THE PUBERTY RITES FOR GIRLS (VUKHOMBA) IN THE NORTHERN REGION OF THE NORTHERN PROVINCE OF SOUTH AFRICA: IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN’S HEALTH AND HEALTH PROMOTION

by

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submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

PROMOTER: PROF. R. TROSKIE

JOINT PROMOTER: PROF. M. DE JONGH

NOVEMBER 2001
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family, my husband Juda, my daughter Ntsako, my sons, Fumani and Nlharhi, the Shabangu family, Mndawe family and Maluleke family, my mother, my late father, my late grandparents and my late great grandmother, Xabela Nwanchimana, a great woman who dedicated her life to the health of women and children, and to all women who have dedicated their lives for the improvement of the health and social status of women in our country.
STUDENT NO: 574-774-5

DECLARATION

I declare that **THE PUBERTY RITES FOR GIRLS (VUKHOMBA) IN THE NORTHERN REGION OF THE NORTHERN PROVINCE OF SOUTH AFRICA: IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN’S HEALTH AND HEALTH PROMOTION** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references and that this work has not been submitted for any degree at any other institution.

Thelmah Xavela Maluleke

Date
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am immensely grateful to God for giving me this opportunity to complete this study, and give Him thanks and praise.

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ABSTRACT

Puberty rites are practised in many countries including South Africa. In South Africa the puberty rites have different names and different practices. This study focused on *vukhomba* among the Manchangana/Vatsonga. *Vukhomba* is conducted exclusively for girls who have reached menarche.

The purpose of this study was to explore the possibility of utilising *vukhomba* for the improvement of the health status of women. The study design is a qualitative, exploratory, descriptive contextual research study conducted in the Northern Region of the Northern Province among Vatsonga/Manchangana in four selected areas. The ethnographic strategy was used to gain access to the *vukhomba* to view and describe the rite from an emic perspective.

The sample included all girls who were initiates during January 1998 and December 1999 in the four selected areas, as well as *vadzabi, varileri*, initiated girls, initiated women and *vukhomba* elders who attended the initiations.

The techniques for data collection included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, key informant interviews and feedback workshops.

The findings indicate that *vukhomba* is conducted during the school holidays in order to cater for girls who are still attending school. The sexuality education in this rite is mainly about encouraging initiates to maintain their virginity for their future husbands. *Vukhomba* therefore teaches girls attending the initiation the facts of life. It was however, found that girls often attend the initiation for material gain and respect for elders. The content of sexuality education information given to girls during the rite is inadequate. Initiated women and girls wanted to gain more knowledge about their bodies, their health, menstruation, child bearing and pregnancy, contraceptives and pregnancy.

After reviewing the findings of the research an intervention programme was developed and discussed with the initiated women and initiated girls. *Vukhomba* elders accepted the
intervention programme, however, certain topics were not approved e.g. contraception. The intervention programme is expected to form part of the initiation programme in the future. Initiated community members will be trained to facilitate the activities of this programme.
KEY CONCEPTS

Acquired Immune-Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), contextual research, descriptive research, ethnography, exploratory, gender, health, health promotion, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), khomba, Manchangana, Mashobye, menses, menstruation, mentor, Mhinga, mudzabi, vdzabi, mudabe, Mukhomi, murileri, Ntlhaveni, puberty rites, qualitative research, ritual, sexual health, sexuality, sexuality education, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), teenage pregnancy, traditional, ukuthomba, Valdezia, Vatsonga, vhusha, vukhomba, women’s health, xikhombana.
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<td>SADHS</td>
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ANNEXURES

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CHAPTER 1.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION

In the Northern Province of South Africa, teenage pregnancy and unsafe abortions are still common. The Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) pandemic is growing with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection level estimated at 7.96 percent. The National Sentinel Surveillance Survey of antenatal clinic results suggests an HIV prevalence of 5 to 33 percent, an increase in the HIV infection at all ages. The highest infections were found in the 20-24 years age group, at 21 percent. Ten percent of antenatal clinic women under 15 years of age tested HIV positive in 1998. The estimated number of adults and children who died of AIDS in South Africa in 1999 is 250,000. Furthermore, since the beginning of the AIDS epidemic about 420,000 children have lost one or both parents to AIDS (UNAIDS & WHO 2000:3).

The latest statistics on teenage pregnancy could not be found. However, the 1994-95 statistics of the Northern Province health services suggest that of the 95,987 deliveries recorded during that period 25,628 were teenagers, which is a teenage pregnancy rate of approximately 26.7 percent. The following were identified as the causes of teenage pregnancy: lack of information, ignorance and myths about sexuality, non-use of contraceptives, and low socio-economic status (Kaseke 1996:4).

This alarming increase in HIV and AIDS infection among teenagers and the increase in teenage pregnancies in this area prompted this investigation. Four areas in the Northern Region of the Northern Province were selected for the study, namely Mhinga, Mukhomi, Ntlhaveni (Mashobye), and Valdezia.
1.2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Northern Province is one of the poorest provinces of South Africa with a population of 4.9 million. It is mainly rural (89%) with women in the majority (54%) (Statistics South Africa 2000: 8-9). It has a young population with almost 60 percent of the population below 20 years of age (Central Statistics Services 1995:12, 47). Women in this area are mainly of a low status, illiterate and poor. They constitute, for example, 57 percent of the illiterate group (Central Statistics Services 1995:52). Since literacy and the socio-economic status of a woman plays a major role in reproductive health in a province where more than 50 percent of the illiterate are women, then it means a large number of women have no access to information on reproductive health. Furthermore, social and cultural barriers prevent most of them from making decisions for themselves and their families. Raliphada-Muludzi (1997:88) suggests that norms of the society, customary marriages, and cultural expectations as social and cultural barriers prevent women in rural areas from accessing reproductive health services.

Since the introduction of free care at the primary health care level in South Africa, access to health services for the inhabitants of the Northern Province has improved. However, in some rural areas access to services is still a problem, people still walk more than five kilometres or use public transport to get to a primary health care centre. Access is more difficult for women who depend on other people to finance them or give them permission to visit a health care facility (Raliphada-Muludzi 1997:88).

Another problem is that some health facilities are overcrowded and people wait for a long time before the health providers see them. A study conducted by Hirschowitz & Orkin (1995:67) in South Africa suggests that half of the African sample in their study waited for a minimum of two hours before a health worker saw them. In such a situation health providers often have no time for health promotion and for providing health education to the community.
The available health facilities are not sensitive to the needs of teenagers. They do not give them the privacy they need and are not sympathetic and user-friendly. This makes it difficult for teenagers to seek professional assistance and advice when it is needed. Hence the lack of information, myths surrounding sexuality, and non-usage of contraceptives. Troskie and Raliphada-Muladzi (1999:40) state that patients visiting reproductive health services entered screening rooms with other patients. Adolescents indicated in a study conducted by Raliphada-Muladzi (1997:88) that providers of health services did not respect them and that they were treated as children. They also would prefer to have separate clinics for teenagers. Unfortunately at present, in the Northern Region there is only one youth clinic, run by the Planned Parenthood of South Africa (PPASA) in collaboration with the Department of Health and Welfare of the Northern Province. This clinic is only accessible to youths that live in the nearby villages. Because of the inaccessibility of health education and health services, women's health is in jeopardy. Should teenage girls be given the appropriate information through health education, these problems could be addressed and the health status of women could be improved. What needs to be taken into consideration is that the health services cannot manage to disseminate all health information on their own; other community resources must be looked at and utilised to help solve these problems.

1.2.1. Areas selected for the study.

The Northern Province is divided into seven regions - Northern, Lowveld, Central, Southern, Bushveld, Western region, and Bushbuckridge. (Figure 1.1). The regions are further divided into districts and fall under the District Transitional Local Council (DTLC). The District Transitional Local Council is divided into a Rural Transitional Local Council (RTLC) and an Urban Transitional Local Council (UTLC). The Rural Transitional Local Council is responsible for the rural wards and each rural ward has its own councillor. The wards comprise a number of villages, which are under the traditional authority (Chiefs and/or headmen) or community authority. In most cases people from the same language group constitute a village, for example: Vatsonga\Manchangana, Vhavenda, and Bapedi. This study concentrates on the Vatsonga\Manchangana based in
the Northern region in three traditional authority areas, Mhinga, Mukhomi and Nthaveni (Mashobye) and one community authority area called Valdezia. The researcher planned to undertake an in-depth study of puberty rites in each village. However, permission was granted in only three of the study areas.

Figure 1.1. : Map of Northern Province and the Selected Research Areas
1.2.2. Reasons for choosing these areas.

The four research areas in the Northern region were chosen because:

- they are not more than 100 kilometres away from one another for possible travelling between villages. This would save costs as well as time involved in travelling.

- the majority of the inhabitants are Manchangana/Vatsonga, the group on whose puberty rites (vukhomba) the study was based.

- because of their historical and socio-political background as discussed in 1.2.3.

1.2.3. The historical background of the selected areas.

Mhinga: The community has been in the area for decades and was minimally affected by forced removals. They were only moved from the Kruger National Park to the present area to join the headmen who were already settled there by the mid-1930s. Mhinga village shares borders with the Kruger National Park in the Punda Maria area. The community is under the leadership of Chief Shilungwa Cydrick Mhinga.

