, Vho-Vayi, Vho-Martha and Vho-Julia alluded and believed that women were silenced because of the power of ideology to control women. However, co-researchers Vho- Mphaphuli and Vho- Mbilwini believed that women were silenced in order not to discourage and threaten those who wanted to be initiated. Vho-Lettie and Vho-Lufuno believed that women were silenced because of the culture and it was taboo to talk about women initiation. Furthermore, the women also said they felt bad, sad, frustrated and humiliated when they remembered all the things which were done to them, more so being denied their rights to express their emotions. They indicated that the most humiliating thing was talking about their traumatic experiences of genital cutting and elongation of labia minora.

Stayt (1931) states that female genital cutting is practised throughout the world, with the practice concentrated most in African countries such as, Nigeria, Zambia and Kenya. Opposition is motivated by consent (or lack thereof, in most cases), of the patient and subsequently the safety and long term consequences of the procedure.

Two feminists, Chodorow and Lever, argue that the traditional practices and some cultural beliefs that surround them, are just some of the many ways men have used patriarchal ideology to reduce women's freedom and maintain control over them. Male supremacy is not possible or rather incomplete without female submissiveness, dependency, a dynamic embedded within the society's culture, norms, values, expectations and standards reflecting gender biases and inequalities (Gilligan, 1982).

The "different voice", the feminine voice, which had been kept silent for so long, has created distortions in the understanding of the female initiation and stages and the sequences of women development, but made itself heard primarily through the work of Gilligan (1982), and continued to resound in the works of other feminist writers, particularly Nancy Chodorow and Janet Lever (Panaretos, 2002).

Voice is natural and also cultural. It is composed of breath and sound, words, rhythm and language. Voice is a powerful psychological instrument and channel, connecting inner and outer worlds. Speaking and listening are a form of psychic breathing. This ongoing relational exchange among people is mediated through language and culture, diversity and plurality. For these reasons, voice is a new key for understanding the psychological social and cultural order (Panaretos, 2002). For these reasons, voice is a new key for understanding the psychological, social and cultural dynamics of female initiation in the Mashau Village, Mashawana Village and Shayandima Village in Limpopo, South Africa.

4.3 THE VOICES OF INITIATED WOMEN

1. The Voice of Vho- Mashudu

“It is difficult to share my initiation experiences with you because it has not been easy for years. You must not be surprised because I was conditioned not to tell anyone. I was told what I have seen should not be revealed or shared with uninitiated people, let alone uncircumcised men. Yes, the time I was taken to the so-called school, it was winter and it was not an easy journey but tortuous. Some of the information I have already alluded to above like the cutting of the clitoris, stretching of labia minora and being taken to the river early in the morning and the branded sign I have on my thigh which is my certificate of appreciation of being initiated. I have suffered pain, shame, anger and stress.”

“The reason I am saying this is because I am angry towards my mother who agreed to put me in this situation, although she says she did not have a choice. I feel ashamed, especially of my booby. I remember when I was admitted in the hospital to give birth, the medical doctor insisted I should give him or her consent to operate my labia minora because they were too long and might affect the baby, again I was silent and I did comply to save my child. What I am telling you now breaks my heart because even the so-called my husband criticizes how I look.”

1.1 How do you feel?

Right now, I feel better because no one would ever silence me again; I deserve to be myself and to decide to satisfy myself not another person.

2. The Voice of Vho- Masindi

“I remember well; it was in 1948 when I was told by my aunt that she was happy that I had turned to be a woman. She insisted that I should be initiated with other girls to learn the cultural beliefs and be prepared for marriage. At that time nothing was strange because women anyway did not go to school except to get married and have children. I did not have a choice but to succumb to the instruction. The whole initiation process was torture, abuse and violation of a person’s rights. I was ill-treated. I was beaten, did not eat healthy food. We would be undressed and be kept half naked; remember it was winter time and I was told to be strong because giving birth would not be an easy task. If I survived it means I will be able to survive the challenges in the near future. Of course, I was not allowed to question anything; I had to agree and follow all the instructions given by the head mother of initiation. The most painful thing was when I was branded by a hot stick, when I was taken to the river and the water was ice cold. I was burnt by a hot stick on the thigh. They said it was the passport to enter in any initiation school without being questioned. However, all the experiences destroyed my self esteem and confidence because even today I do not make my own decisions. I always listen to my husband. The legacy of being oppressed has deepened its roots, whereby I am seen as an underdog. Last year my daughter was getting married and I was not involved in the negotiation process, and I was again silenced when I wanted to query. All this makes me feel pain inside, frustrated and stressed because this is how things should be to my life.”

2.1 How do you feel?

I blame myself and hate the culture because it robbed me of my freedom.

3. The voice of Vho-Makhadzi

I remember well the day I saw my first menses. I did not know what to do or who to turn to. Finally I confided to a friend who also accused me of sleeping around with boys. Remember, I was not supposed to tell my mother, but finally told my grandmother. She ululated and told me that I was a woman and she would tell my mother to inform the elders to prepare for the initiation.

I remember when I was 17 years of age, during those years I mean early sixties. Any girl who was conferred to be matured was obliged to go for "*musevhetho*". This was the time during harvest and girls were supposed to assist as part of their initiation. I was ridiculed and rejected by the community. I was isolated and ill-treated because the girls who graduated would sing about me, and they would call me names, and I suffered dearly for not attending, but the following year I attended. The whole misery disappeared and I also did that to others.

I was not asked to make my decision. I was forced and dragged to the initiation. During the initiation no one is treated special, because even the mentors want to avenge for their suffering. So, it was hell.

3.1 How do you feel?

What I can say is that there is no other more painful thing than being owned and controlled. My voice was silenced for a long time and it is difficult to voice my opinion because I never had that opportunity in my life. I am angry towards myself because I should not have allowed my children to go through the same abuse.

4. The Voice of Vho- Mphephu

Everything was beyond my limits; I remember I was told that the money had been paid for my initiation. I was not surprised because every girl in that village was obliged to be initiated. The only thing that matters now is that what happened cannot be changed. If I had to do it again definitely I would not because I can decide for myself not to do things simply because others are doing them. I think it was wrong. I do not say people should not respect their culture but they should be allowed to make their own decisions and choices without being threatened and discriminated against. The only thing that frustrates me now is the conflicting messages that were communicated to me that if I tell tales about initiation I would be 'mad' some say they would forced my family to leave the village and many things which really scared me. I kept my mouth shut to protect my family and myself. Really the issue of not being isolated, rejected, prejudiced and ridiculed by the community, peers and

family was so real, because no one would associate with you. I think they were scared that if others new what was happening inside they would be scared to be initiated.

4.1 How do you feel?

I feel I was treated like a child. I am saying this because a child would do anything to please the parents no matter what. I feel I did what was supposed to be done but still feel betrayed and ashamed of myself for not deciding for 'me' not 'them.'

5. The Voice of Vho-Khathu

I was a victim of culture. I am initiated and I went through the entire process. It was not good but I survived it. Maybe the character that I carry is because of what initiations made me to be. I am not happy about the character or the personality I carry. I see myself as pleasing others rather than myself. I have a low self esteem because I cannot think for myself. I always suppress my feelings because it is not easy to talk or share with others. Remember I was conditioned to keep secrets and not to talk about what is said to be against culture. I was told even if I fight with my husband I should not tell people about it because it would destroy the family so it is "A FAMILY SECRET". Do you understand where I am coming from? Yes. At the age of 6 I was taught how to stretch my labia minora. It was fun but I was never told why I was doing that, up until when I attended 'vhusha' and later 'musevhetho.' I have a tattoo which confirms that I am initiated. Yes, my clitoris has been cut. I am not sure about what has been speculated that it harnesses the male's sexual desires.

5.1 How do you feel?

I am sad and angry about the whole thing but it won't make a difference to me now.

6. The Voice of Vho-Sara

I hope you are not going to expose me.

Those days, if you were initiated it was a status like now you are respected and carry a better status when you are educated. People respect you, want to associate with you, you are accepted by young and old and the community at large. The same applies to initiation; those days it was valued as important. A person who was against it would suffer humiliation, discrimination; isolation and ridiculed. No one would ever listen to you because you were not a woman. Those days it was fun and it was fashionable. It is like you were wearing the new brand and some women would envy you. Remember marriage was a status. However, now it is a different scenario, because people have the right to talk, to choose, to make decisions, and are free because of democracy and human rights. I now believe that every person should be accorded a sense of value, worth and dignity and every person have the right to voice their thoughts and feelings about life in general.

6.1 How do you feel?

I am ashamed and sad.

7. The Voice of Vho-Vayi

I am sorry to say this, but my mother disappointed me because she new and she allowed it to happen to me. She new the pain, the humiliation and the torture that goes with it and she did not rescue me because she wanted to please my father and 'others'. It is true that the institutionalized power is unquestionable. I am saying this because it appears that no one came forward and challenged the behaviour and the pain was transferred from 'them' to 'us.' It is sad that I also did the same, acquired the same attitude and transferred it to my own children. But now that I understand, maybe your research will bring justice to those who are still practicing this humiliating thing. Politics speaks about how power operates at the most intimate levels of daily life, but does not touch the cultural pathology in the lives of women and children who are continuously oppressed because of the gender-role expectations. What I did not know is "a mother plays a very important role in bringing up a child. However, I exposed them to a risky dangerous situation and betrayed them because I was not open and honest when they wanted to know. I kept it a secret because I was told not to tell anyone. My secret has haunted me so long because of 'fear of the unknown'.

7.1 How do you feel?

I feel bad and helpless.

8. The Voice of Vho-Marta

No matter how painful the suffering was, I kept the secret because I wanted to be like appreciated, accepted. I pretended to myself, my family I mean my children and my friends and gave them the impression that I was ok with it. I kept it a secret because I was told not to discuss initiation with uninitiated women. I once suffered from flashbacks I could not sleep when I thought of the physical abuse because I escaped from initiation. I could not stand the pain and suffering, but my mother was instructed by my father and uncle that I should be taken back because it would humiliate the family. I was taken back after three days and I remember paying the price dearly. They made me squat and dance for the whole day without food. That I would never forget so long as I live, but I did not tell anyone until now. Sometime I laugh about it, but deep down I suffer pain.

8.1 How do you feel?

Sad. My friends still remind me even today, so I will carry this scar for as long as I live.

