The vulnerable boy-child

A qualitative study of the situation for the rural boys in Kenya

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Abstract

This minor field study describes the situation for the boy-child in rural Kenya and the possible effects that can be seen after years of focus directed mostly on the girl-child, both in school and through non-governmental organizations (NGO). This study is done by going into the field of rural Kenya and meeting people who can give their opinion on what is going on for the boy-child in Kenya. This is a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews with six social workers. The method of using open-ended questions will give a hint of what is going on in the day-to-day life in the social worker’s context.

During the analysis of the interviews it became evident that there is a need to pay attention to the boy-child. There is also a slight difference in focus depending on whether the informant is a woman or a man. Furthermore all social workers have spoken about the risks that the boy-child and young teenaged boys are facing. The social workers in this study express their perception that the boy-child is vulnerable. Three major areas could be recognized: vulnerable by the neglect of professionals, vulnerable by the African culture and vulnerable by exposure to hazards. At the end of this study there will be a discussion around the findings and analysis of the interviews. The discussion will also bring up the aspects of manhood, masculinity and the importance of language as a way to construct perceptions as well as how the general construction of gender can be a part of what makes the boy-child vulnerable.

Keywords: Kenya, boy-child, vulnerability, neglect, exclusion, manhood.
Sammanfattning


Sökord: Kenya, pojke, sårbarhet, försummelse, exkludering, manlighet
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Introduction

I was feeling angry with the professionals because they were always saying things like ‘take care of your sisters and take care of your mother’. That made me feel like I was not important, I was thinking; am I not human? (Tom)

Tom is one of six social workers in rural Kenya, who was interviewed for this study. In the quote he is speaking about his feelings growing up as a boy-child in Kenya.

Girls have over the years been acknowledged as suppressed, neglected and in need of the world’s attention (Unterehalter & Dorvard, 2007). Attention and targeted effort to lift and empower girls and women have been made in Kenya. The work has to some extent been successful (Unterehalter & Dorvard, 2007; Foulds, 2014; Chang’ach, 2012; Chege & Likoye, 2015). There is however a side effect of such efforts. Boys tend to fall behind and become more vulnerable. Research has shown that boys are suffering from neglect and can therefore be regarded as vulnerable in a way that has not been acknowledged before (Chege & Likoye, 2015; Chang’ach, 2012; Unterhalter & Dorvard, 2013).

This study is carried out in Kenya and was financed by a scholarship to perform a minor field study given by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The aim for SIDA is to give students a possibility to acquire knowledge about developing countries and development issues (SIDA, 2017). Performing this minor field study made it possible to investigate the situation for boys in rural Kenya. Findings of this study exemplify and prove insight into how the work done by professionals can have negative side effects. It can also provide an understanding on how the construction of gender influences the developmental policy and how the professionals carry out the work to implement the policy.

The aim of this study is to explore the social workers perspective on the boy-child’s vulnerable situation in rural Kenya. In extension it is also giving insight to the cultural construction of the boy-child.

To provide the reader a better understanding of the Kenyan context, there will be a short presentation of Kenyan context concerning political history, general fact of the country, the social work history and the construction of the man.
Kenya

Kenya is situated on the eastern coast of Africa and borders to Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, Sudan and Ethiopia as well as the Indian Ocean. The capital city is Nairobi with approximately 2,75 million citizens of a total of 47 million. The country has Arab, Portuguese and British history. In 1895 the country fell under the control of Britain and in 1963 Kenya became independent (Country Watch, 2017).

Kenya has the biggest economy in east Africa industry and agricultural dominate and act as the backbone to the Kenyan economy. The tourism is also an important industry but after the turbulence of the recent years, the tourism has decreased. The country also struggles with a widespread corruption and the growth is held back by it (Landguiden, 2017). Kenya exports a vast amount of their agricultural products such as tea, coffee, horticultural products and fish. Their national resources are wildlife and land, and recently oil has been discovered (Nations Online, 2017).

Social conditions and welfare

Kenya has a population of around 47 million people and approximately 42 % of them are under the age of fourteen and twenty % are between 15 and 24 years. Of the 47 million people the life expectancy is 60 years if you are a male and 64 if you are female. The amount of people how is expected to read and write is 81 % of male and 75 % of the female. Kenya has recovered well after the global economical crisis of 2008 and is growing at an average of 5. 5 % per year. But the country still suffers from harmful cultural practises, social norms and gender inequality.

HIV/AIDS is a common reason for the low life expectancy and also one of the reasons why the majority of the population is under the age of 14 (UNICEF, 2016). The mortality among children is high, around 74 out of 1000 die before they reach the age of 5 and 44 out of 1000 die before within the first year of birth. One of the many impacts of HIV/AIDS is the vulnerability among the children such as the loss of parental care, food, education, increased risk of poverty, abuse, neglect and stigma (Atwani Akwara, Noubary, Lim Ah Ken, Johnson, Yates, Winfrey, Kaur Chandan, Mulenga, Kolker, & Luo, 2010).

More then 1 million children are still not enrolled in school and about 3,6 million children are orphans or otherwise considered to be vulnerable. The expected amount of
children living with HIV/AIDS is 104,000 (UNICEF, 2015). Hope (2007) indicates that children without parental protection or guardian protection have a big risk of being exposed to violence, abuse and exploitation. According to UNICEF (2016) there is also a risk for children who live in large families and certain populations or communities to suffer from neglect. A way to stop and reverse the growing poverty is to make sure education is followed through (Chege & Arnot, 2012). The poverty is also, according to Hope (2007) a contributing factor of the high child mortality rate in Africa as well as inadequate care practices and poor access to health service.

**Vulnerable Children in Kenya**

Vulnerability is in many ways closely connected to the exposure of different hazards. In this study there are some relevant subjects. Violence can appear in different ways for a child for example exposure to violence as physical, sexual, or psychological.

According to UNICEF (2015) violence against children is common in Kenya; around 76% have experienced one or more types of violence. Physical violence is the most common violence against the boy-child and sexual violence is more commonly used against girls although there is sexual violence aimed at boys as well. Amunga, Maiyoa, Achokaa and Ashioya (2009) conducted a study where they investigated the different types of violence existing in a western part of Kenya and the effect it has on education. The study was conducted on 150 children (the oldest age represented was 17 years). The analysis showed that every boy-child in the study was suffering from neglect.

**Millennium Development Goals**

Millennium Development Goals will further on be mentioned in this study as MDG. To give the reader a good informational background there will be a short presentation of what the MDG’s means:

Which range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015 – form a blueprint agreed on by all the world’s countries and all the world’s leading development institutions. They have galvanized unprecedented efforts to meet the needs of the world’s poorest. UN (2017)
Unterhalter and Dorward (2013) has in their research found a weakness within the MDG; they are not linked to the people from the bottom to the top. Instead the goals are made and implemented from a top-down perspective. Hellsten (2016) has also brought up the problems that follow with top-down decision-making and how it affects the people in Kenya. Due to this the work done for gender equality is not equal but more aimed at girls and women (ibid). According to Unterhalter and Dorward (2013) the results of the civil-society sector like NGOs focus only on them. This gives that the successful work in empowering the girl-child is encouraging NGOs to keep working with girls and women empowerment (Waage, Banerji, Campbell, Chirwa, Collender, Dieltiens, 2010 in Unterhalter & Dorward, 2013). Chang’ach (2012) says that it is important to note that because the girl is given priority the boy become vulnerable.

**Children Act of Kenya**

The Children Act (2012) is Kenya’s law regarding the protection of the children in Kenya. Some of the laws and definitions in the Act are presented to give an image of the regulations and the meaning of them, which concerning the children in Kenya. I want the reader to have the definitions and the law in the back of their head while reading about the boy-child’s situation reflected by interviewees. There will be a short introduction to the text after every quote to point out what is relevant to the findings in this study.

“Child; means any human being under the age of 18” (Children Act, 2012, p. 11)

Home in relation to a child means the place where the child’s parent, guardian, relative or foster parent permanently resides, or if there is no parent, guardian or relative living and the child has no foster parent, the child’s parent’s or guardian’s or relative’s last permanent residence (Children Act, 2012, p. 12).

One finding in this study is the circumcision that many boys go through, generally around the ages of 13-15. When a boy-child is circumcised he should move to a separate home for himself because he should not stay with his parents and siblings.

No child shall be subjected to discrimination on the ground of origin, sex, religion, creed, custom, language, opinion, conscience, colour, birth, social,
political, economic or other status, race, disability, tribe, residence or local connection (Children Act, 2014, p. 14).

This is relevant when the boys are not treated in the same way in their education and by NGO as the girls because of their sex.

Below is a presentation of the safeguards for the rights and welfare of the child and can be related to the risks when going to the streets:

Protection from abuse, etc.:

(1) A child shall be entitled to protection from physical and psychological abuse, neglect and any other form of exploitation including sale, trafficking or abduction by any person.

(2) Any child who becomes a victim of abuse, in the terms of subsection (1), shall be accorded appropriate treatment and rehabilitation in accordance with such regulations as the Minister may make (Children Act, 2012, p. 16)

Protection from drugs:

Every child shall be entitled to protection from the use of hallucinogens, narcotics, alcohol, tobacco products or psychotropic drugs and any other drugs that may be declared harmful by the Minister responsible for health and from being involved in their production, trafficking or distribution (Children act 2012, p. 16).