The Mhinga kingdom dates back to the 14th century when Mashakadzi established his kingdom called Nyandweni near the confluence of the Rivubye and Vembe (Limpopo) rivers, which presently mark the northern portion of the Kruger National Park. Mashakadzi became the founder of the Maluleke dynasty. Mashakadzi came from the Vanwanati clan that has its origin in the northern part of Mozambique. Mashakadzi’s kingdom was established three centuries before the establishment of the erstwhile province of Transvaal. The present head of the Mhinga Tribe, Shilungwa Cydrick Mhinga, succeeded his father, Sundhuza Adolph Mhinga, in 1993 (Mhinga [Sa]: 1-3).
Mukhomi: This area received a large number of people from different areas where forced removals were instituted. It has a population of about 6700 people with about 851 households. Females constitute 58 percent of the population. The statistics in the local schools indicates a total number of 437 teenage girls attending local schools. It was also indicated that there are some teenage girls who attend school in other areas. There is also another percentage (about 10 percent of those attending school) that is out of school (Estimates from the local schools).

The Mukhomi chieftainship originated from Hlengweni in Mozambique, when Humula left and settled at Shitsemba, where he died. His son Masungwini, who was forcefully removed from Shitsemba to the present Mukhomi area by Joao Albasini (Djiwawa), succeeded him. His son, John Risimati (Khatisa), succeeded Masungwini in 1947. As his son Hasani Lawrence was still too young to take the throne his brother Mzamani Daniel began acting as regent in 1970 and ruled up to 1980, when Hasani Lawrence was old enough to take over the throne. Hasani Lawrence died in 1991 and was succeeded by his younger brother Mkhatshani Richard, who is the present chief. Most of the people residing at Mukhomi were forcefully removed by the apartheid regime from the farms around Louis Trichardt called New England and from some areas in the former Venda homeland (Chauke [Sa] oral history).

Nthaveni (Mashoby): This is an area where people who had been forcefully removed from the Venda area and Kruger National Park in the late 1960s were relocated. It shares borders with the Kruger National Park in the east. It stretches from Mhinga in the North to Gidjana village in the South. Nthaveni is divided into ten (10) blocks (A to J) that are under different traditional leaders. Mashoby has about 421 households with a population of 4560, females estimated at 55 percent of the population. There are 319 teenage girls in the local schools. There are about 65 teenage girls (almost 20 percent of those attending school) who are out of school (Estimates from the local schools). The above figure does not include those who have never been to school.
The research was conducted at Nthhaveni block F in a village known as Mashobye. Mashobye is one of the three villages under Chief S. D. Nxumalo, who is also in charge of two other villages, Gidjana and Nghomunghomu. These villages came into existence as a result of the 1960s and early 1970s forced removals by the apartheid government. The families who first settled in these villages were removed from Thengwe in Northern Venda and from the Davhana area southeast of Venda. They were first settled under Chief Shikundu at Nkovanza village, then moved to the three villages mentioned above in 1969. Each village has a headman who is under Chief S. D. Nxumalo (Nxumalo [Sa]: 2).

The Gidjana chieftainship also has its origins in Mozambique. Gidjana was the son of Nkami, who ruled at Gidjana in the then Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique). During that time the senior chief (king) of the whole Vangoni tribe was Nghunghunyana, who ruled at Madlakazi. He was arrested and died in jail. After his death, a war broke out. Gidjana and Mpisana were defeated and then moved together to Wynburg (Mapulangeni) where they parted. Gidjana moved to the North and settled at Ingwenkulu now Davhana but Mpisana moved to Bushbuckridge and settled there. Gidjana died in 1941 and his son Dick Richard Magona was installed. Magona died when they were still on chief Shikundu’s soil. The tribe was removed to Nthhaveni block E and F where the Gidjana Tribal authority started functioning as an unproclaimed traditional authority on the 1st of October 1970 (Nxumalo [Sa]: 3).

**Valdezia:** This village is found twenty kilometres northeast of Elim. The Sapekoe farms surround the village except in the northern part. The Rivubye River borders the northern part. It has about 851 households with a population of 6812. Females constitute 55 percent of this population with about 30% being teenagers. There are about 551 teenage girls in the local schools (Estimates from the TLC office).

Valdezia is an area that had a mission station that might have influenced the community and their culture. The missionaries brought Christianity and education to the village. Valdezia, like the others, was also affected by forced removal, though some families remained behind and resisted forced removal. Valdezia is under what is called the
Community Authority, because the area does not have a chief or headman. The community is divided into sections that have a leader and Civic Association. Leaders in charge of these sections form the Community Authority. Valdezia has a member who represents them in the Elim-Hlanganani Transitional Local Council (TLC) (Marivate 1990: 1-5).

The Manchangana/Vatsonga found in Valdezia originated from Mozambique. They came to South Africa due to wars caused by Manukosi (Soshangana). Many people ran away and settled at Xipilongo. At Xipilongo, they met João Albasini who was staying in a fort at the foot of the Riyonde mountain range (Junod 1927: 169). In 1875 two missionaries, Paul Berthoud and Ernest Creux, wanted a place with many people to start their missionary work. They bought a farm and named it Valdezia. They settled in Valdezia and in 1923 began dividing the land and selling off small farms to the Africans at Mambedi. In the 1950s, the apartheid government ordered the people staying in Valdezia to move and some were moved to different villages in the former Gazankulu. The former Gazankulu government strongly expressed their opposition to the removal of people from the land that was rightfully theirs. It was only in 1985, after thirty (30) years, that the Apartheid government changed its mind and stopped the removal of people from Valdezia (Marivate 1990: 1-5).

1.3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is well documented that puberty rites or initiations for girls are about sexuality, sex education, and sexuality education. However, very little has been revealed about the content of the sexuality education. Stayt (1931:106) mentioned that in the puberty rite girls are taught the cultural rules of etiquette and obedience, and given sexuality education. Schapera (1946:100) also suggests that girls are warned not to sleep with boys before marriage. It is not clear whether this information is given to girls only during the puberty rites or whether it is taught to all girls in the community. The fact that teenage pregnancy and HIV/AIDS are increasing in the areas of the research could be an indication that the warning against sleeping with boys is not stressed during puberty rites.
or initiated girls do not practice what they have been taught. Furthermore, it could be an indication that the sexuality education during *vukhomba* is inadequate and does not meet the needs of the teenager of this era. According to the International Confederation of Midwives & World Health Organisation (2000:6) during the initiation rites the initiates are taught about sex and encouraged to become sexually active. Encouraging sexual activity among young people increases the risk of spreading sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS in the community.

It would therefore seem that as there is still an increase in HIV/AIDS and teenage pregnancy in the area of research that the purpose of the initiation rites as discussed above are not achieved.

It would therefore be interesting to determine what sexuality education is given during *vukhomba* and whether it has any influence on the sexuality of the initiated girls.

No literature could be found that compared initiated and non-initiated women, their sexual behaviours, teenage pregnancy rate, sexual health, self-esteem, and status in the society. It is also not known whether there is a difference in the submissive, obedient and subservient behaviours of initiated and uninitiated women towards men. Nor is it known whether the sexuality education given within the puberty rites has an impact on teenage pregnancy, STDs and achieving control over one’s own body. It is not within the scope of this research to make a comparison between the initiated and the non-initiated.

Having more information and reliable knowledge about the sexuality education content in the puberty rites, however, can shed light on what needs to be done to improve the sexual health of teenage girls in the community. Furthermore, the problems caused by lack of health care facilities could be relieved if teenage girls were given correct sexuality education during *vukhomba*. This research describes the content of sexuality education given to the girls, gender and health issues within the rite are identified and an intervention programme proposed to improve the sexuality education in *vukhomba*. 

9
1.4. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to:

- explore and describe the events and activities of *vukhomba*

- describe the content of the sexuality education given to girls in the *vukhomba*

- explore the possibility of utilising *vukhomba* for the improvement of the health status of women

1.5. THE THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

The theoretical framework of this study is based on a notion of women’s health that defines it as the entire range of issues that touch on illness, disease, wellness and wellbeing, and also on activities of prevention, diagnosing, healing, caring and curing. Health in this sense implies total wellbeing, which is not only determined by biological factors and reproduction but also by the effects of workload, nutrition, stress, war and migration, among others. The unequal power relations between women and men contribute to poor health among women. Furthermore, their multiple roles as biological reproducers, producers and homemaker have an effect on their health (Huggard 1994: 1-3).

Women’s health is an umbrella concept that encompasses gender, sexuality, sexual health, reproductive health, safe motherhood, and development. It aims at improving the health status of women from birth to death. There are three important factors that determine the health status of women. These are biological, social and cultural. They affect a woman throughout the developmental stages. However, this study concentrates on the adolescence stage. The biological factor, that is, the reproductive role, exposes women to STDs, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), and cervical cancer. The low social status of women exposes them to physical and sexual abuse, unwanted pregnancy,
poverty, and malnutrition. Because of their low status, women are denied basic education, thus making it difficult for them to access information that can improve their quality of life. In many countries, there are cultural practices that endanger the lives of women for example, female genital mutilation. Furthermore, in many cultures women are taught and forced to be subservient and obedient to men, resulting in unequal power in sexual relationships. This exposes women to physical and sexual abuse that often results in unwanted pregnancies and mental problems.