9. The voice of Vho-Elisa

If I remember well since childhood, I never had a voice. The reason I am saying this is because I was told by my parents that I should not talk back to elders. I should not question anything but comply and do as I was told. I was taken and forced to attend vhusa and I could not question the reasons why. I had to attend all the initiations without asking any questions. At the initiation school I was also told not to discuss or tell anyone regarding what was happening during initiation. At my marriage my husband always reminded me that he was the head of the house and that he had the final say. Still, I was silenced; so all my life I have been silenced.

How do you feel?

Angry

Now that I am saying this, I feel sad and frustrated because even when I am in pain I find it difficult to share with others because this is how I was conditioned (not to share).

10. The voice of Vho-Vho-Dora

It is funny that I am talking to you. Maybe it is because you are also initiated and I consider you as a woman. What I can say about this thing of women in Venda not sharing or discussing things with others, is because women have been oppressed for so long and I ended believing this is how we should be. Remember the family secret. In my case it started when my child was molested by his uncle and the family insisted that the matter should be handled within the family and is a “family secret.” So for me it is difficult to discuss sensitive issues.

Ok, remember, yes, in *‘dombani’* there are things that are not supposed to be discussed outside dombani. But now I do because things have changed and people have rights to can express how they feel.

How do you feel?

Confused, but what I can say is that there is nothing to hide because there are lots of information about initiations, in the media and books. I think if we really want to preserve the culture it means we need to educate the young generation. And it will be possible only if we share openly with them.

11. The voice of Vho- Mbilwini

It is a good thing but I will be comfortable only if you call more elders because I am scared to discuss this alone.

11.1 How do you feel?

I don't know.

12. The voice of Vho- Rosi

I kept quiet because I wanted to be accepted and have a sense of belonging. When the initiated find out that the secret of initiation has been exposed the person gets punished, humiliated, rejected and mocked at all the time. The experiences become so bad that you can be expelled from the village by the traditional elders. However, now that things have changed, people decide whether they will attend or not without being threatened.

12.1 How do you feel?

I feel happy because all this sanctions are done away with because of democracy.

13. The voice of Vho- Mercy

It is so traumatic to think about how I was treated the time I was a teenager. At that time I considered everything as normal. I even enjoyed not talking about what was happening in the initiation schools, because I wanted other girls to attend and go through the hardship and abuse that I experienced as a person. Remember, if you are initiated you will be given a chance to mentor the newly admitted initiates, and you will have a chance to do the same. I believe this is what is exercised in boarding schools when you are a new comer.

13.1 How do you feel?

For me it was fun, but when I think of it now I feel bad.

14. The voice of Vho-Julia

“I think the silencing of women from divulging traditional practices at initiation schools is because it is known that such practices are atrocious and if initiates are informed before hand, they would not dare have the interest of attending the school. Therefore, the women silences are rooted in the tradition of secrecy into which women are socialized within initiation institutions. I personally believe that the silencing of women is similar to women abuse and oppression. It is better if the health professionals intervene and monitor how things are done in initiation schools. The fact that initiation schools issues are shrouded in secrecy it is likely that they would not like people become aware of the brutal activities and the truth about initiation.”

14.1 How do you feel?

I feel bad and I never told anyone except now when you are asking me.

Would you encourage others attend? No, except that they review how things are practiced.

15. The voice of Vho- Lettie

“I was born in Venda and all my parents were also born and bred in Venda. It is a beautiful place to live in, because of the abundance of resources. The Venda culture is built on a vibrant mythical belief system, which is reflected in their artistic style, dances and ancestral spirits. The cultural ceremonies and rituals are especially fascinating and speak of a long, rich tradition and values.”

When I saw my first menstruation, menses blood in my panty, I was so scared and did not know what to do. I told my aunt and she told me that I should not tell anyone (silenced). Later, I was sent to *vhusha* initiation school but was also told I should not tell anyone again (silenced) so, my entire life I have been silenced.

How do you feel?

I feel bad because since then I rely on others' opinion not my own view. All this had a negative impact on my life. I cannot share my emotional pain because I was taught that I should learn to deal with my own challenges or involve the elders to resolve my problems. You see what I mean.

4.4 Common Emerging Themes

The initiated women (participants) voices acknowledged problems without offering resolutions and reflected helplessness and feelings of pain, guilt, frustration and shame. Some of the initiates reported that they were still keeping the secret, because they believed that if it were discovered that they had been telling tales about the women initiation, they would be labelled, prejudiced, sanctioned and rejected by the community as well as by traditional leaders.

As stated above, talking about women initiation in some cultures is a taboo and it is viewed as a serious offence. Initiated women indicated that if they had spoken or disclosed about what takes place during initiation, they would become mad. Others feared that they might be seen as immature and would be considered failures. More so, they were scared that uninitiated women would be scared to participate if they found out what the rituals entailed (Kelly, 2002).

Gilligan (1982) points out that the female voice has been silent in the narrative adult maturity and these voiceless females have created distortions in the understanding of the stages and the sequences of women's developmental stages of initiation. The "different voice", the feminine voice, which had been kept silent for so long was finally shared with the researcher and stressed that they would not encourage anyone to go through the 'hell' they have experienced.

Co- researchers Vho-Masindi, Vho-Mphephu, Vho-Sara, Vho- Elisa, Vho- Mbilwini, echoed the same thoughts of being threatened, scared of rejection, discrimination and humiliation by the community and traditional elders. Vho- Khathu said "I was scared of rejection." Vho-Vayi and Vho-Rosi said that they did it "to respect the culture and tradition." Vho-Marta and Vho Mercy 'power and control 'Vho-Dora said she kept it a secret, not to scare others. Vho-Julia and Vho-Lettie "we kept a secret because of fear." Vho-Lufuno said that" I thought initiation belongs to the culture and is considered taboo to share outside *dombani*."

Most of the participants reported that they would not encourage others unless things are done differently. It was repeatedly said by other participants that cutting of the clitoris and stretching of labia minora is a barbaric act.

4.5 DATA DISPLAY

During the collection of data the following themes and categories emerged from the interviews:

Table 6: Themes and Categories

Themes	Categories
Meaning of menstruation	Milestone and mockery and marriage, no playing with boys, sleeping with boys
Cultural beliefs associated with initiation	Rejection and isolation and humiliation
Social pressure associated with initiation rituals	Prejudice and lack of respect, lack of Acceptance by - the community - peers - members of the opposite sex lack of respect by - initiates - the traditional leaders
Stigmatization associated with initiation rituals	-Labeling and prejudice, fear of embarrassment and ridicule lead to frustration shame, sadness and low self esteem
Solidarity, unity and identity among the Initiates	Discipline and ubuntu/ humane
Discrimination associated with the initiation rituals	Lack of acceptance
Experiences of performing initiation rituals	Cutting of the clitoris -stretching of labia minora and secrecy lead to pain, shame and stressors.
The reaction of girls' families and peers regarding the menses	Mixed feelings and humiliation. Family starts preparations for initiation and informs the father. Peers will come with speculations to discredit girls who saw their first menses.
Reaction of girls towards menses	Shocked, frequent baths, keeping it as a secret and avoid socializing with others

4.5.1 Understanding menstruation/menarche

Menarche is said to be one big 'first' developmental phase for girls during puberty. It is an experience that that would make a big and exciting period of growing up. It is a graduation from being a little girl to being a grown up: a cross which takes a child to an adult transitional phase of maturity Women and Language (Beidelman, 1997).

Vhomakhadzi said that menarche was a sign of being sexually matured. If a girl started seeing her menses she would inform one of the elderly women of the kraal, of its occurrence. The elderly woman would then approach and tell the girl's mother, who then would tell the father to give consent for the girl to attend '*vhusha*'. There is a barrier that forbids the direct approach of the parent by the child concerning matters such as menstruation. This behaviour occurs repeatedly among the initiates in other African cultures, and this calls for celebration, and preparedness for initiation and marriage.

One of the elders reported that during *vhusha*, the girls are taught how to respect their bodies; not to have sexual intercourse before marriage; not to socialize with boys since they have moved to another developmental stage of sexual maturity and to avoid unplanned pregnancy and diseases like HIV and AIDS. However, first menses can be traumatic for a girl if not professionally handled, such as when some criticise the girl for being naughty, sleeping around with boys, and others would threaten the innocent girl that if seen with boys she would fall pregnant. Some girls react negatively towards their first menses because of lack of knowledge as to how to deal with it. Some would keep it a secret and think something is wrong with them (Blacking, 1969).

Traditionally, this stage has been regarded as a prelude to, and a preparation for, adulthood, a transitional period of life between immaturity and maturity. It is the time of life that has to be lived through. It is the time of personal discovery and identity formation, the time of transition to make decisions and live with the consequences thereof. The Vha-Venda people echo Piaget's views by believing that psychologically, adolescence is the stage when the individual becomes integrated into the society of adults (Piaget, 1969). Vho-Mashudu (pseudo name) said that during '*vhusha*', girls go through virginity testing and all the virgins are accepted by elderly women, ululating to appreciate. Meanwhile those who had broken their virginity bring shame to their families.

4.5.2 Cultural beliefs and Vha-Venda rituals

Haralambos (1990), states that culture determines how members of society think and feel about their beliefs. Culture directs the people's actions and defines their outlook on life. To some cultures, positive attitudes, characters, norms and moral standards serve as a form of social positive reward, especially when people comply with the ritual. On the other hand, negative reward will prevail to those who offend the custom.

Sue, Sue and Sue (1990) defined culture as customs, values, and traditions that are learned from one's environment. They contended that culture consisted of common and shared values, customs, habits, and rituals, system labelling, explanations, and evaluations; social rules of behaviour; perceptions regarding human nature, natural phenomena, interpersonal relationships, time, and activity; symbols, art and historical development. "A culture can be thought of as a community of individuals who see their world in a particular manner- who share particular interpretations as central to the meaning of their lives and action." (Pare, 1995). Culture depicts a collection of people in terms of their world-making practices, and thus gives primacy to the interpretive, cultural and narrative aspects of lived experiences.

Individuals who are against the initiation ceremonies are ridiculed by their communities. Other communities respect and embrace girls and women who went through and completed the initiation process. Those who did not attend are always disadvantaged and often called names. The researcher bears witness to the above because when researching on the topic, she was, to some extent, initiated to be accepted.

During the interviews, some of the participants commonly identified with the notion of social pressure associated with the rituals. Some mentioned the issues of rejection, being isolated and humiliated.