According to Kaime-Atterhög and Ahlberg (2008) the children on the street have no social safety net around them. They should be offered appropriate treatment but according to the statements from the informants this is not done.

Many things are being done for the girl-child in Kenya and over the world. To save her from the perils of poverty, neglect, and abuse, among other things. Many times this is done particularly aimed to the girl, while the boy-child is some-times left outside. While the girl-child is offered support from many organizations and the schools the boy is not seen in the same light and not given the same level of support (Akinyi Ooko, 2012). If the boy-child is not motivated in school by the teachers there is a risk that the
performance is lowered compared to if the boy-child were supported and motivated by an enthusiastic teacher (Ebong’on, 2016).

Edimudia and Sekano (2015) means that there are differences in the socialization of boys as compared to girls. The boys are, according to them, more prone to risk taking behaviour. The boys might also go through a developmental crisis that can have a negative effect. The negative effect includes running away from home or the usage of drugs, or both (Canavaugh, Kalis & Roberts, 2012 in Edimudia & Sekano, 2015). The risk-taking behaviour can be a part of seeking a feeling of belonging in a group, an identity that establish the boy in the peer group (Michael & Ben-Zur, 2007).

**African culture**

Nyaundi (2005, p. 178) describes the concept of culture and tradition:

> The customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular society group and the beliefs and attitudes about something that people in a particular group or organization share … tradition is defined as a belief, custom or way of doing something that has existed for a long time among a particular group of people.

Muchoki & Wandibba (2009, p. 202) says that the “ideology of male superiority is strong with emphasis on dominance, physical strength and male honour.” This can be described as a patriarchal culture where male dominance and power is infused in all parts of society (Mattsson, 2012). There is also the aspect of power relation and the social expectations on how the woman should be and that it creates subordinate roles where the cultural practices are present (Cornwall, 2014). Silberschmidt (2001) writes about the crumbling of traditional social customs in Kenya due to the British colonial rule. Precolonal, the male role was clear and masculinity was closely linked to self-control and dignity. After the British colonial ruling of Kenya the view of masculinity has changed from clear to unclear and sometimes even contradictory due to the change in influence from colonial times. Njue, Rombo and Ngige (2007) present in their study that the division of roles is common in any culture in Kenya. The division of roles can be seen within the families as well. There is a patrilineal tradition that means that the son will inherit the father’s role when he is old enough to do so. Then he will make decisions concerning family structure
and economy, while the women attend to the social responsibilities such as the children and the daily life in the homestead (ibid).

**Previous research**

This part of the study will present an overview over some of the research where the situation for the boy-child is mentioned. This is to give the reader a better understanding of the current situation on the field of research in this area.

**Effects of MDG**

Unterhalter and Dorward (2013) investigated how the MDGs have been implemented and what obstacles it encountered during implementation, as well as how it is meeting the goals. The researchers found that there is resentment amongst teachers and boys for the work being aimed at the girl-child. There are existing attitudes of hostility against girls from professionals and boys. They are amplified by the singlehanded work being done by an NGO. There were workshops and awareness raising aimed only for the girls and there were no equivalent sessions for the boys (ibid). In Kenya, the implementation of MDG meets additional difficulties due to limitations on staff-employment and corruption scandals. There is also critique against the unwillingness to seriously implement the gender aspiration associated with the gender, education and poverty concerns in line with the goals of EFA (Education for All) (UNESCO, 2017). Hellsten (2016) shares the critique but means that the implementations always have to stand back when something more urgent on the political front takes place. Even though there is critique for the unwillingness and slowness, things are being done for the children in Kenya and over the world, to save them from the perils of poverty, neglect and abuse among other things (UNICEF, 2017). Many times these programs are particularly aimed to the girl-child while the boy-child is some-times left out (Akinyi Ooko, 2012; Unterhalter & Dorvard 2013). There is research about male disempowerment that indicates that all the work being done to have a more just and equal society is undermined by the fact that the boys and men are experiencing reject because of their gender (Siberschmith, 2005 referred in: Chege, Likoye, Nyambura & Kiende Guantai, n.d)
School

Ebong’ on (2016) means that if there is little motivation provided by the professional teacher there is a great risk of the boy-child not feeling motivated enough to continue with school. Ebong’ on (2016) also found that if the boy-child is not motivated in school by the teachers there is a risk that the performance is lower compared to if a motivated and enthusiastic teacher supported the boy-child. As well as not being inspired and motivated by the teachers there is also the foundations and NGOs that work for the girl-child and not in the same manner with the boy-child (Unterhalter & Dorvard 2013). Professionals who sponsor the equipment, facilities, uniforms and food to the children are aiming more attention to the girls. There is a risk for the boy-child to feel rejected and less motivated to continue with the education (Achoka, Odebero, Maiyo & Mualuko, 2007). Instead there is the notion of earning money that is more inspiring and has great attraction on the boy-child.

Sociocultural aspects

When a child loses one or both parents he or she faces the risk of becoming an orphan with no one to look after him or her (Atwani et.al, 2010). The authors highlights that the girl-child is considered useful in the community. A girl can work in the household and do the related duties such as; cooking, cleaning, making tea, washing up the dishes, washing the clothes and fetching water. When married off a girl is a source of big income and therefore the girl can be seen as an asset to the caretakers (ibid). One of the factors that cause the boy-child to be more exposed to neglect is according to Atwani et al. (2010) the consequence of the social and cultural responsibilities that a boy-child means. If for example there is a death of the caretakers/caretaker in a family there is a risk that the boy-child will be neglected due to the economical aspect. A boy-child will need a dowry payment upon marriage and will most likely inherit the land of the brides family. This situation can also be equivalent to a boy-child being born outside of wedlock, he can be abounded because of the above-mentioned costs (Amunga, Maiyoa, Achokaa & Ashioya, 2009).

A boy-child in Kenya is not expected to express emotions or any weaknesses. He is taught to always be brave, in that way the boy-child is socialised not to show weakness or emotions and to suffer in silence (Chang’ach, 2012). According to Murove, Forbes, Kean, Wamimbi and Germann (2010) there has to be an understanding of the culture
and the practices that belong to it, is effecting the work with children and the protection of them (ibid).

Chege and Likoye (2015) means that in the context of African culture the boy is socialized to the perception that they are not to keen on such things as schooling and education. On the other hand there is a perception that the boys are not giving back to their family after leaving home whilst the girls would (Chege & Likoye, 2015). The boy-child appears to be more attracted to making his own money to entertain himself with watching movies, playing in arcade-centres or spending time with friends (ibid). The notion of not having an obligation can come from the male role model whom many times is the father of the boy. It can also come from lack of male role models (Chege & Likoye, 2015).

**Street children**

There is a risk for Kenyan children to be living of the streets, or on the streets. This has increased partly because of the postelection violence during the years of 2007-2008 when many families were displaced, because they where trying to escape the violence (Embleton, Ayuky, Atwoli, Vreeman & Braitstein, 2012). Kaime-Atterhög and Ahlberg (2008) makes a definition in their study about street children in Kenya. They distinguish between living of the street and on the street. On the street implies that there are family connections and the child might be living with their family and in some cases even attend school. They seek to the street for income. They spend a portion of their time on the street either roaming around or working. The child living of the street, have the street as their home. There they seek shelter, food and a sense of family among their companions in the same situation. Some might still have family but with scarce contact or no family at all (ibid).

The street offers possibilities to the boy-child but dangers as well. Emelton et.al (2015) means that there are a number of reasons why a child might seek the street. Poverty, abuse, neglect, sociocultural believes and the death of one or both parents. According to Kaime-Atterhög and Ahlberg (2008) a child is vulnerable on the street due to the risk of sexual abuse, physical abuse, drug use and death. The likelihood of the child using drugs whilst spending time on the street is high (Embelton et al, 2012; Kaime-Atterhög & Ahlberg, 2008).
Male circumcision

Nyaundi (2005) explain that male circumcision is common in Kenya and is the male equivalent to female circumcision, otherwise known as FGM it is carried out between the age of 8 to 16 and according to Nyaundi (2005, p. 171) there are more boys being circumcised then girls:

With the exception of the Turkana, Luo and two sub-tribes of the Luhya, all the tribes in Kenya regard circumcision as the rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. In terms of numbers, more boys are circumcised then females.

The circumcision is to prepare the boy for the adult life and marriage and involves the removal of healthy genital tissue on the penis further known as foreskin. The tissue is richly supplied with blood vessels, high amount of nerves and equipped with stretch receptors (Nyaundi, 2005). In rural parts of Kenya this procedure is often executed with instruments not suitable for surgery and in an uncontrolled environment. The removal is many times done in a secluded area where the boy is educated in the role of becoming a man. And after the manhood education is done there is a coming out ceremony to celebrate the transition from boy to man (Nyaundi, 2005).

Darby and Svoboda (2007) describe that part of the civil society views circumcision as a medical intervention. They mean that this view is problematic because a violation to the boy-child is dressed up in medical necessity. They also argue that the practice of the female equivalent is banned in several countries, including Kenya (Nyaundi, 2005) but that the male circumcision is not looked upon as having negative effects on the boy (Darby & Svoboda, 2007). Chege and Arnot (2012) bring up the aspect of pressure and a sense of belonging as factors why the boy-child goes through with the rite. The boy is not asked if the circumcision is something he wishes to do (Nyaundi, 2005). The rite is regarded as something done for the boy and not to him and it is decided over his head, in the different tribes there are words to positively discern someone who is cut (ibid)
Theoretical framework

Grounded theory (GT) is the inspirational method in the constructing of this qualitative study. It is important to stress that this study is inspired by GT and it is in no way an example of GT.