According to Koblinsky, Timyan & Gay (1993:23), the definition of women’s health should reflect the unique dimensions of women’s lives, their reproductive roles, biological reality, work and age as well as the social context in which women live. Reproductive health in this context refers to the ability of women and men to reproduce, regulate fertility, and practice and enjoy sexual relationships in a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and the absence of diseases of the reproductive process. In other words, women and men have a right to information, access to safe effective, affordable and acceptable methods of contraception of their choice and access to appropriate health care services. On the other hand, safe motherhood has been defined by Feuerstein (1993:8) as a way of creating circumstances within which a woman is enabled to choose whether she will become pregnant, and if she does, ensuring she receives care for the prevention and treatment of pregnancy and birth complications. In other words, safe motherhood is concerned with causes of maternal death, family planning, abortion, maternal morbidity, infertility, breast-feeding and female circumcision.

There are three approaches that are commonly used by women’s health activists to deal with women’s problems, namely, a human rights approach, a gender analysis approach, and a comprehensive and holistic approach (Huggard 1994: 1-16). The comprehensive and holistic approach and the gender analysis approach were used in this study. The comprehensive and holistic approach was used because of its focus on the health consequences of cultural practices, the ill health due to women’s work, maternal health, nutrition and female genital mutilation. The gender analysis approach identifies health
problems related to the gender roles of women for example, lack of involvement in decision-making related to their health. The human rights approach affirms that the human rights of women and the girl-child are an integral and indivisible part of their fundamental human rights. All three approaches were used for analysing puberty rites and for suggesting an intervention programme for identified gender, health, and sexuality issues.

1.6. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are to:

- determine the content of the sexuality education and sexual health information given during vukhomba in order to identify its strengths and weaknesses.

- identify gender and health issues related to vukhomba

- determine the reasons that encourage girls to go through the vukhomba

- identify ways of utilising the rite for the improvement of the health status of women by increasing their knowledge of their bodies, their sexuality rights, and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS, and the special cancers affecting women

- develop a programme to enhance women's health and health education for teenage girls.
1.7. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. What is the content of the sexuality education given to girls during the rite?

2. Why do girls attend the rite?

3. What are the gender and health issues related to the rite?

4. What intervention programme can be employed to deal with the gender and health issues identified and to improve the health status of women?

5. How can the puberty rites be used to improve the health status of women and increase their knowledge of their bodies, women’s rights, sexual rights, conditions affecting women, and the prevention of Sexually Transmitted Diseases, HIV and AIDS?

1.8. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study comes at an important time when, in South Africa, an initiative to introduce sexuality education in schools is under discussion. It is important to study traditional sexuality education in order to prevent misunderstanding between the sexuality education given in schools and that given during the puberty rites.

Furthermore, knowledge about the rites will also assist in finding ways of utilising these available community resources for the benefit of the youth. If sexuality education is introduced in schools only young people who are at school will benefit. Young people who are out of school will not benefit. In South Africa, especially in rural areas and poor communities, there are school-age children who are not at school and will miss out on sexuality education.
Another important point is that school-going girls also attend the puberty rites. Since the information given and practised during the rites is not known, this might contradict that given at school, causing a lot of confusion. This study is intended to contribute to preventing confusion and also to identify ways of reaching young people in the region.

Once a programme has been prepared to enhance the health education given during puberty rites, those who lead the rites can be asked to implement it. Should sexuality education include health education on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS, it could contribute to the HIV/AIDS awareness programme. This would help to combat the pandemic.

Teenage pregnancy with all its complications can also be avoided if the rites are used to give girls information on reproductive health.

1.9. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is restricted to the Northern Region of the Northern Province in three traditional authority areas, Mhinga, Mukhomi, and Nthaveni (Mashoby), and one community authority area, Valdezia. It was conducted among the Vatsonga/Manchangana present in the above-mentioned areas at the time of study.

1.10. CONCEPTS CLARIFICATION

1.10.1. Gender

Gender refers to “the definition of identities, roles and relationships of women and men that is formed by culture and society”. In other words, gender is a social identity constructed by culture and society, meaning that the society determines a set of behaviours that are expected from a man or a woman (Goosen & Klugman 1996:35). Gender covers the roles and expectations that society prescribes for women and men for example, “nurturer” for women and “provider” for men. Society expects men to be
strong and brave while women are expected to be submissive and obedient to men. Gender dictates how men and women must look, think, act and perceive the world that they live in and it further determines relations by prescribing roles for men and women. Furthermore, society assigns characteristics and expectations for women and men for example, beauty for a woman and strength for men. In this study the concept gender refers to the roles and expectations that society prescribes for women and men.

Gender can be defined as the set of characteristics, roles and behaviour patterns that distinguish women from men which are constructed not biologically but socially and culturally. The sex of an individual is biologically determined, whereas gender characteristics are socially constructed, a product of nurturing, conditioning, and socio-cultural norms and expectations. These characteristics change over time and from one culture to another. Gender also refers to the web of cultural symbols, normative concepts, institutional structures and internalised self-images that, through a process of social construction, define masculine and feminine roles within power relationships (Commonwealth Secretariat 1999:61).

Gender creates the differences between women and men, not according to their biological make-up, but because of the cultural meanings that are given to the biological and physiological events that influence people’s behaviour. It defines masculinity and femininity through a process of social construction and articulates those domains within power relationships. This means that, in gender, the differences between girls and boys and between men and women are not natural or biological, but are created, enforced and maintained by societal institutions (West 1993: 58-59).

Inequalities and discrimination have a profound effect on the development, health and wellbeing of women. In many societies men are more valued than women are, and women are expected to be subordinate to men. Gender is oppressive in nature. Gender, like any other form of oppression, dehumanises women, lowers their status and enslaves them to men. Gender oppression is kept in force by the societal norms, institutions and laws (Goosen & Klugman 1996: 35-43).
In this study the practices and information given to girls are analysed with a view to identifying gender issues that:

- Perpetuate or promote gender discrimination and stereotypes
- Promote oppression of women by men
- Promote submissiveness

1.10.2. Health

Health has different meanings for different people, depending on the socio-cultural situation. Health professionals and lay people also define health differently. People define health according to the situation they find themselves in. For example, participants in a primary health care workshop at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa defined health as follows:

Health is when basic needs such as decent and safe housing, nutrition and adequate food, employment, education, sanitation, safe water system and adequate clothing, recreation and rest are met. Health means quality of life, having choices, enjoying choices and taking responsibility for choices made (University of Western Cape 1992:22).

It is easy to detect that the people who gave this definition were without basic needs and perceived their situation as oppressive because they had no right to make choices.

According to Ewles and Simnett (1995: 3-14), there is a difference in perceptions of health between lay and professional people. Lay people perceive health subjectively according to their norms and expectations, while professionals view it objectively as being freedom from disease or disability. Culture, socio-economic status, and education influence the perceptions of health or illness. This means that health providers’ interests
also influence the perception of health professionals. Their interest often varies from that of the community who may be of a different class and culture. Sometimes their interests are even hostile to those of the community.

As the meaning of health differs from one group to another, and is influenced by the environment and social and cultural background, the researcher looked at health issues in the rites in a holistic manner. The Alma Ata definition of health was used. Health was defined as "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Health is viewed as a right, and as a right, it should be available, accessible, affordable and appropriate to all community members (Green 1992:7). Using the Alma Ata definition of health, the researcher identified the issues that affect the health of individual girls during and after the rites. The health issues were anything that affects and puts the physical, mental and social wellbeing of the girls at risk.

1.10.3. Health promotion

The Ottawa Charter defines health promotion as follows:

A process that enables people to increase control over and to improve their health. Health promotion involves the whole population in the context of their lives, targets the determinants of health, combines diverse methods that complement each other, aims at effective community participation and is a health and social activity (Dennill, King & Swanepoel 1999:121).

According to Millstein, Petersen & Nightingale (1993:13), health promotion among the youth should promote physical and mental wellbeing, healthy sexuality, good self-esteem, and a positive sense of self-efficacy and supportive relationships with family, peers and others. Furthermore, health promotion should provide opportunities for educational and occupational success. Health promotion must also deal with challenges that might interfere with the positive development of the youth.
Health promotion for the youth should aim at reaching all those in school and out of school to impart information about health, explore attitudes, values, and feelings about health, develop personal skills, self-esteem and positive self-image. Furthermore, health promotion must enable the youth to respond properly to peer pressure and make healthy choices (Kemm & Close 1995: 226). The intervention programme developed by the researcher is aimed at teenage girls in school and out of school. Furthermore gender and health issues that interfere with the health of the youth have been addressed.

1.10.4. Information

Information in this study refers to verbal instructions and messages given to the girl, songs, games, poems and any discussions that take place in her presence.

1.10.5. Khomba ya vakhegula

Khomba ya vakhegula is a special initiation for adult women in order to allow them into the puberty rites for girls. The rites take two days and only women and elders are allowed to participate. Sometimes instead of having this special rite the women are made to join in on the last day of a vukhomba that is already in progress and to attend the geregere and vujelejele rituals.