Vhomakhadzi Tshinakaho (pseudonym) explains thus:

I remember when I was 17 years of age; during those years I mean in the early sixties; any girl who was conferred to be matured was obliged to go for "*musevhetho*". This was done during harvest time and girls were supposed to assist as part of their initiation. However, I did not, not to say I was not interested but my mother who was a single parent did not have money (*Tshitandze*) to pay the traditional leaders for my admission. *Heey!* You would never live a normal life.

I was ridiculed and rejected by the community. I was isolated and ill-treated because the girls who graduated would sing about me, and they would call me names, and I suffered dearly for not attending; but the following year I attended. The whole misery disappeared and I also did that to others.

Other participants associated with the experience started laughing about it. The participants agreed that even today the same outstanding attitudes of rejection and isolation still prevail because girls and women who do not comply with the custom are seen as outsiders.

4.5.3 Rejection by the elders and traditional leaders

The researcher has realized that the influence of tradition and culture, could lead to both positive and negative attitudes towards people who turn a blind eye on the initiation rituals. There appears to be evidence that culture determines how members of the community think or feel. Their belief systems and actions always define their outlook on life. Females and males who comply with the ritual are accepted and embraced by the elders and traditional leaders, while negative attitudes towards the ritual create tension and rejection by the elders and traditional leaders.

Most of the uninitiated women commonly identified a degree of rejection. No matter how educated a person is, as long as they did not respect or comply with the ritual, they were seen as outsiders. Since the practice of women initiation is carried out behind closed doors, it does not allow outsiders to know about the custom, because there is a tendency by the custom to reject those who do not take part.

It is difficult to survive. Everyone in the community would know and no one would be interested to interact or socialize with you. One would feel lonely and no one wants you near them. They would call you names like “shuvhuru”, which refers to being half woman, because one did not go to the initiation school. Nobody wants to hear your side of the story. You cannot initiate or give any input in any gathering. Even if you try hard, no one would take you seriously. One is continuously abused emotionally and often harassed. The researcher also experienced the same treatment before she was initiated.

4.5.4 Social pressure associated with the ritual

During the data collection process, the researcher identified the following categories:

4.5.4.1 Lack of acceptance by community

According to the participants, lack of acceptance could create no sense of belonging to the individual. The individual would not be considered as part of the community. The community would not listen or take any advice from the person who is not initiated because they believe that the individual is still viewed as a child and cannot make informed decisions.

The researcher relates well with the above statement because she was denied access since initially she was not initiated. But after the researcher had gone through the entire process, she was well embraced and accepted by the community.

The participants agreed that lack of acceptance by the community could lead to low self-esteem, helplessness, guilt feelings because of the stigma, and social withdrawal. The participants added that lack of acceptance could lead to dissociation from the community.

According to Feldman-Summers, Gordon and Meagher (1979), self-esteem is “the effective component of the self, a general specific positive or negative self- evaluations.” Low self-esteem is damaging and difficult to break. Individuals with low self esteem are prone to develop physical illness, psychological disturbances and inability to cope with stress related issues.

4.5.4.2 Lack of acceptance/respect by peer groups

According to the researcher, lack of acceptance means not being acknowledged, considered, appreciated and wanted. The participants concurred with the statement by saying that: “Young girls are sent to ‘*musevhetho*’, ‘*vhusha*’ and ‘*domba*’ and ‘*tshitambo*’, to grow up well, learn to respect the elders” and to be accepted by peers, family and community, as mentioned in the above extract. Stayt (1931 and 1968) reported that, at these institutions, the youth are taught respect for adults.

The Vha-Venda people urge young girls and women to go through the initiation school so as to acquire the knowledge that should be passed from one generation to another.

According to the participants:

If the rule is bridged or is not accepted, the person is not respected and not allowed to enter into any conversation with other girls. The uninitiated girl would always be reminded by others that she is not a woman let alone a ‘somebody’. The initiated girls would use lexical dialects when communicating with one another to make it difficult for the uninitiated to understand or comprehend the conversation.”

The uninitiated girls are powerless and frustrated because no one would listen to them nor would they be given a chance to present their opinions. They are told to keep their opinions to themselves because they are valueless. The participants further reported that peer pressure resulted in making young girls relocate to urban areas so as to exercise their freedom and avoid the pressure dictated by custom.

Sue et al., (1994) found the following psychological effects that could later cause low self esteem, paranoia and avoidance tendencies: hypersensitivity to potential rejection, humiliation, anger and shame.

Furthermore, participants from Shayandima, Mashawana and Mashau villages reported that they were also taught to respect their in-laws, senior elders, their husbands; and if found disrespectful, they would be taken back to their respective families where they would be disciplined and re-educated. The participants agreed that there was a psychological trauma induced by lack of acceptance by the community and peers, and that it led to isolation and withdrawal because you did not belong to them (community).

4.5.4.3 Prejudice

The researcher's view to prejudice is similar to labelling and stigmatization, since it connotes and ridicules a person's personality. The above-mentioned subcategories could precipitate problems related to the persons' identity, self-esteem, confidence and dignity.

4.5.4.4 Solidarity, unity, identity among the initiates

The graduates (initiates) perceived initiation to be a high degree of solidarity, unity, identity formation and discipline. Socializing with one another brings unity towards each other. During the process of initiation, the initiates accept and treat each other with respect. Respect is understood as a spirit of unity and humanity towards each other. The initiates become disciplined after they had gone through the same experience. The initiates believe that initiation teaches them tolerance, discipline and how to be responsible adults. The category that was overwhelmingly identified was lack of discipline.

Vho- Mashudu reported:

Before I was initiated I had no respect for any person. I would not be sent by anyone, even my own parents. I would respond with disrespect and still not see it as a problem. However, after I was forced to attend vhusa and later domba I changed my entire negative attitude to be a positive responsible, young woman. Elders started laughing and said to me, you see initiation school has brought out the best of you.

According to the initiation elders, initiation and rites of passage are educational and are believed to be equivalent in what is taught in schools, received by children in western society. Because the great emphasis is: “we teach and teach and teach the girls” and “sometimes we make them clever” and socially competent and have knowledge of etiquette, sometime we teach them how to be disciplined, to prevent them from being stigmatized (Richards, 1956).

4.5.4.5 Stigmatization associated with initiation

Social stigma is a severe disapproval of personal characteristics or beliefs that are against the cultural norm Goffman (1990). Some participants, during interviews, reported that stigmatization of females happens if the initiates are found not to be virgins. Vho-Mashudu (pseudo name) said that during ‘*vhusha*’, girls go through virginity testing. The girls who had lost their virginites bring shame to their families. Their peers begin to ridicule and isolate them. As such, it is a clear indication that culture plays an important role in encouraging teenagers to abstain and retain their virginity.

The researcher, finally, believes that stigmatization could lead to the following effects amongst the initiates:

- i) Fear of embarrassment and ridicule
- ii) Sad feeling because of rejection
- iii) Isolation, prejudiced and loss of friendships
- iv) Low self esteem
- v) Destroys a person's self confidence.

In addition, negative stereotypes and stigmatization play a role ostracizing uninitiated women. The community and peers would reject one, and one would not get a rightful place where one belongs because of labelling by peers and the community.

According to Haralambos (1990), labelling is a master status that colours all other statuses possessed by the individual. For example, the initiated women would always label those who did not graduate from the initiation school by calling them names like “shuvhuru” as indicated above meaning half woman. Uninitiated women are not accepted and respected. The uninitiated would always find it difficult to have normal relationships, whether from the male side or female side. Even men do not recognize or propose to a woman who is not initiated. It is believed by initiated males that uninitiated women cannot satisfy a man in bed.

Vho-Elisa reported:

I was harassed and prejudiced all the time. Remember in the olden days we would go to fetch water and firewood. No one would associate with me. They would further say that I contaminated the water because I was not 'pure and clean.' Because I could not cope with the emotional pain, I had to succumb and go to the initiation school." I did it for the community and not because I was willing. The situation was not conducive anymore.

4.5.4.6 Secrecy associated with the initiation rituals.

Since the practice of initiation is carried behind closed doors, the rule is, uninitiated women are perceived as outsiders. Uninitiated women are not allowed to enter into the initiation schools. The social pressure that is imposed upon the uninitiated is that they are not even allowed to come closer to where the initiation is taking place. The information is strictly confidential and secretive. Talking or sharing the information is believed to be a taboo.

Women at Mashau village said that: "*ebo, tshoo azwi ambiwi zwa dombani*" meaning that the traditional practices are not to be spoken about anywhere, because it is taboo. The elderly initiated women from Mashawana said that: "*u do penga*", meaning that you would become insane when you talk about '*dzingoma*', the traditional practices with uninitiated people.

The initiated elderly women from Shayandima also were against the researcher's idea of wanting to talk about the '*dombani*' traditional practices and they reminded the researcher of the confidentiality agreed upon. They protected their tradition with earnest.

This is supported by Kelly (2002), who contends that telling tales about women's initiation in some cultures is taboo. It is viewed as a serious offence. Initiated women believe that if they tell they would become mad. Others fear that they may be seen as immature and look maladjusted, like failures. Moreover, they are scared that uninitiated women would be scared to participate if they find out what the rituals entail. The consequences suffered because of being silenced are: pain, shame, stress, and humiliation and psycho-social effects of rejection, isolation and lack of support from peers, community and family.

In this study, the researcher observed that conformity, compliance and obedience with the ritual, could save a person embarrassment and being rejected and ridiculed by the peers and the community within the Vha-Venda community.

4.6 SUMMARY

The participants reported that culture amongst the Vha-Venda people is sacred and religious. An animal is slaughtered to mark the beginning and the end of the ritual. The blood is perceived to bind the initiates to the departed life of the uninitiated (Milubi, 2000). ‘*Vhusha*’ initiation is for “stretching of labia minora”; ‘*musevetho*’ is for “cutting of the clitoris”; and *Domba* initiation ritual is for “entry to adulthood life, endurance of pain, hardship and childbearing.” The traditional practices at ‘*dombani*’ are not to be spoken about, it is taboo to speak about ‘*dzingoma*’ initiation rituals outside ‘*dombani*’.

This study found that for the Vha-Venda, a girl’s first menses is celebrated by the elders to welcome her in entering the transition to womanhood. During the research process, the researcher discovered that initiations are a sacred institution that forms the cornerstone of the entire community. The participants associated girls and boys’ sexual maturity with a stage of being sent to the initiation schools and as transition to womanhood and manhood. During the interviews it was discovered that first menses is celebrated because of marriage and a girl’s milestone into becoming a woman.

