
Personality Development and the Impact of Gbeabe Culture on
Ogoni Women: Implications for Counselling

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined personality development and the impact of Gbeabe culture on Ogoni women within an eclectic theoretical framework combining radical feminism and human rights theory. The study carefully identified and re-assessed the factors that are responsible for Gbeabe culture in Ogoni. The findings of the study showed that Gbeabe culture is a major threat to the educational opportunities, physical, psychological, emotional, reproductive, and mental health of girl children. Based on the findings, recommendations were made and counselling implications were equally highlighted to enlighten and transform the belief systems of the people by providing logical reasons for eliminating the obnoxious cultural practices, having known the implications of practicing a culture that does not bring and encourage development.

KEYWORDS: Personality, development, Gbeabe, Culture and Counselling

Introduction

Personality is an important phenomenon. When we meet new people, whether through work, school, or social events, it is often their personality that attracts our attention. Whether they are nice, helpful, outgoing or shy, it's just a few of these things we assess as we evaluate the people around us. Salima (2019) sees personality as individual differences in characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Personality emerges early and continues to develop across one's life span. George et al. (2017) state that the following are important when you want to build a good personality: character traits, behavior traits, and attribute traits. The personality traits are different from each other and could be a mixture of both good and bad. It is always an individual's choice to decide the change of traits based on changes in lifestyle.

Personality development can be seen as a process of developing and enhancing one's personality. This helps the individual gain confidence and high self-esteem. It is said to have a positive impact on one's communication skills and the way one sees the world (Williams 2015). So, it is our personality that makes us who we are, but how exactly does our personality form? Personality development has been a major topic for debate over the years, especially for some prominent psychologists. Since the inception of psychology as a separate science, researchers have proposed a variety of ideas to explain how and why personality develops. Harley (2012) also supports the claim of Salima (2019) that it is the organized pattern of behavior that makes up each person's unique personality, which emerges overtime.

There are many factors that go into influencing a person's personality. This includes parenting and societal variables. Perhaps most importantly, it is the ongoing interaction of all of these influences that continues to shape personality overtime. Kolie (2018) posits that personality development is a step towards improvement and development of talents and potential, enhancing quality of life, realization of dreams and aspirations, and facilitating employability.

Personality development is important because it prepares an individual holistically. Firstly, personality development helps one to develop a positive attitude in life. An individual with a negative attitude finds problems in every situation. Rather than criticizing the people around him, he should analyze the whole situation and try to find an appropriate solution to it. If there is a problem, there has to be a solution as well. Losing hope would make the situation worse. It is essential for individuals to behave well around other people. Being polite with others will not only make you popular among people, but it will also earn you respect and pride. One cannot demand respect by being rude to people around us. Personality development plays an important role in developing not only one's outer but also one's inner self. Human beings are social animals that need other people around them. An individual need to have that magnetic power that attracts people towards them. One needs to have the charisma that earns dignity and respect in the social environment. Personality development helps one to gain recognition and acceptance from the community and society. Secondly, personality development plays an essential role not only in an individual's profession but also in their personal lives. It makes an individual disciplined, punctual, and an asset to society. An undisciplined individual finds it difficult to survive in the long run. Personality development teaches mutual respect. It helps to differentiate between personal and professional life. Thirdly, personality development goes a long way toward reducing stress and conflict. It encourages individuals to look at the brighter side of life and face even the worst situations with a smile. There is no point in worrying over minor issues and problems. Fourthly, it grooms an individual and helps him or her to make a mark of his or her own. Individuals need to have a style of their own for others to follow. Do not blindly copy others. You need to set an example for the people around you. Personality development does not only make one look good and presentable, but also polishes one and makes one face the world with a smile. Finally, it helps the individual to develop certain skills that will showcase his or her personality, such as self-confidence, credibility, leadership qualities, and interpersonal skills.

To this extent, this study attempts an analysis to investigate whether certain cultural practices such as Gbeabe can grow and encourage personality development. This becomes the focus of the study.

Gbeabe is a culture in Ogoni whereby a chosen or favorite daughter is not given in marriage. She is made to remain in the family just like a son, to preserve family property and also to perpetuate the family lineage. Deezia (2020) also supports this claim that the custom of the Gbeabe culture, which operates in all parts of Ogoni, is a compulsory practice, especially in homes where the parents have no male children, i.e., all the offspring are females, in which case any of the female daughters has to be retained at home, or literally wedded to the father in order to ensure continuity of the father's name, family, and lineage. He further claims that the particular girl to be retained at home must meet the desire of her father before traditional ceremonies and rituals are performed.