The researcher attended this rite during September 1996 as a result of failure to get information about the puberty rites. It was explained that the two-day initiation for adults is meant for uninitiated women who marry into families where initiation is still practised. The initiation started on a Thursday afternoon, when a group of women was sent by the elders to accompany the researcher to the initiation hut. In the hut she was given a blanket and instructed to sit next to the initiates who were also covered in blankets. She was told to watch the initiates and vadzabi (plural of mudzabi) carefully. The initiates and vadzabi danced in front of the elders. After the dances by the initiates and vadzabi, the elders started singing a song called A va nwi layeni. In the song, they mentioned the family member of each initiate, their relationship to her, and how she should relate to them.
After the session, the researcher was told not to discuss anything she saw during the initiation. During this period, she was not allowed to speak to her husband and was allocated one of the vukhomba elders to stay with her and share a room to make sure that the researcher did not communicate with her husband.

In the evening the swixuxelo was attended. The researcher was told to sit next to the initiates and watch. After the swixuxelo she went home with her mudzabi. The geregere and vujelejele and the activities of Friday and Saturday morning were also attended. She was then informed that her initiation was over and that she was no longer a xuvuru and was free to attend initiations and learn more about the activities.

There are similarities and differences between the adult and puberty rites for example,

- Both adult and puberty rites initiates do story-telling

- Both adult and puberty rites initiates watch the same geregere and vujelejele.

- The adult initiate is not undressed.

- She does not perform any of the dances that puberty rites initiates perform.

- The adult initiate is allowed to perform her day-to-day chores, though she is not allowed to talk to her husband.

- The adult initiate does not have a mudzabi and murileri

1.10.6. Practices

Practices in this study refer to any event and activities that are performed for the initiation of the girl, at her place of seclusion and at her home. The activities were recorded and analysed to identify activities that are good or harmful to the girls.
1.10.7. Puberty rites

There are debates about the use of the concept ‘puberty rites’ that were initiated by Van Gennep (1908: 67). He strongly argues against using this concept for ‘initiation rites’, “...it would be better to stop calling initiation rites puberty rites”. The initiation rites are described as rites of passage as the initiate changes from one state of being into another. They are usually performed when a person enters a new group and to become a member such a person has to undergo certain ritual experiences”. He argues that puberty rites should be limited to puberty. Brown (1969: 5) defines initiation rites as “a mandatory rite for all girls in a given society that is celebrated between their eighth and twentieth years”. This rite consists of prescribed ceremonial events.

Girls’ initiation ceremonies are rites of passage where the initiate changes from one state of being to another that is, from childhood to womanhood. Initiation rites are seen as an expression of fundamental social values and the focus of which is on relations established by marriage and the community. Furthermore initiation rites create solidarity among women and are used for passing knowledge from one generation to another. The initiation rites use secret language to teach the initiate (Raising 1995: 99).

Paige and Paige (1981:18) refer to the initiation rites for girls as the menarche rites and are described as mechanisms for initiating girls into adulthood. Richards (1956: 17) refers to them as puberty rites or female initiation ceremonies. Puberty rites mark the attainment of menarche as a sign of sexual maturity, fertility and social maturity. Lincoln (1981: 90) refers to them as women’s initiation, a process that a woman goes through, resulting in a change of status and becoming “fertile, productive, experienced and whole”.

The use of puberty rites in this study is in line with the definition of puberty rites as defined above by Richards (1956:17). The concept puberty rites is used in this study, because the researcher is aware of other initiation rites that girls go through before puberty for example, *museumetho*. Since this is the only rite for girls after reaching puberty
and menarche, it was found to be proper to use puberty rites for *vukhomba* and avoid confusion.

It is important to mention at this stage that initiation or the term puberty rites have different names in the different language groups where they are performed and the methods of practice also vary. Among the Vatsonga\Manchangana it is called *Vukhomba*. According to Junod (1962: 175) and Schapera (1946: 100) in Xitsonga it is called *Khomba or Khoba*. They decided to leave out the prefix *Vu-* and it changed the meaning. This will be explained later. Among the Vhavenda, the term puberty rite is called *Vhusha or Khomba* (Stayt 1931: 100) and it is called *Kgopa* among Bapedi (Hammond-Tooke 1981: 53). Among the Amampondo the puberty rite is called *Ukuithomba* (Bam [Sa]: 1). According to Stayt (1931: 100), the term *khomba* means dangerous, implying that sexual intercourse may result in pregnancy. Researchers who have done some work in South Africa on the initiation of girls all agree that *vukhomba* is about sexuality education, though the content of what is taught is not known, as high secrecy is maintained.

Puberty rites practices differ from one language group to another and from area to area. This is discussed in chapter 2. As in any other initiation the puberty rites are secretive and are open only to females who have been initiated. Furthermore, it is prohibited to talk about the rite in the presence of men and uninitiated females, referred to as *maxuvuru*. This might mean that information gathered by an outsider might not be a true reflection of what is happening. It was for this reason that the researcher found it necessary to go through the two-day adult rite. Studying the rites as an insider gave a more comprehensive picture. Importantly, it shed more light on the content of the sexuality education.
1.10.8. Ritual

According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary (1991: 1189), a ritual is the series of actions used in religious or other ceremonies. La Fontaine (1985:11, 38-40, 99) defines a ritual as a social action that requires organisation and the co-operation of individuals directed by a leader. Rituals are hierarchical in nature and entail admission to a secret society. The people who have gone through the ritual take an oath not to tell outsiders. The puberty rites consist of a series of activities and rituals that an initiate goes through in order to claim the new title of being an initiated girl. The activities and rituals are also not shared with uninitiated people. If a person has not gone through these rituals she is referred to as a xuvuru and does not belong to the society of the initiated women.

1.10.9. Sexuality

Sexuality refers to the way people feel about themselves (self-esteem); the way they feel about their bodies and the way they use them (body image); the roles they take on and the expectations other people have of them (social roles) and the way in which they relate to others (relationships) (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies [Sa]: 4).

Sexuality does not just mean sexual activity; it is a concept that encompasses the sexual behaviour and function, as well as the individual’s awareness of her/his body. Feminists see limiting sexuality to sexual intercourse as a patriarchal definition based on men’s needs and satisfaction. Sexuality is further described as a form of expression that begins at birth and continues throughout the individual’s life, involving the physical, emotional, social and intellectual aspects of the individual. Sexuality includes the full range of issues that relate to the sexes and the relationships between them. It is influenced by the societal norms and social conditioning around sexual behaviours (Kenya Women’s International Association 1993: 3-5). In this study the sexuality information given to the girls was analysed from the feminist point of view taking all the above into consideration.
Sexuality is shaped by the following:

- How we feel about ourselves
- How we feel about our bodies
- Belief in our abilities

In other words, if we like ourselves, feel comfortable with our bodies, and believe in our abilities, we are more likely to be comfortable with our sexuality. Our culture and the society in which we grow up and live largely determine how we feel about our sexuality (Goosen & Klugman, 1996: 248).

An individual’s environment from birth to death affects her/his attitude to sexuality and sexual activity. This environment refers to the individual’s culture, which includes family, peers, religion, school, law, the media, the economy, communication, and decision-making skills. Vukhomba forms part of the environment and might have an influence on sexuality and sexual health. By analysing the practices and the information given one can determine how vukhomba influences sexuality and sexual health.

1.10.10. Sexuality education

Different terms, for example, sex education (Fine 1988:29) and sexual health education, are used to refer to sexuality education (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies [Sa]: 5).

Sexuality education is a lifelong process of acquiring information and forming attitudes, beliefs and values about identity, relationships and intimacy. It encompasses sexuality development, reproductive health, interpersonal relationships, affection, intimacy, body image and gender roles. Sexuality education addresses the biological, socio-cultural, psychological and spiritual
dimensions of sexuality from the cognitive, affective and behavioural domain including the skills to communicate effectively and make responsible decisions (National Guidelines Task Force 1992: 3).

Sexuality health education is a process that allows individuals to analyse their views about their own and others' sexuality; freedom and constraints within their culture and socio-economic situations that affect the way they express their sexuality. Furthermore, sexuality education assists individuals to evaluate their sexual relationships with others; how their decisions can lead them into relationships that maintain their self-esteem, health and life and how they can maximise enjoyment of sexuality and minimise the risks (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies [Sa]: 5-6).

Sexuality education, according to the National Health and Population Department (1992: 6), means

Giving the child the knowledge, according to age of healthy relationships between boys and girls, men and women, husbands and wives. It means preparing the child for adolescence and eventually for marriage.

Sexuality education gives the facts about menstruation, sex, pregnancy and married life. In other words sexuality education prepares the individual for marriage and parenthood. This definition assumes that relationships are between people of different sexes and leaves out relationships between same sexes. It further assumes that every child will end up married and have children. It assumes that there are certain values and standards that are prescribed, though it is not clear whose values and standards are being referred to. The definition seems to be related to the sexuality of girls and therefore reinforces the gender roles.
1.10.11. Sexual health

Sexual health has been defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as:

The integration of physical, emotional, and social aspects of sexuality in a way that positively enriches and promotes personality, communication and love.
(International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies [Sa]: 5).

The term sexual health refers to the physical aspects of people’s sexual lives (for example, pregnancy, childbirth and sexually transmitted diseases) and the emotions, which allow us to develop as full human beings. Sexual health involves thoughts, emotions, body and self-esteem. Sexual health is seen as a basic right that “allows us to enjoy our sex lives because we are in control without limiting the enjoyment and control of others”. It is further seen as the positive expression of a person’s sexuality (Hughes 1994:4).