The researcher found out that in Limpopo Province, especially in the three villages where the researcher conducted the study, a girl's menstruation is cause for initiation preparations to welcome the girl to womanhood. It is said in the literature review that in Nigeria, a mother would teach the girl the "love magic". However, this differs from the Japanese's practice in that with them, when a girl sees her first menses, the family celebrates by eating red-coloured rice and beans. In India, a girl who has reached puberty is given a ceremonial bath, decked with ornate jewels and garments, and the girl's kith and kin are all invited for a ceremony in which it is announced that the girl has become of age and is celebrated. For the Hindus and some Buddhists, at the onset of menarche, it is believed that the goddess spirit vacates the girl's body and returns to ordinary life after a series of rituals (Beidelman, 1997).

Initiation is culturally important in most communities and implies the beginning of a new life. It is a ceremony by which a person is introduced into a society, which brings a man or woman to the realization of the egotistic aspect and to bring the lower nature under its control. It is a process of undergoing an expansion of consciousness, as part of the normal process of evolutionary development, viewed on a large scale, and not from a standpoint of an individual. Primarily, it involves the capacity to see, hear and comprehend, and to synthesize and correlate knowledge and recognise the purpose of pervading circumstances (Maluleke & Troskie, 2003).

4.7 TRADITION AND SECRECY

4.7.1 Senior females: Shayandima village

No matter how painful the suffering was, I kept it a secret because I was silenced, conditioned and indoctrinated. I wanted to be a good woman, and I pretended for years and kept this secret for years, I lied to my mother and gave her the impression that everything was fine. I acted according to the culture's expectations. I suffered trauma, stress, shame and humiliation but kept it within myself (*Vho- Makhadzi*).

The researcher's finding about the Vha-Venda initiation tradition regarding "secrecy" is that telling tales about women initiation is regarded as taboo. The Vha-Venda senior females strongly reiterated that every woman who went through the initiation was expected to keep what they saw at dombani during initiations to: They made it clear to the researcher that it was a serious offence to divulge their ritual tradition, although they never mentioned the nature of the consequences.

The senior females from Mashawana and Mashau villages said: “Initiations are not discussed outside ‘*dombani*’ and she further said: “if people tell tales about the initiation rituals, they will become mad.” However, the researcher’s view and belief around the secrecy is not to scare the uninitiated to participate, because if they know beforehand what the rituals entail, they might not see the need to be initiated (Kelly, 2002). Gilligan (1982) pointed out that the female voice has been silenced and these voiceless females have created distortions in the understanding of the stages and the sequences of women’s developmental stages of initiation.

The “different voice”, the feminine voice, which had been kept silent for so long, made itself heard during the interview and primarily through the work of Gilligan (1982), but continued to resound in the works of other feminist writers, particularly Nancy Chodorow and Janet Lever.

The researcher finally believes that initiation schools are secret ceremonies and the knowledge is not supposed to be shared with the uninitiated and outside initiation premises, except at ‘*dombani*’ because to speak about ‘*dzingoma*’, the traditional practices outside ‘*dombani*’ is taboo; yet it is believed to be educational. This confirms the research objective that one of the strongest bonds of women initiation is its secrecy. In agreement with that, secrecy calls attention to pain and shame. The secret itself becomes a stressor and all stress comes from the root of fear, as initiated women fear to talk and share the emotional pain they have experienced during the initiation process.

4.7.2 Senior females: Mashawana village

The senior females responded amazingly when asked about what makes it difficult for the initiated to share their experiences about what happened during the initiation ceremony. The response from one of the elders was: *“tsho, tsho a zwi ambiwi hiii! U bva gayi hoyu muthu asa divhi uri zwa Vho- khomba zwi a ila ni tshi vhudza mashuvhuru.”* meaning that where does this woman come from who does not know that initiation rites are not shared or talked about with the uninitiated. It was seconded by other senior females that it was taboo to tell tales about the initiation ritual. The researcher insisted to be clarified about the secrecy, but others wanted the topic to pass and reported that, yes, it was taboo and we did not talk about it because it is a rule that needs to be respected. Others reported that, yes, we do not share with others *because “zwiasemana”*, meaning that it is insulting and might offend some people.

4.7.3 Senior females: Mashau village

When asked if the ritual was educational and was used to empower women with life skills, the Mashau village senior women said that it was important that all the girls and young women pass the stage by attending the ritual. They further reported that it was like formal education; people needed to go to school and attend in order to pass. They demanded to stop the topic. Yes, the researcher admitted that it was not easy to share with uninitiated people, but only with those who had similar experiences.

4.8 CULTURAL BELIEFS AND WOMEN INITIATION SCHOOLS

4.8.1 Senior Females (Shayandima Village): Musevhetho initiation

The researcher had witnessed that culture within the Vha-Venda people in Limpopo province can be thought of as a community of individuals who see their world in a particular manner; who share particular interpretations as central to the meaning of their lives and actions. Culture depicts a collection of people in terms of their world making practices, and therefore gives primacy to the interpretive, cultural aspects of lived experiences (Pare, 1995). The importance and understanding of *musevhetho*, *vhusha* and *domba* are discussed as the findings received during the research process.

In Shayandima, it was reported by the senior initiated women that *musevhetho* is the initiation for girls, which initiates girls from a baby to the stage of puberty (before a girl starts menstruating). The senior women reported that this rite prepares young girls to have boundaries in terms of breaking their virginity. They are taught to respect themselves and others. They are taught discipline and to respect their rituals and customs. They are taught to abstain from sex until they get married. '*U kwevha*' is part of the activity that takes place during *musevhetho*. Girls are taught how to stretch their labia minora. The reason given was that it prepares girls to harness men into fulfilling relationships during the time of marriage. The senior females reported that most of the girls who attended '*musevhetho*' were still virgins (at a tender age) even though grown up girls may attend. It was further reported that at *musevhethoni*, the young girls are taught to respect their bodies and are discouraged from engaging in sexual intercourse with boys in order to prevent unplanned

pregnancies. It was reported by the senior females that after the initiation, girls are branded (left with a scar on the thigh), as confirmation that they attended the initiation. The scar would be the passport to go through to the next stage of initiation. However, it was also reported that members of the royal family did not attend, but only the commoners, “*vhasiwana*”, attended.

4.8.2 Senior females Mashau village: Musevhethe initiation

The senior initiated women reported that *musevhethe* initiation rites were adopted from the Ba-Sotho some decades ago because of the mixed tribes. Some reported that the culture belongs to the *Vhashavhi* or Vhalemba, while others argued that the Vha-Venda people inherited it from the Pedi people. The main function of *musevhethe* is to teach girls songs and *milayo* (rules). Girls attend *musevhethe* to be on par with their circumcised husbands. However, in Mashau village the girls would also go through ‘*tshitambo*’, which is also associated with ‘*milevhe*’, but the most important rituals for girls are to teach them respect and discipline. The senior initiated women reported that at Mashau village *musevhethe* was rarely celebrated since they did not have a person who specialized in it. However, *musevhethe* could be organized by any person as long as one requested permission from the traditional leaders.

4.8.3 Senior Females Mashawana village: Musevetho initiation

At Mashawana village it was reported that girls should attend all the stages of initiation which are, *musevetho* before menstruation to learn the basics in preparation for the next stage *vhusha*. It had been confirmed by the elders that stretching of labia minora is one of the golden rules the girls should learn. The main function is to teach the girl to grow up well, show respect, especially to the elders. It was reported that, at '*musevetho*', the girls are taught '*u losha*', meaning to salute senior people.

4.8.4 Senior females Shayandima village: Vhusha

The senior initiated women reported that, during '*vhusha*', girls were checked if they were virgins before admission. The reason given was to ensure that they adhered to the rules that were taught during '*musevetho*'. If the girl were still a virgin, she would be praised by the elders. It was reported that, at '*vhushani*', girls were still encouraged to abstain from sexual activities before marriage. They said that girls were taught endurance, responsibilities and discipline. The girls who completed were showered with presents and accepted by the family, community and peers. As mentioned above, the girls would be branded on their thighs 'U' shape to confirm that they had gone through the process of *vhusha* initiation. The brand is viewed as a passport for entering when initiations are in process. However, it was mentioned by the initiates that these practices are used to caution girls about the danger of engaging in sexual intercourse, and to avoid unplanned pregnancies.

4.8.5 Senior Female Mashawana Village: Vhusha

It was reported by the elders that girls who were found to be virgins were decorated and embraced by the community and their families. The function of *vhusha* at Mashawana village was similar to the one mentioned by the Shayandima women. They talked much about, discipline, respect and responsibilities and that girls should maintain their virginity, use condoms to prevent HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. It was reported that these rites were used as a transition to prepare girls from childhood to adulthood life. Louw and Edwards (1997) concur with the above statement that initiation schools are rituals associated with adult life. It is a passage to adulthood.

4.8.6 Senior females Mashau village: Vhusha

Senior females from Mashau village no longer checked the virginity status, but the girls were taught good manners, except those that are taught at family level. It was further reported that *vhusha* initiation was one ceremony attended by grown matured females and it was held both in winter and in summer, because some of the girls could only attend during school holidays. It was reported that due to changes, girls only attended for a few days. The girls were kept in seclusion and taught the essence of womanhood. Initiates were taught about matters relating to sex, sexual behaviour and marriage, with emphasis on avoiding pregnancy outside marriage. They further reported that initiates were taught to sing, dance and learn *milayo*/norms and values that would entitle the initiates to participate in traditional meetings and important ceremonies.

4.9 DOMBA (PYTHON DANCE)

According to senior females at Mashawana, domba initiation school is in essence for girls, but boys also attend it. They reported that it is a stage where girls and boys are prepared for marriage and understand the true significance of marriage and child birth, and the problems that go with that period. The senior females reported that, in the Vhavenda tradition, all girls and young females are expected to attend *musevhetho*, *vhusha*, *tshikanda* and *domba* a pre-marital school for young women. The senior females reported that they believed that the role of the initiation schools help to impart knowledge about what to expect in life, good or bad, and how to behave in dealing with life's challenges.

4.9.1 Senior females of Shayandima village: Domba initiation

The senior females reported that domba initiation is a pre-marital initiation. The rite of passage is attended by both girls and boys after each individual had previously attended other separated initiations dedicated to one's gender; *vhusha* and *tshikanda* for girls and *murundu* for boys. Nowadays, boys and girls do not mix in the same ceremony because it is perceived as immoral, only girls attend domba, which has two functions, namely: teaching girls to prepare themselves to become wives; birth planning, birth giving and child care, and how to treat a husband, and, of late, teaches AIDS risks, thus bringing females to the new generation of the tribe. They ended by saying that domba is a ceremony with deep meanings, and it is not possible to witness many parts of the teaching and the ritual bath.