Justifications for the Gbeabe culture

- ✚ Child birth mortality
- ✚ Single child
- ✚ More number of children
- ✚ Lineage continuity
- ✚ Protection of the family
- ✚ Preservation of royal blood
- ✚ Continuity of family traits

Child birth mortality: Incessant cases of child mortality in some families were another silent factor that gave rise to Gbeabe culture in Ogoniland (Mandus 2012). A situation whereby a family kept on experiencing child birth mortality and eventually the only surviving child was female, was made not to be given in marriage but retained in the family to perpetuate the family lineage as gbeabe. Although the practice of gbeabe culture may appear the same across the ethnic groups, the details vary from subculture to subculture within the Ogoni kingdoms. The Gbeabe is recognized when a family is unable to have the number of children of their own.

The single child: Any family with a single child (female) in Ogoniland automatically retains the girl at home for family continuity. The properties of the father are transferred to her on his demise, and the children of the Gbeabe claim ownership of the properties of their mother's father. She is respected and held in high esteem in the family. The children that come from her bear her father's name and are accepted by the family of the father. In the Gbeabe tradition, family planning mechanisms were never in the culture of the people of Ogoni and marriage was considered blessed by the number of children one could procreate.

Plenty Children: The greater the number of children in the family, the more he is recognized as a great and wealthy man in Ogoni land. The more children in the family, the greater the father's political and social status in the community. So, it was believed that the practice of Gbeabe culture could enhance the opportunity of having more children (Kembe Oral Interview) in Isaac (2017). More so, the people of Ogoni were predominately farmers. As such, farming activities require more hands, so the need for having more children for productivity was imperative. Significantly, Gbeabe culture was adopted by some fathers to attain this lofty goal and height. The Gbeabe procreates more children and, as such, compliments the father.

Lineage continuity: Traditional Ogoni society attaches importance to lineage continuity. And it is the main reason for the Gbeabe cultural practices in Ogoni land. The introduction and institutionalization of culture was a form of cultural intervention into what would have become a misunderstanding, the possible extinction of lineage (Mandus 2012). He further claims that it is against this background that families or marriages that are faced with the unfortunate situation of childlessness eventually have a girl child, and she becomes the Gbeabe to procreate for the family. As a result, male children were preferred in the traditional Ogoni family organization. According to Gba (2012), this is predicted on the notion that male children have the potential to perpetuate the family lineage, a cherished phenomenon in Ogoni land. In order to avert the most dreaded phenomenon of this continuity of the family lineage, Gbeabe culture

was instituted. Mandus (2012) strongly states that the Gbeabe is treated and regarded as the biological son of the family, with all rights and privileges accorded to him.

Protection of the family: As every society cherished male children, so did the Ogoni. Male children are symbolic in the traditional Ogoni family setting. In the absence of the father, they are seen as the safety and security officers of their home. Gba (2012) posits that conflicts among neighbors and communities are an inevitable element in traditional societies, as in the case of Ogoni. He further claims that the responsibility of the male child in the family is to protect the family from external aggression, communal crises, or situations of war. James's oral interview (2019) said women were regarded as weak in nature and, as such, lacked the capacity to protect the family in the face of any conflict.

It was also believed that in a situation where all the women in the family are married out and there is no male child in such a family, the landed properties and other inherited acquisitions would be shared by the other members of the family. The Thompson interview (2019) states that 'if not for the fact that he stood his ground after the demise of his father, his uncles and father's relations would have deprived him of his father's land'. This assertion was a regular occurrence in Ogoni land, a situation whereby land ownership was a case of survival of the fittest.

Against this backdrop, families lacking male children resorted to the practice of Gbeabe culture in a bid to protect their family properties in case of any incursion by the family members. The male child born by the Gbeabe takes the position of the son in the family, saddled with the responsibility of protecting the family property (Kiangbara interview 2020) disclosed that "he is today a source of joy to his grandfather." He further claims that his birth savaged the mother's father's lineage that would have been lost for not having a child. Regarding family names and protection, male children were of major concern to the people of Ogoni.