The idea of GT is to develop an empirically grounded theory based on data that has been collected and analysed in a systematic way (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The point of using this method is that the researcher wants to generate a theory that comes from the ground and derives from the people within the area of interest. Therefore it is crucial not to be bound by a theory before commencing the research. Padgett (2008) states that the usage of theory in the qualitative research can make it hard to explore and keep an open mind. After having spent time in the field in rural Kenya the theories started to gather, and during the coding of the data the decision fell on social constructivism and the gender perspective. Padgett (2008) advocates an open mind but she also says that a study cannot take place in conceptual vacuum. A theory can help the researcher to interpret what is found in the research. More important the theory can offer an anchor for the reader to understand the concepts and findings in this study (Charmaz, 2006).

Constructionism

Bryman (2011) explains constructionism in the following way:

An ontological position, described as constructional, meaning that social characteristics are the result of interplay between individuals and not a phenomena that is “out there” and separate from those involved in their design. (Bryman, 2011, p. 341)

Constructionism derives from the ontological idea that the reality is constructed from our doings and perceptions (Bryman, 2011). In other words this means that the perception of reality will become the way we interpret it. We see and experience things in accordance with our expectations. We therefore tend to explain things based on what we already believe to know (Mattsson, 2012). Humans are social beings and therefore share experiences and knowledge with each other. Thus, we will make interpretations together by the social process of acting and speaking. Our shared assumptions of reality and how things exist are also shared and made by the politics, by the news and by science (ibid). The assumption of manhood and womanhood comes from our mutual and shared
perception of how men are and how women are, as well as the assumption of how they should be.

The role of language

According to Burr (2003) language plays an important role in social construction, as it is not only the means of merely communication. The language can be used to describe a person’s character as a certain personality, depending on for example experience and life situation. When a person uses the words to describe personality, experience and life situation it is perceived as something that exists independently of the words used to describe it (ibid). Simplified, language is seen as something that is used to label and describe our internal and external state. Burr (2003) means that we as humans to a great extent construct our reality and the world around us by the usage of language. Because the words are constructing reality that means that reality can be constructed in different ways depending on the words used to describe it.

Discourse

“A discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events. It refers to a particular picture that is painted of an event, person or class of persons, a particular way of representing it in a certain light” (Burr, 2003, p. 64).

The usage of language can also be seen as descriptions of reality and facts and is mentioned by Burr (2003) as the creation of discourse. A discourse is explained as a way to actively construct identities or to have legitimate versions of events and is connected with social structure and practices. The words used in social interactions between people, are a tool to create truth and justifying the practice connected to it.

Constructing gender identity

Mattsson (2012) describe that within constructionism there is the notion that sex and gender are something constructed, socialized or fostered. Within this framework the gender should not be seen as something biological and fixed, but rather as something that should be seen as elastic. How gender is perceived is dependent on the social, historical and cultural context. While growing up we learn how to act and do our gender
because it falls within the social contexts. Gender can be explained as constructed by what we say and how we act. Living up to the expectations of our gender by how we behave, say and what we notice. Men do masculinity by speaking in a certain way, wearing certain clothes and relate to women as they are expected to do (Iversen, 2011).

**Masculinity**

Masculinity in Kenya has changed over the years especially considering the British colonialism and the impact it had over Kenya (Silberschmidt, 2001). The clear role of a man has changed, this change is a fact of socioeconomic transformation and poverty. Silberschmith (2001) means that now it is somewhat paradoxical because of the notion that a man is the head of the house and the decision maker, but now they find themselves discontent due to powerlessness and poverty. This effects the masculinity stereotype and challenge it.

The social science of masculinity revolves around the idea that there is a male sex role. Initially the science was created as a counteraction of emancipation of women, to justify womens’ exclusion from certain parts of society for example university education or voting (Connell, 2005). New literature and science around masculinity show that there is a significant discrepancy between the ideology of masculinity and the civic notion of its actions thus what masculinity really means (ibid). Masculinity is according to Connell constructed in multiple ways and can be defined by sports (the sportsman), media (in movies and advertising) and by news reports. Masculinity is not a consistent and isolated object but rather an aspect of a larger structure. Connell (2005) means that masculinity cannot exist without the contrast of femininity. The term masculinity can be connected with the construction of a sex difference and men differ and identify themselves in the contrast of women.

**Performative acts**

The idea of having an identity, for example masculinity, builds upon the expectation that some things are the same as they always were; he is a man because he acts as men do. Iversen (2011) describes Judith Butler as a prominent figure for understanding gender as constructed. According to Iversen, Butler means that a person becomes one’s gender through actions and therefore the gender is never completed, it is rather a process. Butler means that gender is a repetition of actions over time and she is using the idea of
performative acts to understand how gender is constructed (ibid). “These actions are performative; the actions perform what they are supposed to describe” (Iversen, 2011, p. 237). How we act is what we are: “When a man holds up the door for a woman he is constructing sex. When different rooms are made for women’s and men’s toileting sex is constructed” (Iversen 2011, p. 238). So performativity is not a single action but a repetition of actions and the more gender is done in a certain way the harder it is to do gender in alternative ways. It becomes culturally incomprehensible to act outside of the expected performative acts (ibid.)

In this study the cultural factors and the construction of manhood together with the gender equality perspective stands out. The gender equality perspective is intertwined in the work for girls and this study will show how it is effecting the boys in a negative way. Not only does the gender equality work effect the boys but also the construction of ‘African culture’ and the construction of the gender image masculinity and manhood. According to Mattsson (2012) the construction of gender can be explained by how it is done, maintained and reproduced.

Method

This qualitative minor field study was carried out through semi structured interviews with social workers in an organization located in the rural inlands of Kenya. Using a technique within the grounded theory approach the aim was not to generate a theory, but rather to generate an empirically grounded categorization from the collected data. In this section the process of creating this study will be described.

Choice of subject

This study has an inductive approach, where the analysis builds upon what can be observed. Before going to Kenya there where no subjects chosen for the study, instead the subjects emerged through spending time, in the rural inlands of Kenya, together with the person who acted as a gatekeeper, whom I have called Cathy in this study. The role of the gatekeeper is, according to Bryman (2011) a person who will give you access to the field of interest. Cathy is also the founder and manager of the organization serving as a platform for the empirical material. She thereby had a clear interest in the making of this study. To minimize the influence of her impact on the data collection, Cathy did not have access to the questions nor took part in the process of developing them. The
research subject on the other hand was chosen together with Cathy. She had already noticed an area that she meant was in need of attention; the situation for the boy-child in rural Kenya.

**Organization serving as platform**

The organization is an NGO mostly active in a rural area of Kenya. It is an organization that covers big areas with in social work and aid. To ensure the confidentiality of the organization and the social workers within it there will not be a specific declaration of what the organization does. However to give the reader context it is valuable to give as much information as possible about the organization in which the information is gathered. What can be mentioned is that it is rooted in a marginalized rural area and that workers within the organization have knowledge of rural cultures and social norms as well as of the challenges facing the communities in the area with aimed focus to children and women.

**Selection of informants**

Informants that are active in the field of social work in one way or another were chosen. They work within Cathy’s organization and she selected them on my request of three men and three women who all receive a salary by preforming social work within the organization. To give a broader presentation of the source of information there will be a short presentation of the informant’s role in the organization. All of them are active in the outreach work done by the organization. All the names have been changed to fictive names.

Andy works in the field through schools. He is educating children and youth about lifestyle and how to avoid risks as a child or teenager. He also does outreach work in the community.

Iris works as a guardian in her community. She educates the community members about HIV/AIDS both presentational and informative for those who have HIV/AIDS. She also works in a women’s group.

Eric works mostly with children and women. He provides help to the ones who need it by filing reports to the police if something has happened. He is active in the communication with the schools around the organization.
Jane is working with organizing all the women-groups and is also active in the work with children in the schools.

Tom works as an educational teacher in an unconventional way. He writes plays and performs them together with a team in the purpose to educate the community.

Betty works with the registration and handling of the money collected in the women-groups. She also works as an informant within the same mentioned groups.

**Data collection**

All the interviews were conducted in the head office of the organization, which consists of two main rooms. One room is a shared desk-office landscape and the other one is Cathy’s room. To make sure that the interviews could be held in confidentiality Cathy’s office-room was used. In that way we had a separate room and a door to shut. I did not want the interviewees to feel uncomfortable. Therefore the room was prepared so that it did not represent the manager’s office and Cathy’s desk was set aside in the aim to make it a little less formal. Interviews were done during daytime when it was suitable for the interviewees, not to interfere with their planned workday. Charmaz (2006) suggests that an interview guide with open-ended questions can be used, to facilitate that the interview will run smoothly. For the first interview a list of questions was prepared, in the case that the first question didn’t suffice. After each interview the guide was formed in the direction that the information from the interviewee gave. In that way the categories was found and developed for this study.