4.9.2 Senior females of Mashau village: Domba initiation

The senior females from Mashau concurred with the females from Mashawana and Shayandima: the *domba* initiation is where the girls are taught all the rules and they are prepared for marriage, how to take care of their in-laws and to respect their cultural beliefs. For example, they should abstain from sex when they have a miscarriage; should know how to space the children; should know the importance of breast feeding and endurance of hardship to make the marriage work. They further reported that domba initiation is attended by matured females to welcome them and bring them to the new generation of the tribe.

This study found that the pain and hardships initiates encountered at '*vhusha*', '*musevhetho*', and '*domba*' prepared them for challenges that they may encounter as adults. These findings were also reported by Stayt (1931) who said that initiation schools are regarded as a cultural tool to prepare young girls for entry to womanhood.

The senior females (participants) reported that, they were also checked to see if they were still virgins at '*vhusha*' and '*domba*'. And at the end of the ceremonies, because they were mixed with boys, they were again checked if they did not have sex with boys (Vho-Masindi and Vho-Lufuno). Virginity testing is the practice and process of inspecting the genitalia of girls and women to determine if they are sexually chaste. The assumption is that a woman's hymen can be torn only as a result of sexual intercourse.

[http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/virginity_test].

The above-mentioned findings can be strongly identified with Van Gennep's (1960) three sub-meanings, namely, a) separation, b) transition, and c) incorporation. All of these may be summarized as social transition associated with *vhusha*, *musevhetho* and *domba* initiation rituals. These rituals are connected with personal transitions between different stages that occur during developmental stages. According to Erikson, identity versus identity diffusion or role confusion corresponds to the genital stage of Freud's psychosexual stages of development. During this phase, the adolescent begins to ask crucial psychosocial questions such as: Who am I in relation to society; what set of values or beliefs would guide my life; and over what elements in my life can I now exercise some choice.

The participants during the focus group reported that: these rites of passage were similar by nature, and were used to mark the socially recognized transition to sexual maturity and marriage (Van de Walle & Franklin, 1996). The researcher discovered that, if one had not attained a sense of identity in the previous stages of *musevhetho*, *vhusha*, and *domba* initiations, and could not share the self with others, a sense of isolation may result.

4.10 THE IMPORTANCE OF FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING

The arguments used to justify female genital cutting (FGC) vary from one society to society. However, social justifications similarly lack scientific evidence. Amongst the Vha-Venda culture, FGC is often used as a means of preservation and proof of virginity, and is regarded in many societies as a prerequisite for honourable marriage. The senior initiated women reported that in the olden days, a heavy stigma was put on men who married an uncircumcised woman. As stated in Chapter two, some societies justify FGC for reasons ranging from health related to social benefits, and these include the following:

Maintenance of cleanliness

Preserving of virginity

Enhancement of virginity

Improvement of male sexual performance and pleasure

Maintenance of good health.

[<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/female-genital-cutting>].

The initiated senior female's participants, during interviews, concurred with the above-mentioned statements that vaginal secretions, in reality, play a critical part in maintaining female health.

Burns and Grove (2005) define validity as that degree to which the instrument measures what is supposed to measure. The researcher focused on the content validity, which is the degree to which the items in an instrument adequately represent the universe of the content. Validity refers to the trustworthiness of the interpretations or conclusions which are made (Streubert & Carpenter, 1995). As discussed in the study, analysis and findings were presented to the participants during the individual interviews discussions for their inputs and clarification.

Within the scope of the study, the strategies of coherence and testimonial validity were employed. Whereas coherence refers to the quality and consistency of interpretations, testimonial validity refers to the validity obtained from the participants themselves (Streubert & Carpenter, 1995).

The researcher listened to the tapes to get the sense of the whole. The researcher repeatedly listened in order to internalize the contents and transcribed them verbatim. The researcher wrote the ideas as they unfolded during the interviews. The most interesting and shortest was to go through the text, asking questions to discern what the data was all about. Do not think about the “substance” of the information, but write down the underlying meaning. Cluster similar topics; and a scheme was organized to see whether new categories and codes emerged. Descriptive wording for the topic was made. Data related to the categories were assembled to show interrelationships. Data collected was recorded.

The data collected was transcribed, coded, translated and analysed. Glaser (1992) Strauss & Corbin, (1990) state that the researcher should entirely transcribe and analyse the very first interview and field notes before going on to the next interview or observation. Later, as the theory develops, only those sentences, paragraphs that relate to the evolving theory are transcribed. The collected data from initiated women were coded, translated and analysed. Coding of the data was done by writing down words or concepts that appeared more than once. The words were grouped together in categories and themes for comparison. Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) state that dependability means that another person might reasonably draw the same conclusions from the data and, essentially, what is important is how the natural meaning units are transformed. The beauty of the journey begins to reflect the reality of the women experiences in the following chapter as it presents the results and discussion of the collected data.

4.11 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the chapter presented a whole array of comprehensive data from the co-researchers mentioned above in responding to the questionnaires. It is clear from the responses that uninitiated women are prejudiced, discriminated against, labelled and rejected. It is also evident that, initiation is part of the custom and should be accepted as part of the cultural norm. Indeed, the researcher participated in the initiation ritual in order to explore and describe the lived experiences of Vha-Venda initiated women. This concurs with the research problem statement that information about women initiation is highly confidential and should not be discussed outside with uninitiated people. The sample population was selected because of the knowledge experience of the research study and three areas were identified using purposive sampling of the research area.

The researcher listened to the voices of women who participated in the study regarding their initiation experiences.

Polit et al., (2004) describe bracketing in phenomenological research as “the process of identifying and holding in abeyance any preconceived beliefs and opinions about the phenomenon under study.” The researcher bracketed her thoughts and perceptions about the research topic. It was essential to allow the participants to describe their experiences openly and freely. The researcher remained interested, attentive and non-judgemental and did not lead the participants. Bracketing is done in order to understand the experiences of participants (initiated women) as they truly are (Giorgi, Barton & Maes 1988). Moustakas (1994) reported that certain entities, such as life experiences, are not easy to bracket. However, the process of bracketing and re bracketing enables the researcher to move from the natural attitude to the transcendental attitude.

Creswell (1994) defines data reduction as the process of selecting; focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data as the researcher elicits meanings and insights from the words of the participants. In phenomenological reduction, the quality of the experience becomes the focus. The aim of reduction is to describe the general features of an experience, excluding everything that is not immediately within one’s conscious experience. It is not a construction made by a scientist or what “common sense” teaches us to see. Reduction enables the researcher to look and observe (Huysamen: 2001) what others call firsthand experience. Each transcribed interview was coded and broken down into categories, and themes were reviewed according to the context validity of each interview.

Reliability is the degree of consistency with which the data collection instrument produces the same results every time it is implemented in the same situation. The data collection instrument was accurate and stable in reflecting the attributes under study and minimized error (Brink 2006; Burns & Grove, 2005; LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 2001).

Reliability and validity are conceptualized as trustworthiness, rigor and quality in a qualitative paradigm. It is also through this association that the way to achieve validity and reliability of any research gets affected from the qualitative researcher's perspective which is to reduce bias and increase the researcher's truthfulness of a proposition about some social phenomenon using triangulation (Dane, 1990).

Triangulation also involves an assessment of the likelihood that all patterns of responses have been accessed and sufficient evidence has been detected to make an informed assertion. Believability/credibility relates to whether the information reported matches the information anticipated or that the pattern of information across multiple informants is consistent (Creswell, 1994; Holloway, 1997).

In ensuring internal validity, the following strategies were employed:

Triangulation of data: data were collected through multiple sources including interviews, observation and document analysis. An ongoing dialogue regarding the interpretations of the informants' reality and meanings to ensure the truth value of the data was checked with the informants throughout the analysis, and the participants that is, the initiated elders, were involved in most phases of the study

Clarification of researcher's bias and the researcher's role are included in the research findings.

The data were transcribed, analysed and translated. Coding of the data was done by writing down words that appeared more than once. The words were grouped together for comparison. Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) state that dependability means that another person might reasonably draw the same conclusions from the data and, essentially, what is important is how the natural meaning units are transformed.

The beauty of qualitative research is how it perfectly merges with the descriptive, exploratory and contextual approaches in understanding the people under study. It is a valuable way to gain access to the social reality of people. Some researchers believe that phenomenological and the ethno-methodological studies are perceived as frameworks that hold qualitative research together (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

The chapter discussed the relationship between narratives of participants, available literature and observations of the researcher. The synthesis of the three facets assisted in making meaning of the information. It is impossible to single out one particular etiology or maintaining factor, but with the synthesized information the following chapter will have a foundation on which to make recommendations. The next and final chapter will summarize the research project and make recommendations to stakeholders and directions for further research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The chapter includes a summary of the main findings and a discussion thereof in relation to theory and the literature review. It also includes the limitations of the study as well as suggestions for future research. This is followed by the recommendations based on the themes that emerged from the results. The aim of the study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of Venda women before, during and after initiation as well as the concomitant consequences of not participating. Furthermore, the study examined the reasons why the Vha-Venda women are secretive about the initiation rituals and the consequences of not remaining silent about these cultural rituals.

Another objective was to investigate whether the Venda women take the cutting of the clitoris and the elongation of the labia minora as barbaric and leading to promiscuity. To this end, which is the real strength of the study, the researcher participated in the initiation of women and had some first-hand experience of the phenomenon. Phenomenology was employed as a method of inquiry and bracketing assisted the researcher to be unbiased to the gathered information. Due to the sensitivity of the subject, the researcher is grateful that she is not from the same culture as this would boost the readers' confidence on the findings

of this research. This study seeks to address the most common social problem of women abuse and initiation as patriarchal ideology.

Van Gennep (1960) found in his study that the initiation ceremony conveys three sub-meanings, namely; separation, transition and incorporation. These dimensions are best seen holistically from the viewpoint of social transition where unique, individual transitions interact with the development of the different (i.e. rural and urban) contexts which are constantly evolving. These changes are life crises from birth until death. However, “rites of passage” in many cultures are used to mark the socially recognised transition to sexual maturity as ascertained by (Van de Walle & Franklin, 1996).