Sexual health includes reproductive health that is,

all the decisions concerned with having, or not having children and how this affects our lives and bodies. It is not just about sexual intercourse and reproduction. It is about issues such as self-esteem, self-expression, caring for others and cultural values. It is a right of all individuals (Hughes 1994: 4).

Furthermore, sexual health includes sexual life free from diseases, injury, violence, unnecessary pain, or risk of death, fear, shame, guilt and false beliefs about sexuality (The Alan Guttmacher Institute 2000: 2).

Although sexual health is seen as a right, in many societies this can be seen essentially as a man’s right. Men in most cultures determine when to have sexual intercourse with a woman and the number of babies to be born into the family. Women are often denied their right to sexual health by social, political, economic, cultural and psychological forces. To promote sexual health in the community there is a need for programmes that
will create self-awareness and an understanding of sexuality and sexual behaviour (Hughes 1994: 4-5). The present study looked at how the vukhomba practices and information given to girls are encouraging or discouraging women from achieving or demanding their sexual rights.

1.10.12. Vatsonga/Manchangana

Vatsonga/Manchangana in this study refers to people who speak Xitsonga/Xinchangana and are found in the Republic of South Africa. They are found in many areas of this country with the majority in some parts of the Northern and Lowveld regions of the Northern Province. Historically the Vatsonga/Manchangana originated from Zimbabwe and Zululand and converged on Mozambique. Due to wars they divided and moved from Mozambique and settled in such areas as Bushbuckridge, Tzaneen, Giyani, Malamulele, and Hlanganani (Mathumba 1993: 41-48). According to Junod (1927: 28), many Vatsonga/Manchangana immigrated into the Northern Province between 1835 and 1840. According to Schapera (1946:100), the history of the Vatsonga/Manchangana also reveals the presence of puberty rites. However, these rites among the Vatsonga/Manchangana in the Bushbuckridge area are no longer practised. Information that the researcher gathered indicated that it was only practised among the Vahlangana tribe and not among the Amashangana. The informants explained that the rites were communal and performed in a big hut next to the home of the person who was in charge. The initiation in this area was the responsibility of one woman called NwaMadlemu Khosa. The last puberty rites were performed in the early sixties before her death and since then no puberty rites have ever been performed. According to the informants, lack of a strong traditional healer led to the disappearance of vukhomba in this area. It was further explained that to host a communal initiation the host must be a very strong traditional healer to protect the initiates, because they are vulnerable to bad spirits and witches. The owner of the initiation must protect the initiates from witches and make sure that no initiate dies during the initiation process.
1.10.13. Vukhomba

The word vukhomba in Xitsonga is derived from the word khomba that refers to a girl who has reached menarche and is seen as being in the developmental stage. According to Junod (1927:575), the life of an individual among the Vatsonga\Manchangana consists of a succession of stages. The individual proceeds from one stage to another through ceremonies that are connected to a number of taboos. The taboos are strictly observed.

Among the Vatsonga\Manchangana there are different names for the different stages of development. To clarify this point these stages of development will be explained.

- In the early developmental stages, until puberty, the names given to the stages are the same for both girls and boys, until puberty for example, xihiangi, n’wana and ricece.

- When a girl’s breasts start budding, she is referred to as a thugamama, meaning “someone whose breasts are coming out”. However, the initiated women and girls also use thugamama for uninitiated older girls and women as a form of mockery.

- When a girl gets her first menses she is referred to as khomba and is fit for the rites.

- After the puberty rites the girl is referred to as nhwayana, which means “girl” or rather a mature girl.

- A girl will remain a nhwayana until she gets married, or has proved that she is sexually active by having a child, and will now be called wansati.

- Traditionally among the Vatsonga\Manchangana a girl is not allowed to be sexually active until marriage and being sexually active means you are a woman wansati and often referred to as wansati hikuva u tiva vavanuna that is, she is a woman, because she knows men (sexually active).
• Once a woman has a child she is called *mubvana*.

• During middle age she is called *ntswatsi* and *mukhegulu* suggesting she has reached the menopause.

The stages of development of a woman are seen in the context of her reproductive activities, physiology, and relationship with men.

Traditionally girls among the Vatsonga/Manchangana are supposed to go through the puberty rites. With the introduction of Christianity and modern school-based education girls were discouraged or prevented from attending *vukhomba*. Some families stopped taking their girls to *vukhomba* and in some areas a Christian type of *vukhomba* was introduced. Thus, there are two types, the traditional and the Christian. This study only concentrates on the traditional *vukhomba*.

The discussion above shows that Christianity and school-based education did not manage to completely eradicate the need for the puberty rites and this could mean that *vukhomba* is still considered a very important event in a girl's life by the community. Another factor contributing to this could be that the majority (about 80 percent) of families in these villages practice both Christianity and African religion. It must also be mentioned at this stage that girls that belong to the Christian faith still prefer to attend the cultural programme. As it is well documented that in many cultures parents do not discuss sexuality issues with their children, it might be possible that *vukhomba* was the only place available for women to discuss such issues.

The puberty rites are usually conducted during school holidays as most of the initiates are still at school. Girls and women in the village who have already been initiated attend it. In this study the latter will be referred to as the participants. Most of the proceedings of the initiation take place at night when the participants are free from their daily duties.
In this study, *vukhomba* refers to the traditional rite for girls that takes place exclusively for a girl after menarche among the Vatsonga/Manchangana. *Vukhomba* happens anytime after the first menses, for example, after a week, months or even years later, depending on the family. It is a period of seclusion and this is referred to as “being in the hut”. *Vukhomba* also denotes an age group. If, say, a girl who started menstruating one or five years ago goes through *vukhomba* with the group that has just started menstruating she is treated as though she is in the same age group as the others. She is expected to respect all those who had been initiated before her even if they are younger than she is. Another name for *vukhomba* is *ku cineriwa* that is, “danced for” and one who has gone through the rite is addressed as *U cineriwile* that is, “They have danced for you”. These statements suggest that the girl does not dance but that other people dance for them. This implies that the initiate watches while others dance. The puberty rites of the Bemba people called *Chisungu* are also described as ‘dancing the girl’ (Richards 1956:59).

When the girl is undergoing *vukhomba* she is called *xikhombana*. Each girl who is a *xikhombana* has a mentor called *mudzabi* (plural *vadzabi*). This *mudzabi* is responsible for all the needs of the girl and she is the only one who touches her. The initiate only does what the *mudzabi* tells her and they do it together, and the *mudzabi* is not allowed to leave the initiate unattended. Another important person in *vukhomba* is the person the girl confided to when she realised she was menstruating, and this person is called *murleri* meaning ‘cried to’. *Murleri* is also referred to as *mhani wa vukhomba*, meaning mother of the initiate. In each rite there is a chief *vukhomba* elder who comes from the royal house to supervise the rite and is usually the traditional leader’s wife, mother or sister. It is important to mention at this stage that there is a special rite for girls who have had children before initiation and adults who have not gone through the rite. This is a two-day rite often called *khomba ya vakhegula* and which is discussed in 1.10.5.
1.10.14. Women’s health

The health of women has been on the international agenda for many years, though primarily viewed in relation to reproduction. The programmes and services to address women’s health needs consisted exclusively of family planning and maternal health interventions (Doyal 1995: 21-25). A change in the way women’s health is viewed and women’s health needs are addressed came into being in the 1990s. This new view of women’s health focuses its attention on the full range of factors that affect women’s physical, social and mental wellbeing, namely, socio-economic factors, the social status of women, gender related factors, demographic factors, political factors, health policies, education and literacy, and environmental factors. Furthermore food and nutrition, domestic division of labour and overwork, local customs and traditions, endemic diseases, violence and exploitation, reproductive health problems, mental health problems and disability also have a profound effect on the health status of women (Goosen & Klugman 1996: 1-29). This study focuses on establishing the impact of vukhomba as one of the traditional practices involved with the health of women.

The move to women’s health was initiated by participants at a conference held in the Rockefeller International Study and Conference Centre in Bellagio, Italy in February 1994. Women at this meeting were concerned about the poor health which millions of women experience because their gender caused them to be seen as producers only and denied them access to health services. Furthermore, they challenged women’s health status indicators because they focused on reproduction and did not include the socio-economic context in which they occur (Huggard 1994: 1-16).

1.11. METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative, exploratory, descriptive and contextual research project conducted in the Northern Region of the Northern Province of South Africa among the Vatsonga\Manchangana in four selected areas. The ethnographic strategy was used to gain access to the vukhomba to view and describe the rites from an emic perspective.
Data collection was carried out using the following methods: participant observation, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and semi-structured one-to-one interviews. **Chapter 3** discusses these methods.

### 1. 12. ORGANISATION OF THE REPORT

**Chapter 1** is devoted to the orientation of the study. It states the problem, the background of the problem, the purpose and, significance of the study, and research questions. The key concepts of the study are also discussed. The areas selected for the study and reasons for selecting them are described in detail.

**Chapter 2** reviews and discusses the literature relevant to the puberty rites. The information was categorised according to the research questions concerning puberty rites, sexual health and sexuality education, gender and health issues, the reasons for attending puberty rites, and programmes that can improve the health and status of women. There is evidence of the existence of puberty rites in several countries in Africa, the Caribbean and South America. They mark the end of childhood and the beginning of girlhood and adulthood, and girls are initiated to gain respect in society.