**Recording and transcribing interviews**

Bryman (2011) describes what makes a good interviewer. In the aim to be as such some of his recommendations was followed. For example the recommendation of being open to what is said, react and be flexible during the interview. To be able to achieve this a Dictaphone was used to record the interviews. In that way there was no need to take notes during the procedure, which can be disturbing for both parties (Charmaz, 2006). The Dictaphone fulfils another purpose as well, it makes it possible to catch every word and special expressions that otherwise easily could be lost. Not only can the focus be placed at the words said but also how they are saying them. Charmaz (2006) means that it provides a deeper insight and nuance to what was being said. That also made the analysis more approachable. The technique of transcribing was verbatim and nothing was left out
or changed, to conserve the exact meaning of the quotes. While using them in this study they are grammatically corrected and repetitions are removed to give the reader better access to the quotes and to the analysis of the result.

Coding and categorisation

During the transcription of the interviews a rough mind map was formed and noteworthy areas submerged. After this a more structured and detailed coding process started. Charmaz (2006) calls this analytical face initial coding: Initial coding means that segments of data are identified and given a name. Many codes were identified and later grouped together based on similarities. In other words, categorized. Several categories emerged, but three stood out as more relevant than the others. These three categories are: vulnerability by practice of professionals, vulnerability by culture and vulnerability by exposure. All of the informants speak about these categories in some way with their own words. Some expressions are mutual for all of them. Further in this study, every area will be presented with quotes from the informants. This is to give the reader the informants’ interpretation and opinion of what it means to be a boy-child in Kenya.

According to Charmaz (2006) the understanding for categories develops through focused coding. It was during this analyse phase that similarities and the differences in the categories was detected and defined as sub-categories. The sub-categories show a difference in perspective between the male and the female interviewees.

Quality criteria

Awareness of your own meaning in the interplay between you and the surrounding is an important part of conducting research. If there is awareness there is also room for reflection. Due to the nature of qualitative method, it is hard to provide a systematic account of the procedure compared with what can be done in quantitative research. Unlike the quantitative approach, measuring your data is not the aim of qualitative research. To be aware of your own impact on the informant is important for the trustworthiness of the research (Padgett, 2008). A trustworthy study implies that the researcher is aware of his or her own personal opinions and perceptions, and how these can impact the interpretation of the data (ibid). To minimize this, after every interview I consciously reflected over my emotions that were evoked (Charmaz, 2006) during the
interviews and wrote them down for future reminding during the coding and working with data.

The importance of fullness in the data and of the researchers understanding of the background is something that Charmaz (2006) mentions. While settling on the subject for this study I wanted to know about the background where the data would come from. So, time was spent in the field to collect impressions and what could be found between the lines of what was said and done (Padgett, 2008). Bryman (2011) brings up the concepts of trustworthiness and authenticity as a way to evaluate a qualitative study. The trustworthiness of this study can be divided into two criteria, how credible and transferable it is.

Credibility- there is more then one possible way to describe the reality as it is perceived and this study has been carried out accordingly to the rules and the results of it will be reported to the organization and the interviewees. During gathering of data the permission was given by the informants to use their information. To ensure that this study has the potential to be credible, I read literature around the subject, country and continent. To be well acquainted with the subject of interest leads to the next criteria.

Transferability- to transfer the results of this study or any other study can be somewhat difficult. To apply the findings from one organization in a certain time to another organization, in another time is not easily done. However giving ‘thick descriptions’ of the culture in which the study was conducted can facilitate it. That way there is a possibility to control how well this study could be transferred to another environment.

Ethical aspects

Before executing this field study, courses were attended, that brings up the aspect of ethics in both the field of social work and in the field of research as a part of preparation. One part of the scholarship is to attend a preparatory course at SIDA Partnership forum. During this preparation course the aspect of awareness was brought up to the participants, as well as the importance of considering the context in which the field study will be conducted. In the case of this study a recommendation was given by SIDA to learn about the effects of the colonization of Kenya, and how it has effected the country.

To conduct a study means great responsibility towards the people who are giving the information that is needed. That is why the ethical aspect needs to be addressed. The
informants for this study were informed about: the purpose of the study, that the participation is voluntary, and that at any given time they have the right to terminate their participation without reprimand. An oral consent was given from all informants to go through with the interview and to use the findings. After the writing of this study the recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed.

Padgett (2008) describes the basic elements of informed consent; there should be a short description of the study, a full presentation of the researcher’s identity and the sponsoring organization. Assurance of full confidentiality and any risks or benefits associated with taking part of the study. To make sure a full informed consent was given for this study, all of the above was explained to the informants. They were furthermore given information about the meaning of voluntary participation. I illuminated that there will be strict confidentiality and therefore the informant will be assigned a pseudonym. Any information that could be traced to the organization, where it is located or to the informant would be changed.

**Hurdles of making this study**

There were a few things that were not prepared for that at times made the writing of this study harder then expected. Firstly, in the beginning of spending time in Kenya the difference in culture and economical conditions had a bigger impact then prepared for mentally. The first weeks were spent just trying to understand the context of the surroundings. Secondly, the access to Internet was at times minimal and unpredictable, which made the time of collecting research material longer then expected. The third challenge was the weather. During the planned final stage of writing this study the rain season started in Kenya and air was filled with moisture that made all technic equipment fail. Therefore the last stage of writing had to be done after coming back to Sweden.

**Findings - The vulnerable boy-child**

All the interviewees expressed concerns about the situation for young boy’s growing up in rural areas in Kenya today. The term boy-child was used when referring to young boys. Three categories were developed by analyzing the transcribed texts; vulnerability by neglect of professionals, vulnerability by African culture and vulnerability by exposure. Analyzing the transcribed texts also made it possible to create an understanding of the interviewees’ perspective of the boy-child as vulnerable.
The first category refers to the occurrence that boys are viewed as vulnerable since girls are prioritized and empowered in schools and in the work carried out by NGOs. The second refer to the well-grounded and culturally embedded gender roles and how these roles contribute to the vulnerability amongst the boys. The third, vulnerability by exposure, describes other possible hazards that make the boy-child vulnerable.

There were also subcategories developed during the analysis, these are presented under each of the three categories to deepen the understanding for the presented categories and the different perspectives within them.

**Vulnerable by neglect of professionals**

Andy said the following when he described the situation for the boy-child in Kenya: “So much effort has been focused on the girl-child. We are leaving out the boy-child, so the boy-child is more vulnerable then the girl-child.” As this quote indicates, Andy considers boys to be more vulnerable because they are not given the same attention as girls. He also points out that the boys, most of the time sees all the work that is done for the girls, and they wonder why they are not given the same attention. Jane gave an example of how it can become visible among boys that they don’t feel included in the practices carried out by professionals:

If we just concentrate with the girls it will reach an age when we go to maybe a school or in to a community and they say, “ah they just came for the girls” so you can see them start walking away…

Eric develops his argumentation by blaming what he calls the civil society and the work being done only for the girls. ”But, now the boy-child is in danger because when the civil society start to bring their knowledge. Now the communities is embracing it, so the girl-child is being given the priority.” What Eric means about the civil society is the NGOs and the school that are working under the influence of the western society. Many of the NGOs started are run by people who come from other countries and have the economical means to develop and improve the situation for those who need it. The schools many times also depend on funding either from NGOs or other actors that have an interest in development and improved learning for the children. Most of the time the focus is placed on the girls in the development work from NGOs and in some extent the schools. This means that the boy-child, in many cases is not in the concern of the NGOs
work in the field of improvement and development. And in the school the main focus is on the girl’s improvement in their schoolwork, how they preform and learn. When the boy-child is exposed to this there is a risk that the boy-child will become vulnerable because of the aimed attentions toward girls and lesser attention given to the boys. The boy-child is not empowered as the girl-child by the NGOs and to some extent the schools.

Vulnerability by neglect appears in this study in different ways such as the perception of less information and empowerment. How imbalances effect and evoke jealousy and bad behaviour.

*Lack of empowerment and information*

Eric express that there is a risk for the boys and the men, by not having any inspiration or support, because the girls and women are getting the attention. Girls are empowered and women are motivated to start their own business or to do other things that generate an income. The lack of empowerment among boys can be generating fears about what will happen to boys when they grow older without any guidance or motivation like the girls and the women have. Eric stated that he already could see the effects of the lack of empowerments among boys and young men: “When you go to the village you’ll find the men they have no work, they have no economic activity”. Betty expresses the general attitude to why there is no empowerment or information given: “That is because the boy-child is not considered important in Kenya.”

Everyone needs to get access to know about their rights and everything. But now you see, they are not informed and they are not educated. The risk will be that they eventually realize that they are wasted. Because they are not involved in the education about carelessness or maybe dependency and substance abuse. (Eric)

All informants speak about sexuality in one or another way. Andy says: ”So we’ve just focused on the girl-child and teach them about sexuality and boys doesn’t know the consequences of their sexuality”. Jane also tells about the boys being excluded from education around sexuality, and the effects this can have on their relationships with girls:
It’s when the girl has really grown up and they are starting those relationships, the boy and the girl relationship. Then you have trained the girl much more then the boy and the boy won’t listen to the girl. But if they were together on the training and being trained together they’ll know this is bad and this is good […]. Now when the girl starts to have those relationships, some of them have early pregnancy, but who is responsible? It’s the boy, but now you’ve kept out the boy. You didn’t talk to the boy you didn’t say anything to the boy, he doesn’t know.