Moreover, Lincoln (1981) describes female initiation as a process that women go through resulting in a change of status and becoming “fertile” productive, experienced and whole where the terms “initiation” and “rite of passage” can be seen as a ritual, marking a transaction in the life of an individual from one cultural status to another.

Milubi (2000) found in his study that the forms of initiation may differ according to ethnic groups; however, what is common to the practitioners of these rites is that the elderly ceremoniously welcome the young adolescents to their status by performing a communal ritual.

Stayt (1968) highlighted the significance of the initiation rite for girls from being a baby to the puberty stage as very popular for instilling respect and other morals by observing and imitating their parents' behaviour. Berenice (1994) concurred in stating that young girls undergoing this ritual would thereby see exactly how their future and relationships would be.

Despite the limited research that exists on the Vha-Venda female initiation process which is enshrined in secrecy, this study managed to explore the process through the researcher's willingness to undergo the necessary rituals before being allowed access to the sample of middle-aged, Venda initiated women (30 to 60 years old) in the Limpopo Province villages of Shayandima, Mashau and Mashawana. This empathy acquired by the researcher has added to the body of knowledge concerning the culture-bound rituals that take place in Africa and how they affect young people in context.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Themes that emerged are as follows:

Menstruation/new life celebration: this means that the woman has grown to be a matured woman; preparation of initiation and mockery. The researchers' findings are that, menstruation is highly honoured by the female initiated elders. It symbolizes the beginning of womanhood and confirms the girl identity. It characterizes the girl's leap from being a young girl to being a matured woman with the abilities to be married and bare children (Wilson, 1991).

The elders inform the girl about the transition from being a girl into growing up to be a woman. The elders teach the girl a code of conduct in relation to menstruation and how to behave in order to avoid an unplanned pregnancy. Apart from celebrating the girl's biological development, the girl is introduced to womanhood by having a mother or any other female kin to teach her the roles of being a woman. Young (1965) concurs with the idea of taking part in the performance of rites as serving to cultivate in the individual sentiments.

Matlin (1987) postulates that menarche (pronounced "men-nar-kee") is the first menstrual period. When a girl has "seen the moon" is when she reaches her first menstruation. Menstruation is defined as a period when a woman bleeds. It is commonly referred to as a menstrual period. Menstruation is called just a period. Both the information posted by Ussher (1989) and Beidelman (1997) concur that the onset of menstruation is marked with disempowering messages on the possibility of unplanned pregnancy, promiscuity, contraction of HIV-AIDS, as opposed to messages that affirm one's newly acquired status as a woman who has power to give life. Menarche allows accommodation and assimilation of these changes to take place, as it is an event which cannot be ignored and for many mothers and daughters symbolizes the beginning for womanhood.

The researcher agrees with the fact that menstruation is perceived as a new transition for a girl to womanhood. Some girls associate menstruation with physical discomfort and emotional pain due to menstruation cramps and that if they miss their menstruation, it becomes traumatic as they think they might be pregnant especially if they have had sexual intercourse. Some young women become anxious and feel stressed because they are scared to go to the initiation schools.

Participants in the current study also reported that young girls and young women believe that menstruation makes them feel they have reached the stage of womanhood. Some girls reported that a girl who does not see her menses is not a woman. They believe that a girl or woman with no menstruation would not bare children. In contrast, some of the girls still hide and do not tell their friends when menstruating because they are scared of mockery and that they would be forced to attend initiation, or they are teased about sleeping around with boys.

Findings acquired from the elderly women on menstruation:

All participants (initiated elders) from Mashawana, Shayandima and Mashau villages reported that menstruation was always celebrated. They further reported that it was a graduation to promote a little girl to being a grown up; a cross which takes a child to an adult transitional phase of maturity. The elderly continuously reported that menstruation was a sign of being sexually matured. The elderly women would inform the parents that the child is now a woman. They said that this stage was regarded as a prelude to, preparation for adulthood, a transitional period of life between immaturity and maturity. They perceived

menstruation as a period of personal discovery and identity formation, a time of transition to make informed decisions and most importantly a stage when the girl becomes integrated into the society of adults by embracing 'vhusa' initiation ceremony, a sacred institution that forms the cornerstone of the entire community.

Findings acquired by the researcher on menstruation:

The researcher discovered that a girl's menstruation is a cause for celebration. It is the time for the mother to educate the girl about life and womanhood. It is a phase that allows for initiation preparation to welcome the girl into womanhood. First menstruation in some girls is traumatic as they are not knowledgeable about how to react to it. Some reported that it was depressing because of the myths around it. For example, menstruation was negatively associated with sleeping with boys.

Findings acquired from the focus group on menstruation:

The participants reported that a girl's first menstruation was cause for initiation preparations and welcoming the girl to womanhood and it meant the beginning of a new life. The group reported that it was important for the girl to report her monthly menstruation to her mother or an elderly person in order to assure her that she is not pregnant.

Findings acquired on cultural beliefs on initiation:

A cultural belief on initiation is that, it allows learning of respect, discipline, responsibility and solidarity. Culture increases group solidarity and a sense of belonging. The researcher discovered that during initiation, the elderly women are the ones who are knowledgeable about the Vha-Venda cultures. They teach the young girls how to respect, be disciplined and behave responsibly. During initiation, the researcher realised that women who are initiated talk the same language and use special dialects that cannot be understood by those who did not go for initiation. For example, women who went through initiation understand and respect one another and it is different from women who have not attended initiation. The uninitiated women are viewed as “others” this means they do not form part of the initiated.

The researcher realized that the influence of tradition and culture could lead to both positive and negative attitudes towards people who turn a blind eye on the initiation rituals. It is evident that culture determines how members of the community think or feel about their belief systems which are meant to define their outlook on life. Women and males who are complying with the rituals are accepted and embraced by the elders and traditional leaders, while negative attitudes towards the rituals would create tension and rejection by the elders and community. The researcher concurs that culture provides the “lens” through which we view the world and make sense of it as ascertained by Pedersen (1991).

The researcher also learnt that it is important for girls to attend initiation because there are certain things that girls need to know which are not included in the school curriculum. Cultural practices such as initiation schools are validated in contributing to the young girls' wellbeing and social integration.

Findings on psychological trauma and initiation:

Most participants reported first hand or vicarious experience of initiation as traumatic. Mean (2000) argued that trauma eradicates individual's sense of security. Most participants in this research reported feelings of helplessness and worthlessness with possible psychological damage.

From the interviews and discussions held with initiated women, it became clear that women who went through the process of genital mutilation considered initiation as traumatic. They did not want to share their experiences regarding the operation. Although the researcher did not go through the mutilation process, it was also clear that other activities that were performed at the initiation schools were painful and traumatic. Means (2000) concurs with the fact that, women who go through the process of genital mutilation suffer psychological and physical distress.

Findings acquired on socialization:

The researcher discovered that initiation within the Vha-Venda people is important. It is perceived as safe places where women learn about their cultural beliefs admire and understand their respective roles, and learn to develop a sense of self. They are receptive, and responsive. Initiated girls learn to gain power, deal and cope with hardship and respect the elders no matter how well educated a person is. As ascertained by Haralambos & Heald (1980) most importantly, it enhances a person's emotional intelligence. By emotional intelligence, this means better inter- and intra- relation with self and others.

The researcher concurs with the idea that it is difficult to survive if you are not initiated "an outsider" People in the community would know if you had not survived and no one would be interested to interact or socialize with you. One would feel lonely and no one wants you near them. They would call you names like "*shuvhuru*", which refers to being half woman, because one did not go right through the initiation school. Nobody wants to hear your side of the story. You cannot initiate or give any input in any gathering. Even if you try hard, no one would take you seriously. One is continuously abused emotionally and often harassed. The researcher also experienced the same treatment before she was initiated.

Findings on tradition and secrecy with initiated elderly women:

Kelly (2000) loosely defined secrecy as deliberately hiding of information from other people. This was experienced by the researcher when she struggled to synthesize the information regarding the initiation of women. The current researcher agrees that it is difficult to access the data of the initiation ritual if not initiated and conferred as a taboo.

The research topic is sensitive and not easily accessible unless one has graduated from the initiation. The researcher consulted different people trying to find their opinions about women initiation. It was difficult because she was asked if she had been through initiation. The researcher was informed before hand that it would be difficult to access information from the initiates if not initiated. The researcher went to different villages in the Vhembe District hoping that she would get the information but, unfortunately, she was told the same thing that she needed to go through the initiation first.

It was amazing to hear how the initiation elders responded when asked about what made it difficult for the initiated women to share the initiation experiences and what happened during the ceremony of initiation. The response from one of the elders was: *“tsho, tsho azwi ambiwi hiii! U bva gayi hoyu muthu a sa divhi uri zwa vhukomba zwi a ila ni tshi vhudza mashuvhuru* meaning that “where does this woman come from who does not know that initiation rites are not shared or talked about.” It was seconded by other senior females that it is a taboo to tell tales about the initiation ritual. I kept it a secret because I was told not to tell anyone. My secret has haunted me so long because of ‘fear of the unknown’.

[Vho-Vayi]

The researcher insisted on this being clarified about the secrecy, but others wanted the topic to pass and reported that, it was taboo and they did not talk about it because it is a rule that needs to be respected. Others reported that, they did not share with others because “*zwi a semana*”, meaning that it is an insult.

When the senior elders were asked if the ritual was educational and used to empower women with life skills, they said that it was important that all the girls and young women passed the stage by attending the ritual. They further reported that it was like formal education where people needed to go to school and attend in order to pass. They demanded to stop the topic. The researcher admitted that it was not easy to share with uninitiated people, but only with those who had had a similar experience.

The finding is that the practice of initiation is done behind closed doors and the rule is that everything should remain inside the initiation school. Uninitiated women are not allowed to enter into the initiation activities unless accepted to participate. The information and the activities performed are strictly confidential and secretive. Sharing the information with the uninitiated is believed to be taboo.

The elderly women from Mashawana, Mashau and Shayandima reported that they were against the people who discussed initiation information with uninitiated women. They further reported that there are sanctions that are imposed on individuals who do not conform to the traditional rules.

Findings on tradition and secrecy with the researcher:

The researcher went through initiation and I was told that telling tales about women initiation was a taboo. Initiation schools are secret ceremonies and knowledge acquired there is not supposed to be shared with the uninitiated because to speak about “*dzingoma*”- traditional practices- is strictly prohibited. The reason is that much has been speculated about women initiation and they want women to come and experience the truth by themselves. After being initiated, the researcher believed and admitted that it was not easy to share with uninitiated people.