Preservation of loyal blood: As it is obtainable in any other traditional society, the people of Ogoni value and respect kingship. Ascension to the kingship throne in most African societies is by appointment or recommendation by the gods. But in the case of the Ogonis, it is different because ascension is hereditary. The first son of the family takes over the throne at the demise of the king. Where there is a reservation for the first son, such as a case of insanity or any incapacitated situation, any of the sons in the family is recommended for the throne, Mandus (2012). It is expected that whoever takes over the throne must come from the family of the king.

Paradventure the king does not have a male child, a selected daughter is pronounced a Gbeabe to bear a male child for the family who will eventually take over the throne and, as such, preserve the royal blood. The male children are treated like the biological children of the king, with all rights and privileges. As a result of this, the king's family is regarded as the royal lineage because whoever ascends the throne must come from the family.

Continuity of family traits: There are some important social activities that the Ogoni attach value to, and one example of these activities is wrestling. Wrestling is a cultural activity embraced and cherished by the young and old. Gborobe, interviewed by Isaac (2017), commented that wrestling was a cultural play that brought the entire community together in an atmosphere of joy and excitement by the dramatic and acrobatic display of the wrestlers. According to him, those who were endowed with this

act of natural strength were regarded as strong men in society and enjoyed the respect of their followers. He added that some families were known to have brave wrestlers.

In light of this, Gborobe noted that since the act of wrestling in Ogoni land was the preserve of men, if the next generation of such families did not have a male child to carry on the trait or what the family was known for, a selected daughter was made a Gbeabe to bear a male child that would potentially fill the vacuum.

Parents Perception and Culture

The perception and the decisions of parents towards girl children and culture must be redefined, especially the training of the girl child and her development. Most parents, in this sense, feel that training the girl child is a wasteful venture that has no gain. So, as faithful adherents to the culture of the people, parents would rather protect the girl children by keeping them at home and teaching them how to take care of the home. To support this claim, Tobi (2006) declares some parents' perceptions toward women's education: It is more expensive to train a girl in school than a boy. Girls, by their nature, will get pregnant, and that will disturb their educational career. Girls, after marriage, will drop their father's name and take on the name of their husband. Sending girls to school will deprive them of domestic training, which they will find most useful for their future matrimonial life and responsibility. Girls are more useful to the parents in the home than attending educational institutions, which should be left for boys. Sending girls to school deprives the parents of their service of domestic chores. Sending a girl to school will delay her getting married on time. Due to the preconceived notion that such women become too wise and wild to stay under the control of a man, men are too scared to marry women who have trained up to a university degree. For sustainable human capital development to be achieved in Ogoni land, certain harmful cultural practises against women and the girl child must be eliminated so that women will be recognised to harness their God-given potential as they constitute a large percentage of the population. Woke in Isaac (2017) supported this claim by saying that for Nigeria to sustainably develop, those cultural practises that violate the human rights of the girl child and women must be eliminated completely, especially when it has to do with human capital development. Another claim by Oluwatoyin (2013) reported that Nigeria needs women with creative and innovative abilities to transform her family, LGA, state, and nation's market-driven economy into a knowledge-driven economy, which will significantly impact the development of her nation. Isaac (2017) also states that the most viable and veritable vehicle for self-reliance and sustenance is human capital building. A nation cannot attain development if she neglects or refuses to make an impressive commitment to her human capital development.

Women play an important role in the education of their children. The influence they exert over the children is enormous and overwhelming. Therefore, women in every given society constitute part of the human capital, and if they are not adequately educated, the society suffers the impact of a devalued human capital. Adelralebe (2005) affirmed the role of women in nation building when he stressed that if you educate a man, you are educating an individual, but when you educate a woman, you are educating families and nations. The development of a place lies basically in the human capital of which women must be inclusive. This is why the education of a girl is very important because of the restructuring of social values, the definition of economic status, policy initiation, and the entire functional production process itself. There is no

doubt that the provision of adequate care, health service, growth, economic development, cultural protection, and inculcation of the right value system from the cradle depends very much on the educational system of women.

The psychological and emotional effects of the Gbeabe culture are enormous and can be very traumatic and devastating on women who may not be willing to stay at home in the name of lineage continuity. It is found that Gbeabe culture has hindered the development of most Ogoni girls because it is the joy and desire of every woman to feel the sense of acceptance of her personality and self-worth within the social environment (Isaac, 2014). She also claims that in Gbeabe culture, the girl child who is kept at home is exposed to some of the unfavourable experiences. There is no doubt that her status denies her the virtues of a wife, which are properly expressed in the content of a marriage. She is seen as a semi-woman due to the fact that she remained in her father's house all her life. She is not accorded respect among her fellow women and, by extension, society. Often, this situation causes depression, sadness, rejection, and mockery for her.