What can be seen as an interesting aspect here is how it differs between Andy and Jane when they speak about sexuality. Jane speaks mostly from the perspective that the girls will suffer from the neglect of the boy’s lack of sexual education. Jane points out that the boys are vulnerable because they don’t know the consequences of having sex, either if it’s about the risk of contracting STDs (sexually transmitted disease) or if it’s the risk of becoming a young parent.

**Vulnerable by imbalances**

Tom lifts the aspect of the future for the boy. He foresees that if one part is left out from the society by not being addressed, then there will be some problems for the men in the future: “[…] They will start feeling that in the future there is a risk of being neglected again”. What Tom talks about is that the boy fears that he will suffer in the future due to the fact that only the girl-child is given information, and empowerment. Andy describes the future being hard for the boy and men because all the jobs and important positions will be taken over by women “The girl will start dominating everywhere”. Andy seems, as the quote indicates, to be afraid that women will take over society if the one-sided focus continues.

Jane argues in a slightly different way then Tom, she thinks it is good that the boys ask why they are not getting the same kind of attention. Because according to Jane, that means that they want to be involved and therefore will be more engaged: “They even say that we just focus on girls. You don’t focus on us. And that is good because if they want to involve themselves in the program then it’s a good thing.” She argues that even though there is a lot of attention on the girl-child, the boy-child is still active despite this and is questioning why they cannot have the same. But on the other hand it doesn’t
always happen like this, that the boys approach them. Most of the time the boys do not do that.

When we go to maybe a school or in a community they say “ah they just came for the girls” so you can see them start walking away […] because they know that they are not the one.

In this quote, Jane talks about when they, in their organization, do what they call outreach work. They go to the villages around to provide service. She speaks about the boy-children and what their reaction might be upon their arrival to the village. Jane says that the boy-child also needs to be engaged in programs.

Eric lifts the aspect of the society being imbalanced and that in the future there might be a wedge between the men and the women. “We have a situation of imbalance just as it was before but now the opposite.”

Andy explains what he thinks is one reason for the imbalance that Eric mentions. The NGOs are focusing so much on the girl-child and women. He says it is partly because of the aid that is given to the organizations, the funding, is labelled for the empowerment of girls and women due to the fact that their society is patriarchal. Andy means that to stop the effects of the money given to the NGOs is for them to empower the girls and women. He sees a problem with the unilateral focus:

In our culture we don’t recognise women so that when they just bridge the gap, it is not bad, to me it is not bad, but when we just leave the others (boys and men) outside you are doing more harm then good. […] But you find that some part of the society is worried about their right this other part of the society being left out.

**Bad behaviour and the rise of jealousness**

Eric speaks about being approached by boys and they tell him that they see people coming from organizations or from the government to the schools, but that they only speak to the girls. This creates envy and a feeling of jealousy among the boys:

One boy who approached me, because he felt like why is everyone that is coming here, even the government, just interested with the girls. So they start
to be jealous and think why isn’t it us … they feel, like school is meant for girls.

Tom explains how he used to feel when he was growing up, he did not develop jealousy, but he was angry with the teachers because they all favoured the girls. Tom talks about friends who did feel angry at the girls just because they were getting attention. Also the other interviewees say that there is an impact on the behaviour amongst boys and that they tend to be drawn to bad behaviour.

Betty talks about how boys almost automatically fall into bad behaviour and that this can be stopped by talking to the boys in counselling and engaging the parents:

Me: Why do you think they automatically go and do bad things?
Betty: Because we have just left the boy free and without sitting down with the boys and talking to them ... I think the climate is so hard between the boys because we don’t counsel boys. Most of the time we normally counsel girls. That’s why we now counsel both boys and girls and parents, both parents yeah if there is no parent their guardian to come for counselling.

Betty is the one who speaks mostly about the importance of involving the parents in the process of education and counselling. Betty’s opinion is that without the parents being involved it will be hard for the children in the school and in growing up to become an adult. She gives an example of what the consequence can be for the boy-child of not being attended to, by the parent/parents can appear in the village nearby to hers:

There is a village here where the mother is drunkard, the father is drunkard and they just leave their children free. The boy starts carrying the luggage for the people and he is being paid. One day he has no money and that day he became a thief … you see the children walking even at twelve in the evening … and they are young, young boys.

What Betty is talking about can also be connected to the consequences of living in poverty and therefore turning to stealing money. She is more over talking about the negative results from the neglect of not having any parent/parents or guardian attending to him.
Vulnerable by African culture

The expression African culture has been used by more than one of the interviewees and therefore can be considered valid in this context. African culture seems to be tightly connected with the gender roles. African culture is commonly referred to as a patriarchal culture and that the men and boys are the ones who have a say. What Andy means is that the boys are the ones who will decide and have the last say on things:

And the biggest thing now, I forgot to tell you. The biggest thing is our culture. In our culture we just praise our boys, we just praise our boys that they are the men. They are the world so that when you grow up you know that you are the man that is going to take everything. … So, as he grows he just views himself as a man who is going to inherit his father’s property.

What it means to be a boy-child according to the interviewees, is expressed by them and found in the analysis of the data. The interviewees give their view of how the boys grow up having no obligations in life before they go for circumcision. After the circumcision they suddenly have an obligation to be a man and that means to be in a certain way. This can lead to the boy-child dropping out of school to become a head of the house, a leader.

Eric also speaks about the African culture and how it can be can be expressed. He means that the boy-child will look upon his father and know that when he grows up he will have the same life:

They (the boys) are comfortable to stay at home because they believe that they will be the decision maker and he will decide. The girl will be married and the land will remain to him. He doesn’t feel like he has to make an effort.

African culture is the word used to explain the way a boy is perceived. How he has no obligations growing up, how he latter becomes a man by the ceremony of circumcision and how it will effect him.
Boys were described as not having any obligations when they grow up. The girls on the other hand were described as they grow up with the responsibility of taking care of the house and the male family members. This is how Jane explains the situation:

We start teaching girls a lot of things when they are still young, about hygiene, about menstruation, about how to start washing things at home, washing clothes washing utensils, taking responsibilities. As the communities are, the girls are the ones who do a lot of work in the family, the boy is just there. In the morning the girl is the one who wakes up and light the fireplace. Put the tea on the fire and when the tea is ready the boy will come out just take the tea. Then the girls start washing the utensils, going to fetch water, coming back, washing clothes, preparing lunch. You see now the boy is not so involved.

From Jane’s quote it becomes clear that the role of girls is to learn how to take care of the household, while the boys are the ones who are served by the girls. Eric expressed the same gender roles but from the perspective of a boy:

This is a boy how wakes up in the morning only to prepare to go to school but on the other side the girl-child will wake up prepare the tea, do the house related work. Then in the evening again come and collect firewood, do the cooking and then do the homework. You see. So the boy-child has been made to know that he is supposed to wait for the woman to work for him. (Eric)

There is a difference in the perspectives both Jane and Eric describe that the boy-child does not have to do any household chores. Boys can as Eric expressed it “wait for the woman to work for him”. Both Jane’s and Eric’s descriptions indicate how gender roles are socialised among children. The girl-child has obligations in the house and it might be so that the girl grows in to the routines of working for members in the household. While the boy grows in to knowing that he has no obligations in the household, like Betty says: “They will be the head of the house and they can do what ever they want to do”
Betty explained how deeply embedded in culture the boys non-existing obligations concerning household tasks are: “In some culture a boy cannot even enter into the kitchen and cook, a boy cannot even wash the utensils, a boy cannot even fetch water” Eric expressed that he found the lack of obligations in the home of boys to be problematic. This creates a “hands of attitude” amongst the boys and that mentality can be negative fore the boy-child in the future. He meant that most men and boys also have “care less attitude” and that they have the purpose of existing as a boy. “Boys purpose is only to exist, now that is the challenge” Eric concludes. Andy express a similar thing about the boy-child and how he grows up knowing that it doesn’t matter what he does or how he performs: “He doesn’t have any role to play at home. He just feels that when I grow up I’ll be like my father.”

Jane is also of the opinion that it is problematic when the boy grows up with no obligations:

He will never take responsibility. Maybe, when he gets a family he will not be responsible and the woman will be the one who is responsible. … There is a lot of things in life that the man has to take responsibility for; their family, take care of their children, make sure that the children are at school, that they get food, and so on. But now I wake up in the morning as a boy, take tea and start walking around.

This is Jane’s response to the question of what she thinks the future will be like if nobody recognises the boy-children like they recognise the girl-children. She believes that they will never take responsibility for their family or for their own lives.

Time is another aspect of the boy-child growing up in a culture that gives them no obligation to help out in the household or being motivated in school. Time in the meaning of having too much of it, when there is no responsibilities to spend the time on like the girl-child have. Iris argues that the boy-child are at risk of falling in to bad behaviour when he has too much time on his hands. That’s when he “messes up” Iris says.

Growing up with the idea that you are not supposed to be doing anything in the house complicates the work for a less harmful influence of the patriarchal culture.
We (boys and men) grew up knowing that women can just be used as a maid you see. She can wash the utensils, clean up the house, clean up the clothes and that’s all it’s the wrong idea. (Tom)

When the boy-child is growing up he can spend his time roaming around because he have nothing to do and no obligations to tend to. And this might cause the boys to become irresponsible and have a careless attitude like Eric argues.