Findings on tradition and secrecy with focus group:

During the focus group discussions, the participants reiterated that it was still difficult to talk about initiation with uninitiated women. They reported that it had been there for years. They said that sometimes they felt like sharing their experiences but it was difficult to break the golden rule. They further reported that the secret itself was a stressor and they were still silenced about it. They also reported that people who talked about ‘*dzingoma*’ became mad and they were afraid to follow suit [informants]. This statement has been substantiated by (Gilligan, 1982) when she said the “different voice”, the feminine voice, which had been kept for so long, made itself heard primarily through the work of other feminist writers, Nancy Chodorow ; Janet lever.

Findings on rejection and social pressure:

The researcher noted that uninitiated women were rejected and were not accepted by those who were initiated. Before the researcher was initiated she was rejected and denied access to information. The reason given was that they would not share any information with her because she would not understand and that she had not gone for initiation. The current researcher further discovered that uninitiated women commonly identified a degree of rejection. No matter how educated a person was, as long as a person had not been initiated meant nothing.

In women gatherings or women “stokvels” the uninitiated suffer social pressure from the initiated women. The uninitiated are not accommodated in any activities within the community. The uninitiated are made to feel small and are called names.

Findings acquired on lack of acceptance and stigmatization:

The Vha-Venda people urge young girls and women to attend initiation schools because it is a cultural norm. The initiation schools are perceived as an informal school that educate girls about cultural values and help them to acquire the knowledge that should be passed from one generation to another. If the individual does not comply with the norm, she would not be accepted by the community and would be reminded by others that she is not a woman. The initiated would make life difficult for the uninitiated in understanding the conversation.

Women who are not initiated are not considered as part of the community. The community would not listen or accept any advice from them, because the person is considered to be still a child and cannot make informed decisions. The uninitiated also suffer from isolation, rejection and stigmatisation by their peers and community. They are not accepted and respected by initiated women and they always find it difficult to have normal relationships, whether from the initiated male side or female side.

The initiated women contend that the female genital cutting gives pleasure to their partners. A five year study of 300 women and 100 men in Sudan found that “sexual desire, pleasure, and orgasm are experienced by the majority of women who have been subjected to genital mutilation, in spite of them being culturally bound to hide these experiences.” The researcher has discovered that those initiated think they perform better sexually than those who did not go for initiation.

Most advocates of the practice continue to perform the procedure in adherence to standards of beauty that are different from those in the west. Initiated women contend that the pleasure their partners receive due to this procedure is a definite part of a successful marriage and enjoyable sex life. However, female genital cutting does not eliminate all sexual pleasure for all women who go through initiation, but it does reduce the likelihood of orgasm. The researcher personally found that initiated women say different things when asked about sexuality and initiation which she believed was a way of encouraging those who did not attend initiation, to attend.

The outcome of the research is based on the in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with the fifteen elderly women as stated in Table 1, research participants 3.3.1. The researcher conducted the interviews over the period of three months. After the interviews, she collated these interviews into thematic areas that were designed not to generalize the experiences of the women initiations but to allow one to navigate issues that were transparent and constantly intertwined. The themes emerged from questions that were raised consistently in the interviews. While the voices of all fifteen initiated women are represented here thematically, the researcher also drew specifically on the voices of all the women who were silenced for so long to explicate the areas of discussion. The voices of the initiated women are represented thematically. In keeping with the ethical research code, all the participants were provided with pseudonyms. This is a link that the researcher drew on to the previous ethnographic research conducted in the rural areas, especially in Limpopo and other neighbouring villages.

The researcher's role was to find out why initiation is kept a secret. However, in analysing the identified themes and categories with gender lenses, it is clear that being accepted and having a sense of belonging leaves women with no choice but to comply and conform in terms of cultural norms whether it is against violating human rights or abuse. It also deprives uninitiated women freedom of speech and movement, because uninitiated women cannot be accepted in nearby places where initiation rituals are taking place. For example, the uninitiated women are discriminated against, labelled, prejudiced, rejected and isolated unless they comply and go through the initiation process.

The researcher's finding is that information that is acquired and learned cannot be shared except when you have graduated from the ceremony. This is why the researcher was forced to be initiated to give a true reflection of knowledge. Yes, it is prohibited to talk about the rite of passage with uninitiated women. The researcher's finding is that some information that is shared by uninitiated women is not the true reflection of what happens at the schools. Some would falsify the information to discourage girls not to attend the ritual. However, the researcher had an opportunity to attend the *domba* initiation and it gave her a more comprehensive insight, and shed more light on the context of secrecy and taboo regarding sharing information without facts.

Women initiations are considered by initiates as traumatic and abusive. The initiates felt emotionally bullied and experienced feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, and inferiority because all instructions during the process of initiation were imposed upon the initiates and never questioned. The psychological, traumatic impact of the above-mentioned physical hardship is enormous in the sense that initiates were disempowered and put in a position of subservience without freedom of choice. However, the old generation did not regard all this as abuse, because contemporary society views the practice as an acceptable norm of culture.

Initiation schools demand complete submissiveness and obedience of girls and women. The schools are perceived as a general preparation for marriage, where boys and girls, are brought together by means of symbols and metaphors, taught to understand the true significance of marriage and child birth. In the process of informal education, they are warned of the pitfalls and the dangers that they are likely to encounter during the course of their lives.

It is true that all initiation ceremonies by definition are status markers meaning an important change in the initiate's social standing or function? As it was discussed above, adolescent initiation ceremonies are more likely to be held in societies in which gender identity has a great social significance. Management of initiation schools also serves as a source of identity, unity and solidarity among the initiates.

The Vha-Venda people say that the management of initiation is in the hands of a man *Nyamungozwa* or '*mme a domba*' *Nyamungozwa* (the role played by the man in charge). He is regarded as the mother of all the initiates and they should all listen to her instructions. (*Mother of domba*), is chosen for his vocal ability. In the Venda custom a man has the power to lead even if the initiates are women. The *Nyamungozwa* would choose a woman as his assistant called '*nyamatei*' (mother of the initiates). It is said that these two are masters of ceremonies, and are responsible for the arrival of adequate supplies of food and beer and the regular attendance of the participants. Their duties are to give proper instructions, as well as being there for the general supervision of the institution during the initiation of women.

According to the informants, the mother of the initiates, throughout the school is in charge of the three sticks which are said to have been treated with protective medicine. The belief is that the sticks keep the evil spirit away from the school and must always be held in the initiate's hand while dancing is in progress. During intervals, the sticks that are used to play drums should be placed on the drums, and in no other place. It is alleged to be a taboo to place the sticks on the floor because bad luck may strike.

The initiates, called '*vhatei*', are supervised and instructed by the young people who have already graduated at the previous *domba* and who are now called *midabe*. Before *domba*, the initiates must first take part in two inaugural ceremonies, the *tshikanda* and *ludodo*. The two ceremonies take place on the first and second nights respectively. *Tshikanda* is a secret initiation rite for females. It is known as *tshikanda* because initiates wear pieces of raw hide. It takes place on the first day before *domba* whereby the initiated girl teaches the initiates the morals of what is traditionally right and the customs, ethics and what is obligatory. All this is regarded as the foundation of the future generation. That is why it is called *vhatei*, meaning foundation layers, and thus prepares the girls to the next phase called *ludodo*.

The passage from childhood to adolescence is when a girl has “seen the moon” that is when she has started her first menstruation; she must discard her childish practices and become a responsible member of the community. The passage from childhood to adolescence is marked by the *vhusha* ceremony. The girl is called *musidzana* (a young girl), and afterwards is always referred to as *khomba*, meaning ‘dangerous’, implying that sexual intercourse may now result in pregnancy. In other words now that the girl has started menstruating she is perceived as matured, can get married and have children.

The ceremonies only take place when there are more than two girls. On the day of proceedings, all initiated women living nearby come into the chief’s kraal with loud trilling and ululating to welcome the new initiates. Girls of royal blood do not go into the water. It is said that they have a fever. They only make beer and they pay no fees for participation in the rites of *vhusha*. They only undergo treatment, but do not have to suffer the maltreatment that the *zwisiwana*/commoners go through.

A fire is lit in the *khoro* (public meeting place of the ruler). The fire is said to cast away the evil spirit. Young and old women, dance around the fire. The python dance is performed for two or three hours before the initiates are allowed to rest. No special drums are used at this ceremony, but ordinary drums are played with a characteristic beat, which is never heard elsewhere. The singing and dancing continue for the whole night. The initiates remain in the public hut called *tshivhambo* throughout the ceremony, which continues for a period of six days. A great deal of time is dedicated to sexual teaching and the girls are warned against becoming deflowered before marriage.

The girls are also taught all about womanhood, customs of marriage life and how to plan a family by spacing children. The girls are taught how a woman should behave and how to satisfy her husband. To the beat of drums, they are made fit paying special attention to the thigh and leg muscles by squatting and dancing while in a crouched position: this is believed to make childbirth easier. The initiates are escorted to the riverside each morning, led by one of the instructresses, who beats the drum as a warning to all males that the party is approaching. During this phase, all men are excluded, and throughout the ceremony it is strictly forbidden for a man to come anywhere near. If a man is caught in the vicinity, he would be brought before the chief and fined for his indiscretion.

At the river bank, a fire is lit and the initiates will sleep around it for two or more days. The fire has the following symbolism:

- a) Red flame is associated with a woman's menstrual blood;
- b) White ash represents male semen; and
- c) Black charcoal represents an infertile old woman.

The initiates are then awakened and are taught the tribal rules of etiquette and obedience. The initiates are often subjected to further humiliation. For example, they may be ordered to lift a heavy stone on to their backs and walk to the kraal carrying it in the same position. The dance performance is more in the nature of hard physical exercise than actual dancing and the findings are that *domba* does not take place regularly. Its occurrence depends largely on the number of girls who are ready to participate on the results of the harvest. It is essential that there should be plenty of food to enable the members of the school to have the necessary leisure.

One of the informants confirmed Van Warmelo's (1932) statement that the *domba* is preceded by the practices of *tshikanda* and *Vhusha*. *Domba* is held throughout the areas where the Vha-Venda people are found, but some practices of *domba* differ from one area to another. The researcher's finding is that, nowadays, *domba* initiation is attended voluntarily and it lasts only for one week.