**Chapter 3** presents the research methodology. Sampling procedures and ethical considerations for the study are discussed. Methods of data collection, data analysis, limitations, and data validation are presented.

**Chapter 4** deals with the analysis, description and interpretation of the collected data. The process of analysing the data is discussed in detail. Information from the initiates, initiators, parents of the initiates, community leaders, teachers and church elders is analysed and presented as feedback to the research participants for verification. Feedback workshop inputs were analysed and integrated into the report.

**Chapter 5** describes the daily activities and events of the first initiation observed by the researcher. It also highlights the similarities and differences in the initiation process of
the three vukhomba observed. Furthermore, the vukhomba initiation process is compared with puberty rites in other countries.

Chapter 6 presents the findings of the study and also indicates how the objectives and questions of the study were answered. The content of the sexuality education is outlined. Furthermore it discusses the suggested intervention programme.

Chapter 7 presents conclusions and recommendations according to the theoretical framework, namely, a human rights approach, a gender analysis approach and a comprehensive and holistic approach.

Annexures

These describe the research method/technique and present a sample of the data collected using each method.

1.13. SUMMARY

The Northern province is mainly rural and one of the poorest provinces of South Africa. It has all the characteristics of a developing country, namely poverty, illiteracy among women, lack of access to information, and inadequate health services in some areas. HIV/AIDS among teenagers is on the increase. Teenage pregnancies and unsafe abortions are still a problem in some areas. The province is divided into regions: the Northern, Lowveld, Bushveld, Western, Southern, Central and Bushbuckridge.

Traditionally among the Vatsonga\Manchangana, Vhavenda and Bapedi in the Northern Region the girls go through the puberty rites after reaching menarche. There are debates in the literature on whether these ceremonies are puberty rites or initiation rites. However, most researchers agree that the puberty or initiation rite for girls is about changing from one stage to another, sexuality, sexuality education, and sex education.
This study focuses on the puberty rites of girls among the Vatsonga 'Manchangana known as vukhomba. Four traditional authority areas were selected and three puberty rites were studied. The puberty rites, activities and information given to girls were studied to determine the content of the sexuality education that is given. Gender and health issues within the rite were identified and intervention programmes developed. Different qualitative research instruments were used to collect data, namely participant observation, focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, key informant interviews, and feedback workshops. These are discussed in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews the relevant literature. The review is divided into five sections, namely literature related to:

- Puberty rites
- Sexual health and sexuality education
- Gender and health issues
- Reasons for attending puberty rites
- Programmes that can improve health and the status of women

Different studies conducted in these areas are discussed, compared, and analysed in detail. The names of the puberty rites differ from country to country and from one cultural group to another. Furthermore differences in the way they are conducted are also evident.

2.2. PUBERTY RITES

Studies on puberty and initiation rites for girls have been conducted in several countries and within different cultures. Mainly men who were missionaries in these areas conducted them. However, it should be noted that “information regarding initiation is extremely difficult to obtain particularly for a male researcher” (Mönig 1967:124). This
difficulty results from the fact that it is taboo to discuss female initiation with men. In the present study the researcher also experienced difficulties in discussing puberty rites with men for example, fathers of initiates, male teachers, and church elders. It seems as if men see vukhomba as offering special privacy for women or as a space that men should not invade. On the one hand, the lack of interest in the details of vukhomba could stem from the cultural notion that men do not discuss women’s matters. It is not manly to discuss women’s activities and issues. However, the excitement fathers exhibit, and the preparations and money they are prepared to spend on the initiation of their daughters does not tally with the above-mentioned cultural notion. On the other hand, since the activities in vukhomba are secret, women could be jealously guarding them, making it impossible for men to talk about them. In one of the research areas the initiated women refused to participate in this study, because the researcher talked to the traditional leader before talking to them.

Earthly & Haddon (1933: 109-135) conducted a study of the puberty rites among the Valenge found in Gazaland in Mozambique, the then Portuguese East Africa. The language of the Valenge was described as Thonga-Shangaan. The puberty rites for girls here were called Ambula or Ambatsa. They were compulsory except for the disabled. A secret language, symbols and figures, for example, manyike, are used in the rites. These initiations were conducted at the chief’s kraal and an entrance fee was paid. The Ambula/Ambatsa were under the leadership of the Nyambatsu, who is referred to as the mistress of the rites. The chief pays the Nyambatsu for her services and each initiate was assigned a chaperon. Although the chief is responsible for paying the Nyambatsu, no evidence could be found that suggests his participation in the initiation of girls, except offering sacrifices to the ancestors. In a study by Richards (1956:17) the owner of the Chisungu, which is the puberty rite of the Bemba people, can be a woman or a man. For example, the chief can be the owner of the rite if the rite is organised for his sisters or a new wife. In each rite there is a mistress of the rite who leads the dances and organises it. In a situation where the chief owns or has financial involvement there is potential for exploitation and abuse of the situation, which might lead to interference with the initiation or even taking away control of the initiation. In vukhomba the owner of the
initiation is the initiate, though there is a supervisor of the initiation who is called *phorisa ra vukhomba*. The *phorisa ra vukhomba* is a woman who is chosen by the *vukhomba* elders to lead the initiation. The chief and other males have no influence on the initiation process.

The origin of the Vatsonga/ Manchangana in this study is similar to that of the Valenge studied by Earthy & Haddon (1933: 103-135). However, the names of the puberty rites and some of the activities are different. For example, no evidence could be found in the present study to suggest that the puberty rites among the Vatsonga/Manchangana in the Northern Province of South Africa were once conducted in the chief’s kraal. It was indicated in the feedback workshops, however, that this practice is found among the Vhavenda. Among the Bapedi, as soon as a girl gets her first menstruation she is secluded and only family members are involved in her initiation (Mönig 1967: 124-125). As in *Ambatsa*, in *vukhomba* the family pays an initiation fee to the tribal office for each initiate, but the chief does not contribute anything towards the initiation of the girls. The preparations, ancestral sacrifices and financing are the responsibilities of the initiate’s family and the initiation is a responsibility of the initiated women and girls. Although the chiefs’ or headmen’s wives are usually chosen to be the supervisors of *vukhomba*, the chances of interference by the chief or headmen seem to be remote. The control of the initiation seems to be only in the hands of women only.

The secret language, symbols and figures are still used in the *vukhomba* and each rite is under the leadership of the *phorisa ra vukhomba*, who supervises the initiation. The *manyike* referred to by Earthy & Haddon (1933: 103-105) seem to be the figurines called *managa* which are revealed to the initiates at the *vujelejele*. Initiates at the *vukhomba* have a *vadzabi*, who seems to be the chaperon indicated by Earthy and Haddon (1933: 110). The functions of a *mudzabi* in *vukhomba* are similar to the functions of a mentor in nursing, which are mainly to facilitate, guide, assist and support the novice in learning new skills, adopting new behaviour, and acquiring new attitudes. To do all this the mentor should be qualified and experienced in her field of specialisation (Quinn 1995:188). The *mudzabi* in *vukhomba* is an initiated girl who has completed her
initiation. In *vukhomba* the girl remains an initiate for the whole year. When there is an initiation she sits with the initiates and participates in their activities. See chapter 5. After finishing her one year of initiation she is now allowed to be a *mudzabi*. This suggests that although *vukhomba* is said to be one week long the actual length of the initiation period is in fact one year.

According to Earthy and Haddon (1933:110), the initiation rites are about nude dances, singing and the deflowering of the girls with a horn. Nude dances are done on the last day of *vukhomba*. However, the reason and meaning of this could not be established. It could mean that *vukhomba* gives the initiated participant a sense of freedom, security and time to enjoy her body. However, nude dancing by the initiate might not have the same meaning to her.

It is quite surprising to find deflowering of girls practised among the Valenge, because in most African cultures a girl’s virginity is respected and is something used to show off at the time of marriage. For example among the Amampondo girls go into a seclusion period as soon as they reach menarche. During this period they are taught how to take care of themselves and not to get deflowered (Bam [Sa]: 1). This is similar to what Schapera (1946:100) found among the Vatsonga, Manchangana and Vhavenda. The puberty rites are accompanied by singing and dancing and initiates are made to recite formulae, which are about sexual functions. At *vhusha* girls are warned not to get deflowered and are taught ways of having sex without penetration. The girls are beaten and made to stand in cold water (Schapera 1946:100).

There is evidence that virginity tests are still practised for example, in Kwazulu-Natal (Ntsingila & Ndiyane 1998:18). The efforts to preserve virginity are one of the reasons that encourage some African cultures and Muslim groups to practise female circumcision, to make sure that the girl’s virginity is maintained. Female circumcision is detrimental to the health of women (Johnson & Rodgers1994:71). No evidence of the deflowering of girls was found in the *vukhomba*.
During a special rite for adults, the researcher was asked about the horn by one of the vukhomba elders.

Where is the horn that the maxuvuru always talk about when they talk about the puberty rites? We do not use any horn or touch the girls’ vagina, but we let them believe what they want to believe happens. We do not correct them, because that is the way we identify those who have never been to vukhomba.

This statement is similar to what La Fontaine said about secret societies - that the secrecy in initiations is often seen by outsiders as evil. “Secrecy has allowed free rein to contemporary fantasies and obscured much of what actually happened” (La Fontaine 1985:40).