**Becoming a man – circumcision**

In Kenya there is work done and campaigns to stop the tradition of female genital mutilation (Action Aid, 2017), but what is not as known, is an equivalent tradition. A circumcision ceremony that surrounds the boy-child. Tom describes the importance of the circumcision ceremony: “It’s a rite you must go through that, to be called a man. So you cannot be 33 and not circumcised and call yourself a man, then you are still a kid.”

Male circumcision is therefore closely linked to manliness. According to Tom’s argumentation the male circumcision is equal to becoming a man. Tom explains how the traditional procedure is done:

So you got to be cut, and you get away a bit to get secluded from the community. Then you are being thought some things about being a man, how to handle yourself, how to handle your family and how to handle the community, things like that … you cannot go through the cut and stay at home and call that a circumcision. Ask many people around me. That one who stayed at home will still be called a child.

The tradition of circumcision is deeply culturally embedded over a period of time. It is more or less taken for granted as something good and that all boys need to go through it just as their father did and their fathers before them. There are boys according to Tom that can be forced in to doing a circumcision. They are forced to keep this tradition alive and the meaning of it is; that you cannot be a man unless you have gone through the tradition of becoming a man:

… It will be a shame. If he will not be forced, he will be sent away from home. He will be told by his father that, if you cannot go through what I
went through then you are not my child, walk away, go and live your life.
That’s what happens.

Andy described that after the ceremony the boys are not viewed as boys any more:
“Their culture says that they are a man, you are ready to marry and can inherit your
property from your father.”

During the interview with Eric I wanted to know if the boy-child really is considered to
be a man after the few weeks of secluded tutoring during the traditional ceremony. And
Eric said: “It means you are a man, you can be part of the decision but also we have the
rang” the rang means that even though the boy is considered a man after the
circumcision he is still considered young and do not have the same respect as an older
man.

Jane explains that there are different cultures around the ceremony and that the one,
which is called a traditional circumcision, is the one that brings the boys to a secluded
area, the bush. During this time it is only the boys and the tutors that are allowed to be
there and what is learned there is a secret. The boys are gathered together with elders
who are supposed to teach them how to be when you are a man. According to Andy, this
can give negative effects on the boy. He explains that the elders sometimes are older men
with no education and very strong believes of what it is to be a man: “when they go to
traditional ceremony they are told by older men about their culture.”

Jane explained this type of tradition to be harmful for the boy-child as it has an impact
on him: “… the cultural tradition of circumcision can really destroy the boy.” What Jane
talks about is the traditional circumcision ceremony that has effect on the boy-child. It is
regarded to be the step in to manhood and to become an adult, to become a man. But
becoming an adult over such a small amount of time can be hard to handle if you are not
prepared to do so. For example, the boy-child is growing up knowing he has no
obligation like mentioned above. Andy has a proposal on how to change the possible
negative impact. That is to keep the tradition of circumcision but change the old men as
tutors. He means that tutors need to be updated on the preferred social changes and
therefore can “tell them about the modern world, what is going on”.
Dropping out of school

The interviewees explained how the traditional circumcision could be bad for the boy-child, in the way that what they are thought during the weeks secluded from the everyday life can be harmful:

When we leave a young boy of 14, 15 years with someone who has not gone to school and just pumping him words about our culture, at the end of the day most of them they refused to go to school. (Andy)

Andy is talking about the older men as “someone who has not gone to school.” He says that they are a reason why boys drop out of school. The older men tell them what they can and cannot do as a man. Tom explained how the circumcision ritual and the new role of being man made school less attractive for them:

They are injected with the manship education so much during the circumcision. When they come out they think; how can a man learn in the same place as with children. It can’t happen, so most of them walk out of school. Or he will stay in school but with a arrogant attitude … with that idea that he is a man not a student anymore. He can even stand and fight the teacher. So most of them drop out of school.

The boy-child stops going to school because he has the notion that he doesn’t need to go to school anymore. Often the school is promoted to the children as a way to secure their future and to be able to get a job in the future, but after the ceremony the boys have a different view. Eric speaks about the boy feeling like he doesn’t need education because he will have land, he will inherit it and decide over it. So a common thing is stated in the quote from Eric:

The boys are comfortable to stay at home because they still believe; after all, we are the decision maker. When it comes to land we are the ones who will decide who will have what. After all the girl-child will be married and this land will become mine. They are not seeing the importance of getting education.
**Head of the house, a sudden responsibility**

Betty says that the boys are instructed during the ceremony but she doesn’t know exactly what and how they are instructed. She knows one thing about what boys are taught by the tutors: “They say that you shouldn’t allow a woman to control you, be the head of you. … Being the man of the house controlling their sisters and their mothers”. Betty think this is their thoughts since she has observed that many boys are different after circumcision ceremony:

And most of the boys when they go for the traditional circumcision, they come back at home and they say; now they are the head, the head of the house they can do what ever they want to do. (Betty)

According to Betty the boys are not the same when they come back from the ceremony. Then the boy will start to give orders to his mother and sisters like he did not do before and to remember what Tom mentioned the boy might also have an arrogant attitude in the school.

This tradition is something that can be a part of a bigger problem. A few weeks are a short time to go from a boy to a man, with the expectation to lead and be the head of a house. Law still defines him as a child (Children Act, 2012). The transition between being a boy-child with no obligations to suddenly being a man that has to go to his own house and having obligations are challenging and makes the boy vulnerable. The ceremonial circumcision tradition brings a lot of pressure to the boy, it makes him vulnerable in many ways. If he is not ready to cope with what it means to be a man he might have a taxing future. Betty talks about a case where the boys was circumcised and had left school looking for something to do: “I think it was the day before yesterday we had the bad news. In Nairobi the police shoot about ten boys to death because they have become gangsters” She means that the boy cannot handle the responsibility of becoming a man without a transition seminar from childhood to an adult together with parents or guardians: “It is good if we could have a seminar for both parents and the boy-child”.

After circumcision, the boy is defined as a man and cannot stay under the same roof as his mother and siblings any more. He must separate himself from the family. “You have to build another house for the boy” Jane explained. It is nothing wrong with moving out from home, it is a natural step into the adult life but under these circumstances it can be
regarded in a somewhat bad way for the boy-child to enter the adult life. The most common age is between 14-16 years to undergo the circumcision. At that time the boy, who by tradition becomes a man, must fend for himself.

You are not allowed to stay with your mum. You build your own house. Even if you are still in school, you see it can be hard. You go to school and then you come back and you have to look for something that you can eat.

(Tom)

Tom points out that he, the boy, now have to fend for himself and that can be a difficult transition. Think about how the boy lived before he underwent the circumcision. He was living together with his family and being served by the women. Suddenly he is standing alone in his house and have no family around him like he used to and he have no food served like he used to.

Vulnerable by exposure

As the boy-child grows up he is exposed to different things in his life. In this part the risks the boy-child might be exposed to and the consequences the risks might lead to will be discussed. The interviewees described how boys became more vulnerable to after they went through the circumcision and were regarded as men. How do they handle the sudden change that appears? The interviewees speak about the hazards of: street life, drugs, alcohol, gambling as well as the seeking of a belonging; creating a meaning. The hazards and seeking of belonging are intertwined and therefore many of the aspects brought up will float in to each other under the different sub-categories explored below.

Street life

Tom tells about the street life, from the experiences of his friends as well as his own observations. He tells me about some of his friends and how they where looking for money on the streets and were in a search for a better life.

Maybe when they get to the streets you know the life there isn’t easy it ain’t good. I can tell you about an example; if you’ve got a friend like me and I go and live in the streets for like three months. When you meet me again I will be a very different person with different thinking, different talking, different behaviour everything different.
What Tom is speaking about is that the boy will be exposed to many things on the street and that he will change after three months of living on the street. He means that it can be dangerous to go looking on the streets for money. Tom points out that the boy is dependent on meeting someone who doesn’t take advantage of him in his pursuit of trying to earn money on street business or creating a better life for him self. If he is unlucky he will meet a bad person that will use the boy for various criminal activities in exchange for the boys life:

The bad person will tell you; you have to go and kill so and so. Or you must rob so and so. And boy have no any other way then doing what he is commanded because of the fear he has for his life.

Tom means that the boy has performed bad things that he was told to do, in the hopes that he will be released.

The vulnerability of falling in to the wrong hands while searching for a better life can be a dangerous thing for the boy. One must also take in to consideration the mentality that could come with the struggle on the streets, for money. Tom called it an enemy mentality and he means that, if there is nothing done to stop the boys from going to the street we are creating enemies. Not only because the boys are going to the streets but also because the boy might have developed the jealousness against women. That was previously discussed under the category of vulnerability. Tom means that there is a risk of the boys doing bad things in the search for money:

“Many boys will be against women … maybe she is successful and she has everything I need, and the boy-child is in despair …”. The despair of not having anything can be turned against the one who have something. Tom means that there is a risk of the boys turning against the girls and women.

**Drugs and alcohol**

Tom says that the drugs and bad behaviour is intertwined: “If you went there for drugs or even for fall in the hands of gangsters, you see, after three months you’ll be a crook”. It seems to be a common thing with alcohol and drugs in the area where the interviewees are working. Some argue that it is a negative effect of having too much time to spend after dropping out of school. Andy gives examples of the impact that addictive
substances can have on the boys: “Around 14, 15, 16 they drop out of school and many of them take drugs and drink. That is one of the biggest worries in our area.” Andy is not alone in the opinion that that abusing of alcohol and drugs is a common thing amongst boys. Both Betty and Iris mention that it is common and problematic.