Domba initiation is held in winter and, nowadays, it is held during school holidays irrespective of the season. The socio-economic status led to some changes within societies and the right to freedom brought some changes to different cultures. All this has caused deterioration in women's interest in attending initiation. According to Corey (1956), the changes in *domba* seem to be related to the demands of formal education. Nowadays, the girls often attend *nonyana* hut for a day and night. They see the spirit and then return to their homes until there are enough initiates to warrant the operation.

Domba is held in the *khoro* of the village (*khoro* is the main gateway to the outside and is also an access route to the chief's kraal. Although the school in essence is for girls, men and women may attend this important social function. Some researchers highlight that those who have not previously attended *domba*, play the important part in the dancing and singing, and are the centre of interest to the elderly people who act as helpers and spectators. In order to gain entry into *domba*, the family should pay *tshitandza* (R500.00). On the first day of *domba*, the *vhatei* are taken to *tshivhambo* where the initiation takes place. Inside *tshivhambo*, each 'mutei' climbs two poles onto the roof and then hangs upside down in the same way as the bat. This activity is called 'mulema', meaning "bat sleeping position." The practice signifies the entrance into a new stage as the initiates will have to do away with the practice of *u davhula* (the practice of false intercourse) and become responsible mature adults.

Nyamatei (*mme a domba*) is the song leader and the man in charge of the *domba* who is assisted by an elderly woman who is like the hostel matron. She is usually one of the chief's wives or any woman appointed by the chief. On the last day, the girls are inspected to see if they are still maintaining their virginity. This is followed by a secret cleansing wash in the river before the initiates are returned to the chief's kraal. Married women who have not attended the *domba* join in for *tshilala-ndoima* (spending the night standing).

5.3 RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this study, the researcher's findings are that:

Conformity, compliance and obedience with the initiation rituals can save a person from embarrassment in Limpopo Province where initiation is practiced. Participants reported that women are silenced and forbidden to talk about initiation outside 'dombani' with the uninitiated women. They reported that the initiation ritual is secret and thus a taboo to talk about it. Initiates are prohibited to disclose what happens during the initiation process.

In contrast, uninitiated women viewed the ritual as barbaric and promiscuous. The initiated indicated that they were forced to attend because of fear of rejection, discrimination and isolation by the community. Other participants agreed to have attended for the sake of acceptance, though they believed to have gained knowledge about understanding womanhood.

Most of the women mentioned that although it was some years that they had attended the initiation school, they still carried the burden of anger, shame, humiliation, frustration, low-self esteem, sense of helplessness and lack confidence and still find it hard to share their experiences or talk about them. The researcher concurs with the participants and Stayt (1968) that initiated women are denied freedom of expression. It is strictly prohibited to talk or share the initiation experiences with the non-initiated let alone discuss it outside *dombani*. Thereby, the aim, and its concomitant 4 objectives, have been thoroughly explored and achieved.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Burns and Grove (2005) describe limitations as restrictions in a study which can reduce the generalization of the results. With regard to this study, the information was provided by initiated women in only three villages in Limpopo Province, thus limiting the transferability of the results to other areas.

The qualitative methods used allowed a wealth of detailed information to emerge, although the small number of participants used would be a concern when it came to generalizing the findings to other females initiated in different parts of Venda.. The small numbers become a drawback in that there was no absolute truth as to what extent the results can be generalized to the broader population of females being initiated.

Another limitation was that the privacy of informants and the researcher as a participant observer made it difficult to generalize the findings. Securing appointments for the interview with the initiated women was not easy, but after the researcher went through the initiation process it became easy. Another challenging factor that was experienced is that the participants were always late and often missed scheduled appointments.

The biggest challenge was that it took almost two and half years for the participants to grant the researcher access to conduct the research. The fact that the research topic is sensitive and initiation rites of passage are secret could have influenced the participants to withhold some information that they regarded as highly confidential.

The practice of initiation rituals is carried out behind closed doors and do not allow outsiders to know about the custom. The researcher acknowledges the role that culture contributes to social pressure of uninitiated women. There is a tendency by custom to reject those who did not go through the initiation process.

During data collection, and as a participant, the researcher experienced the same culture of social pressure from the women who were already initiated. She identified the following categories: lack of acceptance by the community and members of the opposite sex as well as lack of respect and ridicule by males and initiated women. Participants and research guides reported that within the initiation rituals, the uninitiated women do not have a voice in decision-making nor are they permitted in any cultural gathering. They suffer humiliation and rejection. An uninitiated person does not have any sense of belonging within the community, and this also contributes to the stigma.

The presence, importance, and elaboration of both rites of passage in general and adolescent initiation rites in particular are contingent upon certain features of a society, which have been described early in the chapter. Thus, rites of passage are more likely to be found in some societies and less likely to be found in others. When societies or communities change, either by virtue of internal processes or as a result of external influences such as human rights, democracy and freedom of speech, rites of passage become more or less important, depending on how a particular community would negotiate the life transitions of its members.

Objectivity is the very device possible to be as faithful to the ethics as possible. Yet, the subjective element of the researcher cannot be totally eliminated; whereas, it is the 'subjectivity' which, it could be argued, allows for greater 'objectivity'. The scholarly duty is to drive the concept until it is not only clear in the eyes of the community but the females being initiated with the hope that the community does not only change its attitude or mentality towards the torture and abuse during female initiation, but take it into consideration that the standards are disadvantaging everyone with the stigmatized pathology.

This process is complex and difficult. This is because the collection of data and transcripts cannot be analysed simultaneously, it had to be broken into manageable units, and the process of sequential steps was delineated to assist the researcher to develop structural descriptions.

The findings suggested that there was a need for further research on the following:

- i) Female initiation and mental health;
- ii) Female initiation and life orientation;
- iii) Female initiation and HIV and AIDS; and
- iv) Female initiation as a preventative measure to teenage pregnancy.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Initiation schools should not altogether be abolished because some of the traditional rituals are educational and enhance cultural morals and values, such as, discipline, self respect, and prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), preparing youth for marriage, tolerance and obedience as well as helping in establishing one's identity. However, strict measures should be taken to regulate and to make sure that initiates are treated with dignity and respect. The researcher recommends that:

These cultural beliefs should be taught and included in the school learning areas such as Life Orientation.

- a) As we are in a democratic environment, women's rights should be considered so as not to humiliate and abuse women.
- b) Initiation schools should consider working hand-in-hand with the mental health care professionals in educating young girls and boys to live a healthy and safe lifestyle.
- c) Initiates should be prepared psychologically before being admitted in the initiation schools.
- d) The stigma of female genital cutting and virginity testing is no longer performed because of people's rights.
- e) It might be interesting to see both traditional ceremonial rituals together with the cultural heritage day, celebrated together, since they embrace the cultural traditions.

- f) *Vhusha* and *musevetho* initiation schools should be considered in teaching the young generation “UBUNTU”, discipline, respect, morals and standards in making informed decisions.
- g) The young generation should be encouraged and motivated not to turn a blind eye to knowing their tradition, culture, language and understanding the importance of preserving their traditional ritual ceremonies.

5.6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the researcher has learnt that initiation schools within the Vhavenda culture are regarded as an important foundation of teaching young girls and boys respect and morals. The initiation is considered necessary for the individual in order to be regarded and accepted as a full member of the tribe. The individual may not be allowed to participate in other important ceremonies or even take part in the social ritual such as *u mala* or *vhinga khomba* “marriage ceremony.” The stigmatization, rejection and, labelling of uninitiated women put them in an unpleasant position of being ridiculed and humiliated. However, initiation ceremonies like, *vhusha*, *musevetho* and *tshikanda* are thought to help build respect in teenagers and prepares them for womanhood. The senior elders are the ones who are guiding the initiate through the entire process of greater exposure of knowledge, except the revelation of secrets, usually reserved for those at the higher level of understanding. This means that what is happening during initiation should not be discussed or shared with the uninitiated because it is considered a taboo. The aim and the objectives of the study have been successfully achieved with reference to:

The researcher went through the initiation process to understand the lived experiences of Vha-Venda initiated women.

Indeed, the Vha-Venda initiation are secret rituals and not discussed outside, *dombani*. The myths about disclosing the secret of becoming mad’ has been clarified. It was used to discourage people from speculating about the initiation rituals. The issue of cutting of the clitoris and elongation of labia minora as abusive, barbaric and promiscuous, are no longer practiced due to the Human Rights Act.

Policy governing initiations could be developed and enforced in this regard, because the roles played by the institution is needed to promote, protect and modify it in order to perform its functions properly at all times.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR FOCUS GROUPS

SEMI- STRUCTURED RESEARCH QUESTIONS

At what age did you first experience your menstruation period?

How did you react when you first had your menstruation period?

What makes elderly women applaud a girl's first menstruation?

Are you initiated? - If yes, how old were you when you went to the initiation school?

Did you voluntarily attend the initiation school or were you forced?

In your opinion, what makes initiated women to be secretive about female initiation?

What do you say about the myths around female genital cutting and the elongation of the labia minora that it promotes exquisite sexual pleasure?

Explain how you feel about the speculations made by uninitiated women that initiates are prohibited to talk about the initiation ritual.

Do you have children who are initiated if yes did you encourage her to attend?

Would you encourage others to attend initiation school?

Some people believe that initiation school encourages girls to maintain their virginity? What is your response?

What is your opinion about the initiation of women being speculated as a barbaric act?

APPENDIX 2: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Participant

I am conducting a research study that involves the initiated women in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The research topic is The Silenced Voice of Venda Initiated Women, focusing on the three villages that is, Shayandima, Mashau and Mashawana village in Thohoyandou.

The findings of the study will be made available to the University of Zululand.

You will be interviewed individually. The researcher will visit Mashawana, Mashau and Shayandima villages on different days for an hour's group session discussion.

Participants included in the study must be between the ages of 30 and 60 and have to be initiated and will voluntarily participate in the research study. They should be willing to articulate and communicate their thoughts, feelings and perceptions regarding the topic being studied.

There is no monetary compensation for participating in this study. You may withdraw at any time during the data collection period and you may refuse to answer any question without penalty.

The interviews will be audio-taped and only research advisors and the researcher will have access to data.

The researcher guarantees that the respondents' identities will be treated as confidential information at all times, and that this will at no stage be disclosed in reports emanating from this research.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

JOINT DECLARATION

We, the participants and the researcher, fully understand the above information and the implications thereof.

Signed thisday of.....2009 at

ParticipantsResearcher.....

APPENDIX 3: MAP OF LOCATION