Mönnig (1967: 124-125) views the puberty rites among the Bapedi as rites of passage. The girl is instructed on how to behave. After the initiation the girl is referred to as kgarebe, which means “girl” or rather “mature girl”. This is an indication that the puberty rites among the Bapedi are not a transition from childhood to womanhood, but to “girlhood” and this is similar to what has been discussed in Chapter 1 about vukhomba among the Vatsonga\Manchangana. This might mean that even among the Bapedi a woman (mosadi) is a person who is sexually active or that lobola has been paid for her.

Persons (1990: 47-49), in a study conducted among the Basanga in South Zaire, suggests that the initiation rites are a transition stage from childhood to adulthood. It is about acculturation into a new social group and accepting responsibility for a person’s own behaviour. Furthermore, it is defined as a ritual and a medium for teaching a worldview. The acculturation value of the initiation influences the cognitive element of the initiated as it is a reflection of the beliefs of the group. Teaching takes place using the cognitive and affective domains. It takes place through repetition and ordeals and the initiates gain knowledge related to socially approved attitudes towards the prescribed roles (Persons 1990:51). In vukhomba learning also takes place through reading for example, milawu, demonstration for example, dances, singing, and repetition of some of the rituals.
The focus of *Chisungu* is on nobility, fertility and motherhood and is usually done for girls who are already betrothed. It is characterised by singing, dancing, special drum beats and mimes. Richards (1956:17) gave an outline of the *Chisungu* rite, which is about 23 days in duration, and after the rite, the girl is married. The initiation rites as described by Lutkehaus and Roscoe (1995: 33-36) is an all-women event. It involves seclusion, a series of exchanges and a display of health. It also involves transvestite behaviour and is concerned with procreation.

According to Brown (1969: 57-73), initiation for girls occurs in societies where a girl does not leave her home after marriage. In this type of society the initiation is used as a measure to proclaim her changed status. The initiation ceremonies are also found in societies where women make a notable contribution to subsistence activities. Since the girl has an important role to play in the life of the society she is given special assurance of her competence through the rites. The puberty rites in these societies were mandatory and were celebrated between the age of eight and twenty years. They serve as an announcement to the girl and those around her of her changed status from childhood to womanhood. In the olden days *vukhomba* was also mandatory and served as a milestone along the journey from being a *thugamama* to a *nhwanyana* and also as an announcement to the community that there is a girl who is fit for marriage.

Raising (1995: 99-103) studied initiation rites for girls in Zambia. The study suggests that initiation rites are an expression of fundamental social values. The focus is on relations established by marriage and the community. The ritual is perceived as the property of ancestors who are the founders of all social life and the rites should therefore be handed on. Initiation is seen as crossing the border from childhood to womanhood and becoming a full member of female society. A woman who has not been initiated will stay on one side of the border and is considered an outsider or *Cipelelo*. High rates of teenage pregnancies are attributed to lack of initiation rites. This sentiment was also echoed in the *vukhomba*, though the *vukhomba* elders felt that the changes in the initiation were responsible for the teenage pregnancies among initiated girls. Virginity testing was seen as the only way that could prevent girls from indulging in early sexual activities.
Krine and Krige (1947: 113) suggest that girls go through harsh treatment and that this is looked upon as discipline. The girls are instructed in the rules related to the stage the girl is now entering. She is also warned to be careful in any sex play with boys because she will fall pregnant. The rites involve dancing during the night. Although initiates are not subjected to beatings, the exercises and dances that are performed in *vukhomba* can be classified as harsh treatment for a person who is performing them for the first time. *Vukhomba* also warns initiates about playing with boys and the initiates are also given rules related to the stage the initiates are entering. This is done through songs and *tingoma* during *vujelejele*.

La Fontaine (1985:11, 38-40, 99) discusses two categories of initiation rituals, namely the ritual of admission to secret societies and rituals that mark the passage between childhood and maturity (Initiation to adult status). The secret societies are defined as organisations that emphasise secrecy, whether they are legitimate or illegal, while the latter is a ritual to establish a social identity. They are both described as rites of passage and have many similarities. La Fontaine (1985:7) argues that there is a difference between the ritual of initiation into adult status and puberty rites. Puberty rites are related to development of breasts and menstruation. However, La Fontaine acknowledges that some societies perform both puberty and initiation rites. Taking into consideration the discussion above, *vukhomba* can be classified as both rites of passage and initiation rites, because *vukhomba* is only done for social identity purposes for girls who have reached puberty.

According to La Fontaine (1985:11, 38-40, 99), the ritual of initiation is a ritual of admission to the secret society. A ritual is defined as a social action that requires the organisation and co-operation of individuals directed by a leader. Rituals are hierarchical in nature, they carefully guard their secrets, and an oath is taken not to tell any outsider. Because of this secrecy outsiders often believe that there are evil things done in the secret society. La Fontaine gave several examples of secret societies: the Ku Klux Klan, Free Masons etc.
The initiation ritual inducts a new member into the secret society. The secrecy guards their initiation ritual against outsiders and initiates have to swear to that. The initiates go through ordeals, for example, circumcision, which can even kill them, at the end the initiates are given new names to mark their new status, and there is public feasting and gift-giving to celebrate their achievement. The initiate is first stripped of the attributes that identify her with the world outside the society. Then she is separated from her former existence, but not given a new identity (Marginal stage) (La Fontaine 1985: 38-40).

*Vukhomba* seems to be a ritual that inducts the initiate into a secret society as described above. In *vukhomba* the undressing of the initiate and making her wear the traditional G-string seems to be a way of stripping away the attributes that identify the initiate with the outside world. During the initiation the initiate’s name is not used. Instead, she is referred to as *xikhombana* (the Xi- prefix is used for non-human objects), which is a way of separating the initiate from her former existence as a human to become an object without identity. At the end of her *vukhomba* the initiate is requested to give herself a new name to mark her new status and a public feast and gift-giving marks the end of the initiation. As in all secret societies, *vukhomba* initiates do not discuss their initiation with uninitiated people.

According to Lincoln (1981:92), the goals of initiation for girls are to make a person stronger, better, and knowledgeable, and to radically separate her from her childhood existence. Initiations also create a new useful member of the society through practical training. Female puberty rites are about the shaping of emotions and behaviours that are acceptable to the community (Lutkehaus & Roscoe 1995:12). Cohen (1964:45) suggests that the changes that occur in an individual at puberty cause confusion and great emotional and psychological vulnerability that makes it easy for the society to make a permanent imprint on the personality.

The purpose of initiating women and men is different and serves to preserve the social status quo. It does not change the nature of the society, but reinforces the gender roles that society has prescribed for men and women. In other words it does not challenge the gender discrimination and inequalities in society. In a patriarchal society the initiation for
men is an installation to power (power over women) and it changes the person from one level to another in the society, while initiation for women does not change their place in the hierarchy of the society (subordination to men). The initiation of women takes place within the home (a place for a woman), and thus within a woman's normal living space. But, the initiation of men takes place in the bush (out of their normal living space) which gives them a chance to explore the world outside the home environment. In vukhomiba, the initiation usually takes place in the hut that is used as a kitchen, which is a way of reaffirming that the place of a woman is precisely there in the kitchen. The initiation does not change the women's status in society or make them powerful, but is just an experience of growth (See figure 6.1) and an acknowledgement of their existence in society (Lincoln 1981: 92-95).

Lincoln (1981:92) further discusses the implications of initiations when they are done by men or women. He argues that if women are responsible for the initiation of girls it is a rite of solidarity; but if men are responsible it is imposed on women and is about indoctrination, subjugation and assault.

2.3. SEXUAL HEALTH AND SEXUAL EDUCATION

The concept of sexual health came to the fore when the United Nations declared the 1980s as the Decade of Women. Many organisations and networks started focusing on women’s health. This led to redefining women’s health and the expanding of mother and child health and family planning, leading to the development of two concepts: sexual and reproductive health. It was also realised that the health of adolescents was neglected (SIDA 1994:7).

Sexual health was defined by the World Health Organisation as:

The integration of the somatic, emotional, intellectual, and social aspects of sexual being in ways that are positively enriching, and that enhance personality, communication and love (International Family Health[Sa]: 3).
SIDA (1994: 7-8) defines sexual health as psychosexual development, sexuality, sex roles, family life and human relationships. This study concentrated on four sexual health activities, namely, health promotion programmes targeted at sexual health, sexuality and gender, health information and health care programmes for STDs, HIV and AIDS.

The sexual health programmes mentioned above have taken into consideration the three basic elements of sexual health suggested by Koontz and Conly (1994:3) in the process of empowering the girls. These three basic elements are:

1. The capacity to enjoy and control sexual and reproductive behaviour in accordance with social and personal ethics

2. Freedom from fear, shame, guilt, false beliefs and other psychological factors inhibiting sexual response and impairing sexual relationships

3. Freedom from organic disorders, diseases and deficiencies that interfere with sexual and reproductive functions

Since the United Nations’ declaration on sexual health many countries have introduced sexual health as a subject through sexuality education. Sexuality education aims to provide accurate information about sexual health, and assist the youth in acquiring skills that will help them make decisions. Furthermore sexuality education develops the youths’ interpersonal skills and helps them to exercise responsibility regarding sexual relationships (National Guidelines Task Force 1992:3).