For Andy the addiction to drugs or alcohol is troubling because he feels that it is an area where he can do nothing and here is a sequence winding-up the last part of the interview with Andy:

Me: is there anything in particular which is a little bit tricky or that you´ve been thinking about how to reach some certain boys?

Andy: Yeah it is first off all when someone has started drugs. For me to pull him out of the drugs, I don’t have the knowledge how to bring somebody out from the drugs.

Andy foresees that the problems with addiction will be worse in the future and that knowledge is needed on how to handle the boys when they are exposed to alcohol and drugs.

Betty shares his view that many of the boys in their area and in Kenya use drugs and drink. She also speaks about bad behaviour as a consequence of drugs being used by boys: ”They take a lot of bhang (cannabis), and they drink”. Betty argues that if the boy leaves school there is no one to control him and there is only the influence from the boy’s peers. And if the peers are taking drugs or alcohol so will the boy.

Iris also speaks about the peers and that they consider each other as idols. Iris is of similar opinion as Betty. The peer that behaves badly by using drugs or alcohol will have influence on the boy-child and he will mess up, “sometimes they use drugs and they mess up. They influence each other to mess up”. Iris also mentions that if the boy-child is busy he will not have time to do those things. Betty thinks that the boys create bad behaviour because they are not spoken to or controlled: “We have just left the boy free without talking to him”.

Maybe it´s just a way to make the time pass, Jane argues:
There is nobody to control the boy-child, the father is a drunkard and he normally wakes up early in the morning and leave the house. So the boy-child remains there saying what shall I do? I shall take that container and sell it and go and buy the bhang, cigarette, and drink.

Eric is reasoning in a similar way as Iris and Jane, that the use of substances whether it is alcohol or drugs is a way to spend the time because there is nothing else for the boy-child to do: “maybe I get some money from my parents and I go get drunk … that’s the order of the day. No dreams or no vision” Eric also points out that it can be a little better in the rural compared to the urban setup, since boys have some thing to do with their time:

You know it is a bit better for the rural setup because people have cows, they have goats, they have farms to cultivate and what have you. But looking at a state of town where there is no land and no animal to keep. These are the same people who will enter into social crimes. We will have a lot of thieves, a lot of robbery and all those evils associated with drug abuse and dependency.

Tom is in line with Eric, Andy, Betty and Jane that the aspect of having nothing to do combined with peers abusing drugs and alcohol, is a bad influence on the boy:

I can say yeah because of what I experience when I am on the field working. Some times at night I walk around and se how the areas look like. I will go and meet young boys in the age of 14, 15, 16 and some drink, some are chewing those Kat some are even smoking bhang and they do nothing […] Those drugs, I can say, they effect the user and the peers also effect the use of drugs and alcohol. […] There are so many men out here at the age of 20 but they look older, they look like people over 40.

**Seeking a belonging- creating a meaning**

As mentioned above many boys have very little to do with their time. Using drugs can be one way of making time pass by and so can the joining a gang or creating a meaning in life by having something to do. Andy remarks that a new trend has come to the area where the boys ride motorcycles together and these motorcycles are called Bodaboda: “There is a new trend. Bodabodariders. These bodabodariders have been dominated by the boys.” Andy elaborates about the situation and hazards for the boy-child when they
are in a gang. The Bodaboda is a motorcycle that can be seen on the roads in Kenya, some drives them like a taxi service to earn money. But then there is also the bodabodariders that form gangs like motorcycle gangs according to Andy.

The boy can form a gang of about five or even ten boys. They form a gang and say; today we are going to rob the shop of James. And so then they go and rob the shop. And they will be going on like that. They can even kill people.

Betty additionally tells me about the risks when the boys form a gang. There is a risk of the boy joining a gang, that can lead to criminal activity and in worst case scenario it can lead to the boy being killed. Even Tom has mentioned the risks that seem connected with the joining and being a member of the gangs but that the influence of the urban areas is hard to stop. Nowadays the easy access of social media can create a romanticizing image of the gangs and what it means to be a gang member:

The streets are where boys go and meet the gangsters and become gang members. So the urban areas they somehow effect the rural area because you see most of the things that happen in urban areas you can see on the phone. … So many boys they take that idea that people in the urban areas have a good life.

Jane speaks about that the boys needing something to do with their time, and someone who engages it with them: “He needs activities, he needs games, he needs to be engaged. Then you have a chance to talk to them”. She continues: “when you are addressing them together and making something for them, you create a team and you can make them grow better”. She talks about the outreach work done for the boys in the organization and one of the methods of reaching out and creating something to do and creating a meaning by engaging the boys.
Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the professional's perspective and how they construct the boy-child’s situation in rural Kenya. It is important to stress that the findings of this study is not accounting for how the boys really are. This study conveys the perception and construction of the boys by social workers in a specific organization in rural Kenya.

What was found within the limitations of this study, was that social workers interviewed for this study see and construct the boy-child as vulnerable. Through the interviews with social workers it was possible to find three main categories in which they perceive the boy-child to be vulnerable. The first is vulnerability by neglect of professionals where they mean that there is a lack of empowerment and information. Through that there is a rise of jealousness and bad behaviour. In the second category the informants found the boy to be vulnerable by culture and the third category is vulnerability due to the exposure of street life, drugs and alcohol. The findings end with the perception that boys search for a belonging and trying to create a meaning.

Professionals constructing vulnerability

The construction of a girl-child is that she needs more attention and the construction of a boy-child is that he eventually will be the one who decides (Chang’ach, 2012). In the study from Chege and Likoye (2015) they address the construction of girls and boys in the Kenyan gender research. They point out that gender research many times separates the girls’ needs from the boys’ and that the research reflects only on girls (ibid). This study shows a similar tendency, that focus is placed on the girls at the expense of the boys. Much of the general work towards lifting children in school and out of poverty, for example the MDGs (UN, 2017) addresses gender as something that needs to be equal.

Work to implement gender equality from a top-perspective is applied and many times understood as the empowerment of girls. The interpretation and implementation of MDG has shown to be somewhat skewed. Underhalter and Dorvard, (2013) and Hellsten (2016) discuss the problem with the ‘top-down’ implementation in the international development co-operation and aid agenda. They argue that a process coming from the top lead by government or NGOs is disconnected from bottom up actions. If they are not coming from the society there will be a struggle to implement the
changes in the way they were thought to be implemented. Iversen (2011) brings up the importance of understanding social and cultural constructions in which a change is wanted. There has to be an understanding of the background, the ethical choices done by people in that society. According to her reasoning, understanding can only come from inside the social context where the construction is made. This study, about the perception of vulnerability of the boy-child, can give an insight into the importance of understanding the construction and social context around the boy.

There is however more to this then a top down perspective that can be brought up as influencing the perceived image of the vulnerable boy-child. Language play a part in the construction as well, the use of words can construct a phenomenon for example vulnerability (Burr, 2003). As above mentioned, women and girls have been in focus as vulnerable and in the need of empowerment and support. The aid agenda, NGO and professionals use words to describe the situation, understand it, and work to improve it. Some of the words used in this study by social workers are; vulnerable, not empowered, being left out and decision maker about the boys and men. There is a discrepancy between the words, how can a boy be vulnerable, left out, disempowered but at the same time a decision maker? According to Silberschmidt (2001) there is a problem with this discrepancy in the perception of masculinity as being head of the household and at the same time have a feeling of disempowerment and invisibility.

The construction of the boy-child, man and masculinity is done by the informants within the patriarchal ideology were the man have the power and is being unquestioned. But in the findings within the frames of this study the authority of man is questioned and preserved as threatened.

The interviewees in this study argue that the girl is getting all the attention and the boy is feeling like he doesn’t matter. Such an understanding is in line with what have been addressed by Chang’ach (2012) where he means that the girl is given prevalence and the boy is vulnerable.

A difference was detected in the perspective of the male and female informants. Female informants speak from their (women) perspective and therefore interpret the situation for the boy-child from their perspective. Male informants speak from a male perspective and interpreting the boy-child’s situation from their perspective. Mattsson (2012)
describes that the understanding of reality is constructed as well as the interpretation and experience from it and not the reality in itself. When issues are expressed it is in the community it needs to be accepted and addressed as a problem. If the community doesn’t see it as a problem it will not be addressed as one.

**Neglect by the construction of manhood**

The concept of masculinity is depending on the idea that there is a male sex role and that there is a woman sex role. These roles effect each other and are dependent on the existence of the opposite role. According to Connelly (2005) masculinity is mediated by politics, news reports, and sports to mention a few places where masculinity is constructed. The words used in mediating masculinity is building and creating the expectation of manhood. Language creates what and how the boys, men, women and girls are expected to be like. The language used to mediate this is creating the discourse in which the boy-child is a part of (Burr, 2003). To be aware of how professionals as social workers are a part of creating the discourse and the image of masculinity can be important to understand the influence of every individual’s perspective.