The Gbeabe becomes an object of ridicule by loose and sexy men who knock on her door at night for free sex. They have no husband, so they are free to all men. Isaac (2017) states that the Gbeabe cannot relate to married women in the community because they are seen as husband snatchers. The Gbeabe maintains a posture that isolates her from the group of married women, so that she will not be insulted. According to Ledibabari (Interview 2021), a lady who is kept at home by her parents in Gokana, discloses that she has always been accused by some married women in the community of taking the attention of their husbands. She further said that Gbeabe is not given the opportunity for self-development that would guarantee her a voice and a place in society. The reason for this, according to her, was the belief that if she is educated she may revolt against her family, as is the case in most families. She is expected to be within the confines of her family all her life.

Gbeabe is practiced for the purpose of procreation. Unfortunately, after the death of her father, who lavished her with love and imposed the culture on her, she and her children are left to their fate. At this point, she begins to labour to train her children without the presence of a father-figure. Gbeabe tends to suffer emotional problems because, no matter the number of children, no man, not even the biological father, takes responsibility for the upbringing of these children. The Gbeabe is always under pressure and directed to give birth every time, and since the biological father fails to take responsibility, the children end up not having a proper upbringing (Isaac 2014). She further claims that it is a known fact that in the process of socialization, the influence of a father figure is of major significance. As a result of these unfavourable conditions in their formative years, most of the children end up becoming a nuisance to society, compounding the woes of their mothers. Nwinee (2012) discloses that such children have low self-esteem and experience more poverty as adults when compared to children raised by both parents with adequate and proper parental care. He also agreed with the previous views by restating that children are more likely to be delinquent and engage in anti-social behavior since there is no father figure to exert influence on them.

Implications for Counselling

- ✚ Through effective counselling, parents and guardians will change their attitude towards their female children by taking decisions that will add value to the emotional growth of their daughters.
- ✚ Counsellors will sensitize families, community members and other stakeholders against prohibition of favorite daughters from marriage through the organization of seminars, workshops that people will be aware of what to do when the need arises.
- ✚ Effective counselling will be an eye opener to parents and families who are engaged in certain cultural practice that promote lineage continuity and procreation to explore alternative approaches such as legal adoption of children.
- ✚ Effective counselling will change and transform the behavior system of people by eliminating the obnoxious cultural practices having known the implications of practicing cultures that do not bring and encourage development.
- ✚ Counselling will be an eye opener to the victims of the obnoxious culture having known the implications of not going to school by practicing the culture.

Conclusion

An objective analysis of both phenomenon shows that Gbeabe as a culture inhibits personality development because Gbeabe is only concerned about family lineage, preservation of royal blood, continuity of family traits, single child and childbirth mortality without considering the capital development of the girl child.

Going by contemporary issues, Ogoni women are not in any way different from other women worldwide. So, the situation is not healthy for human capital development. The Gbeabe culture constitutes a threat to the educational opportunities of young girls in Ogoni. Again, for development to be sustainable and also achievable in a place, there must be an improved standard in the quality of human capital. Also, society must encourage and promote an atmosphere in which the girl child is free to make choices and decisions. It is also imperative to address this obnoxious and humiliating culture in Ogoniland that puts women/girl children in perpetual suffering, poverty, and backwardness.

Therefore, implicit in this study is the fact that education remains the only weapon in the fight against cultural impediments. It is also a catalyst for liberation from the limiting circumstances presented by harmful cultures. It removes all psychological, emotional, reproductive, mental, economic, and intellectual impediments and enhances the leverage to participate and contribute maximally to overall development.

Recommendations

1. Counselors should encourage parents to explore alternative approaches such as legal adoption of children instead of prohibiting their favourite daughter from marriage which is practiced as the Gbeabe culture by the Ogoni people through sensitization campaigns, the practice of Gbeabe is for lineage continuity.
2. The Government should encourage the girl child by introducing more educational programmes because “Education” is the fundamental human

right for all (women inclusive) that can develop her personality in order to avoid psychosocial problem.

3. Government, community leaders, should create policies that can encourage the girl child to evolve from powerlessness into a woman of virtue and integrity which envisages a better tomorrow.
4. Counsellors should sensitize parents and community leaders with the right information especially on the consequences of cultural practices that make women sub-servient, marginalized, bound and ineffective in the society.

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