In this study the informants have given their view of the boy-child’s situation and looking at the findings of this limited study the boy-child is not empowered, he seems to be put on hold. It might be so that the construction of manhood is one of the reasons why it is like this. One would think that in a patriarchal society the boy-child would be empowered as a norm (Hellsten, 2016). According to the findings in this study it is not so. Amunga et al. (2009) have found that all the boys in their study were suffering from neglect. Mattsson (2012) means that the society is built by actions and doings according to the constructed expectations around what manhood and womanhood is, therefore people act upon them. So if the manhood is constructed by the expectations that boys don’t need empowerment it will result in that. What manhood is is also constructed by such things as media and politics (Mattsson, 2012). If the politics and media are creating the context that the girls are in need then the boys must therefore be sidestepped.

A reaction to this sidestep is mentioned by Unterhalter and Dorward (2013) as resentment towards the girls and women amongst the boys and men. Maybe the reaction can be explained as the feeling of the loss of masculine identity and belonging. What this study find is in line with Iversen (2011), that women and girls are acknowledged and by being addressed, a person is recognized and given a determined identity, in contrast to
the previous meaningless creatures. The interviewees talk about bad behaviour amongst the boys as a consequence of no counselling and the girls having the attention. In the perspective of performity, it is not possible to do whatever one wants to do because the doing is all that exists, and the doing increases the power of the authority through repetition (Iversen 2011). The informants mean that the boys feel that the girls are being made authority by the doings of professionals, their reactions can be understood as a self-defence in this study. It might also be so that the boy-child is constructed as vulnerable and therefore become so (Burr, 2003). Can it be the shift of attention to the other gender by the language and words used by aid organizations, NGO and the professional around them as swell as the words and actions used in politics that create the perception that the boy-child is vulnerable? When social workers construct boys as vulnerable it can become a creation of a fact, as the vulnerable boy. It becomes a discourse (ibid). A circular reasoning that in turn will effect the way boys and men perceive them selves, in this case, vulnerable. There is however a risk of using this reasoning because the notion that vulnerability is constructed and upheld by a discourse does not mean that the boy-child is not suffering from vulnerability. The experience is real to the boys and to the social workers who are trying to hinder the impact of vulnerability.

**Construction of masculinity a performative act**

Interviewees in this study perceive the boy-child as vulnerable and in need of empowerment just as much as the girl-child. He is vulnerable because he is not receiving empowerment from either school or NGOs nor within the family. Theoretically he is empowered since of the patriarchal construction in Kenya (Hellsten, 2016) and therefore not in need of more empowerment and attention. The patriarchal construction of the boy-child can be seen as problematic if viewed through the perspective of constructionism as well as the performative perspective. To exemplify how the construction of the man as the original in the patriarchal society and how it can reinforce and become reinforced, a quote from Kenya’s law regarding children is presented:

No person shall subject a child to female circumcision, early marriage, or other cultural rites, customs or traditional practices that are likely to negatively affect the child’s life, health, social welfare, dignity or physical or psychological development. (Child Act 2012:16)
Here there is a clear example on how the construction of gender is done. In the law there is the word female, and so the reader can interpret the law like it is not regarding boys. Iversen (2011) writes that a boy is assumed to be the original and is therefore standing above the rest. On the one hand the original doesn’t need to be protected which leads to the neglect of the boy-child. On the other hand it can be valuable to recognize that there still is the idea of the man as the original. Here masculinity can be seen as supported by the policy. According to Connell (2005) masculinity is dependent on femininity so masculinity cannot exist on its own. In this law it can be seen as the construction of the weaker sex (female) who needs the law to protect her whilst the male stands above. It might therefore be considered a right to be circumcised in order to become a man.

**Circumcision**

When it is time for the circumcision the boy is expected to want it as mentioned above, and to come out of it as a man. Nyaundi (2005) has described the expectation as a phenomenon of myths, folklore and peer-pressure and that the circumcision is a cultural rite. According to Kenyan Child Act (2012) the female circumcision is illegal, but the Act doesn’t mention the male equivalent. Darby and Svoboda (2007) lift the aspect of male circumcision, and that it should be illegal to protect the children. They express that intensive work to hinder FGM (female genital mutilation) can be doing the opposite by threatening the culture that belongs to it. In extent, Darby and Svoboda (2007) mean that the male culture is strengthened by its rites, and a culture is expressed by performative acts (Iversen, 2011). Within the findings of this study where social workers talk about the circumcision ceremony and traditions regarding the boy-child, the performative acts to maintain the masculinity role can be detected (Connell, 2005).

The aspect of no obligation for the boys and men is brought up in the findings. The boys are being brought up knowing that they are the ones who will have the say and the girls are the one doing the housework. Looking at it in a gender perspective the genders are constructed and upheld. Gender is constructed and socialized, therefore a girl is expected to be in a certain way as well as the boy is expected to be so (Iversen, 2011). According to the informants in this study the boy-child is expected to do nothing as a boy-child and he is expected to grow up knowing that one day he will be like his father.

For a boy to become like his father, a man, he should be circumcised like his father, and his fathers father that is seen as a norm according to the interviewees as well as by Darby...
and Svoboda (2007). The circumcision ceremony is a very good example of a performative act as well as the construction of manhood. To be a man or a woman there is a constant need to enhance the gender by actions, and the actions are performative, meaning the actions make the gender (Iversen, 2011). A ceremony that physically enhances the transition from boy to man as well as teaching them how to be and act like a man. The masculinity is constructed and upheld by the ceremony, but findings in this study says that the construction made by the performative act of circumcision have negative impact on the boy. He leaves his education, or behaves badly in the school. Suddenly he must take responsibility over his surroundings and home.

**Leaving school**

Hellsten (2016, p. 370) speaks about the culture as a construction that limits:

> It is important to see that neither men nor women are not fully autonomous and cannot be expected to be so, as we all are embedded in our social contexts and social duties, whether we are borne in Africa or in Europe. If women’s-as well as man’s-identities are defined by using gender as the only, or at least, the major criteria for inclusion and exclusion, the causes of conflict and inequalities, that is, the intricacies of the underlying social hierarchies and communal loyalties, are radically ignored.

As Hellsten (2016) says there are no women or men who can escape the social contexts that identify them with their gender. During the interviews the African culture and context was mentioned and what effects they can have. The African culture keeps the construction of the Kenyan boy and men, it can be seen in the empirical examples of this study. The boy becomes a man after the ceremony and he is then expected by his surroundings and by him self to manage on his own. Like the informants in this study have revealed, a large number of the boys drop out of school after this ceremony because they are regarding themselves as men and men can not stay in the same place as women and children. One more factor of leaving school is also the urge to earn money either induced by poverty or by the notion that a ‘man’ earns money. In the coming text I will discuss the two reasons for leaving the education.
The informants in this study say that the boy thinks that he should leave school because as a man, he cannot sit with children and be educated by women. That is many times told to the boy, during the ceremony, by the elders who educate the boy to be a man. He learns what it is to be a man. Then he must act like one. The ceremony is creating and upholding the strong masculine and patriarchal structure in the rural society where this study was made and can be regarded as Murove et al., (2010) have discussed, as a risk for the boy. The upholding of this structure can be making the boy vulnerable in the way that he is regarded as an adult, when he is not. Kenyan law says: a child is every individual that is under the age of 18 (Child Act, 2012). After leaving the school there is time to fill, and as the informants of this study have expressed, many boys fill the time with roaming around. Interviewees also mention the exposure to and usage of addictive substances as a hazard for the boy-child. According to the Child Act (2012) every child should be entitled to protection from the use of narcotics and alcohol or any other drugs that can be considered harmful. Kaime-Atterhög and Ahlberg (2008) and Embleton et al. (2012) mean that there is a need for protection and a need for adequate education and information to the boys about the dangers and effects of usage of addictive substances. They also point out that many boys in their studies say that no such protection, information or education was given. The interviewees in this study also mention that the boy is left out from information.

**Seeking for identity through manhood**

When the boys have been circumcised some of them go to the streets to look for money or a better life. The search for a better life might be explained by the construction of identity that can be found on the street. Kaime-Atterhög and Ahlberg (2008) explain in their study about street boys in Kenya that there is a highly organised community amongst the boys. According to them the boys on the street have a collective identity and make by with peer support. According to Iversen (2011) our identity only exists in relation to others. There is no ‘me’ without the relation to others. The boys might be seeking belonging on the street because there is nobody else to exist in relation to after becoming a man. If he is not seen or empowered, only expected to be the man. It is not such a strange thing that the boys are searching for identity among other boys on the street where there is a mutual understanding and a collective identity. Seeking of identity can also be related to the high consumption of addictive substances. It gives the boy a
purpose to fulfil and together with peers they construct their reality of what it means to be a man.

**Recommendation**

In rural parts of Kenya, traditions and customs are an important part of maintaining and upholding the roles; this is done by performative acts both by men and women. The performative acts can be seen in the bigger context of a discourse. Social workers, parents, scientists, students and many more are all part of keeping and maintaining it. By acknowledging and bringing it in to the light an understanding and knowledge can be created. To better understand the effects of the culture around male circumcision and how it can effect the boy-child in a negative way, there is a need to further explore attitudes and believes amongst men, women and boys in early teenage years toward the culture around circumcision. In many Kenyan ethnic groups this ceremony is common and looked upon as something positive.

To create understanding of the current situation for men and boys, further research on the male perception of daily life in the context of gender identity and masculinity identity in rural areas of Kenya is recommended. How does the perception of disempowerment and feeling of disregard in connection with the patriarchal structure effect the construction of men and boys as vulnerable?
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