According to Koontz and Conly (1994:1), sexuality education aims at addressing the sexuality health needs of the youth. That is, it improves the knowledge and understanding of sexual development, human reproduction, and healthy sexual behaviour among the youth. Addressing the sexual health needs of the youth requires the use of comprehensive approaches. Sexuality education should be linked to contraceptive counselling and
services and efforts should be made to address the social context of adolescent sexuality and eliminate harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation.

The National Guide Task Force (1992:3) suggests six key areas of concentration that should be included in a comprehensive sexuality education. These are human development, relationships, personal skills, sexual behaviour, sexual health, and society and culture. According to the National Health and Population Department (1992:4), sexuality education takes place anywhere and at any time. It is a socialisation process that expresses values, attitudes, personal knowledge and feelings surrounding sexuality. *Vukhomba* is a socialisation process that seems to address some of the key areas of sexual health, namely, personal skills (for example, dancing and women's daily chores), cleanliness (for example, personal hygiene) and society and culture (for example, the *A va nwi layeni* teaches the initiate about society and culture).

In many countries, including South Africa, the majority of sexually active adolescents lack access to reproductive health education. Some schools in South Africa have sexuality education programmes, but the majority of South African youths have no access to them. A comprehensive sexuality education programme for schools has been developed and it forms part of the curriculum. It is known as "The Life Skills and HIV/AIDS Education Programme in Schools" and has been developed by the National Department of Health and the Department of Education. Some people argue that the inclusion of sexuality education in the South African schools curriculum will make the girls become promiscuous (Crewe 1996: 8). This, however, is not consistent with the findings of a study done by the World Health Organisation in thirty-five countries where sexuality programmes have been in place for some time. Their findings suggest that sexuality education does not encourage earlier sexual activities but that it delays them, leading to safer sexual practices (Koontz & Conly 1994:2). It would therefore be interesting to determine what sexuality education is given during the *vukhomba* and whether it has any influence on the sexuality of the initiated girls.
Many Western countries have sexuality education programmes that encourage the youth to delay first intercourse. Sweden, which is one of the countries with the most progressive policies of sexuality education, uses the comprehensive approach. There are special adolescent clinics linked to the school that provide family planning and abortion services. The Swedish experience indicates that provision of sexuality and gender education in schools has decreased teenage pregnancies and abortions. The Swedes also have programmes for adolescents who are outside the school system. The United States of America has programmes that only promote abstinence and there is no indication that sexual activities among the youth have actually decreased (National Guidelines Task Force 1992:3). This could serve as a guideline for information that should be given during the initiation rites.

Fine (1988: 43-45) argues that the abstinence approach to sexuality education and school-based health clinics does not enhance the development of sexual responsibility among adolescents. She suggests that there should be a good sexuality education curriculum, school-based health clinics, access to free confidential family planning and abortion services, and sexuality information.

After reviewing the literature on sexual health and sexual education it has become clear that sexual health is important for the development of the youth. In an area like the Northern Province, where teenage pregnancy and HIV/ AIDS are increasing, sexuality education should be available for all youths to address their sexuality health needs. They should have knowledge and understanding of sexual development, human reproduction, and healthy sexual behaviour, which is a need that has been indicated in the focus group discussions held with them. As the puberty rites already address some aspects of sexual health, having more information on sexual health in vukhomba would strengthen the sexuality education given there and limit sexual problems that young girls experience. To address the sexual health needs of the youth requires the use of comprehensive approaches.
2.4. GENDER AND HEALTH ISSUES

As already indicated in chapter 1, society prescribes roles and assigns characteristics to women and men, which have a profound effect on the health of the individual. Some examples of the gender characteristics for women are beauty, tolerance, passivity, dependence, obedience, subordination, and self-sacrifice. Gender characteristics for men are self-reliance, self-confidence, independence, aggressiveness, and fearlessness. Tables 2.1. and 2.2. indicate some of the characteristics and their impact on the health of the individual.

Table: 2.1. Gender characteristics of women and their impact on the health of the individual

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Effect on the health of the individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beauty</td>
<td>Since being slim is considered beautiful some women or girls starve themselves to death, suffer from anorexia nervosa and bulimia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerance &amp; dependence</td>
<td>Women are expected to be tolerant; because of this many of them stay in abusive relationships and suffer physical and emotional abuse. Many women stay with their abusers because they are dependent on them and they feel they are not going to manage to live on their own (Goosen &amp; Klugman 1996:69).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedience and subordination</td>
<td>Patriarchal society expects women to be obedient to the elders and men. They are expected to be subordinate to men, even to their own children. Their subordinate position makes it difficult for them to negotiate for safer sex practices from their partners which in turn makes them vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS (Doyal 1995: 7-14).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-sacrifice</td>
<td>Division of labour is gender biased; women have more tasks than men do. Meanwhile women are not paid for their household tasks and women usually eat last when there are food shortages in families, resulting in health problems. Women feel that they have no right to assert their own needs and desires in a situation where males are dominant (Doyal 1995: 7-14).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table: 2.2. Gender characteristics of men and their impact on the health of the individual

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Effect on the health of the individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-reliance, self-confidence, independence</td>
<td>Men usually refrain from discussing their problems or ask for help when they need it, leading to emotional imbalances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Because men do not depend on another person for money to visit a doctor they usually seek help when they need it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressiveness and fearlessness</td>
<td>Leads men to getting into fights and getting injured.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender roles, like prescribed gender characteristics, also affect the health of the individual. According to Vlassoff (Sa: 1), women’s lower status in society influences their health status. Women, because of their status, are often victims of abuse and violence. Their low status also reduces their access to educational information, health services, and information about their health. “Women are primary providers in the family in most cultures. Therefore seeking help for their illness may create role conflict…” (Vlassoff (Sa: 2). As providers of care, women tend to ignore their own health problems and seek treatment for their children and other family members. Another issue that prevents women from utilising the health services when they have a need is the lack of gender-sensitivity in the provision of health services and the unsatisfactory relationship between health providers and women. Jacobson in Koblinsky et al (1993:21) cited lack of information about the available services, lack of freedom, costs, cultural circumstances, poverty, long distances, and quality of service as major obstacles to seeking health care.

Although poverty affects women and men, due to a gender-based division of labour, and their central role in the household, women do the bulk of the work. According to Williams, Seed and Mwau (1994:100) many women in the world live in poverty and poor health, but they perform two-thirds of the world’s work. They earn one tenth of the world’s income and own less than one-hundredth of the world’s property. Women’s
social, political, economic and cultural position is lower than that of men. In the last
decade, poverty amongst women has increased due to high unemployment rates. The
cultural and socio-economic environment that women find themselves in is a
disadvantaged social position that exposes them to diseases, injuries and malnutrition.
Furthermore, it makes it difficult for them to access and use health services. This social
position perpetuates poor health, malnutrition, teenage pregnancy, frequent pregnancies,
and poverty (Tinker, Finn & Epp 2000:10).

Jacobson in Koblinsky et al (1996: 4-6) describes poverty among women as a disease,
which has the following symptoms: chronic anaemia, malnutrition and severe fatigue.
Patients are susceptible to respiratory and reproductive tract infections. The diseases are
communicable and mainly female children are affected. Poverty has an impact on the
health of the individual. In many countries, including South Africa, the poorest of the
poor are rural women and they have limited access to health services. They have to walk
long distances to a health care facility. Sometimes they are faced with cultural barriers
that prevent them from seeking health care (Koblinsky et al 1996: 4-6).

It is normal in some societies for a man to have more than one sexual partner, which
might lead to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS. On the other
hand, as women are expected to be sexually available to their husbands, they might not be
able to refuse sex or demand safer sex and thus might end up with sexually transmitted
diseases or HIV/AIDS.

After reviewing the literature on gender and health issues, it has become clear that gender
roles and characteristics have an impact on the health of women. Secondly, the gender
roles and expectations prescribed for men and women determine the way men and
women react to their health needs. In a situation where culture still enforces gender
discrimination, abuse and violence are still common. Women need to be taught ways of
protecting themselves against abuse at a very young age. The puberty rites could be used
to create awareness about gender and health issues among the youth and women who are
attending the rite.
2.5. REASONS FOR ATTENDING PUBERTY RITES

Literature suggests that girls are initiated in order to gain respect in the society. Some girls are forced into initiation, as in the case of those abducted and forced into initiation by unknown women (Khupiso 2000:4). Cory (1956:27) does not discuss the reasons that make girls attend initiation, though he suggests the purpose of puberty rites and describes them as a way of creating a new and useful member of the tribe.

2.6. PROGRAMMES THAT CAN IMPROVE THE HEALTH AND STATUS OF WOMEN

At the Beijing Conference of 1995, women outlined their plan of action to address the plight of women in the whole world. They identified critical areas that affect the status and health of women and also suggested some actions that their governments need to work on. The plan is used as a guide to improve women’s status and to reform governments and government policies. The areas of concentration identified were:

- Women and health
- Women and unequal education
- Women and conflict
- Women’s inequality in access to economic structures and policy-making and women in the reproductive process
- Women and decision making
- Mechanisms to promote the advancement of women
- Women and human rights
• Women and the media

• Women and the environment

• Violation of the girl-child’s rights


The South African government has worked hard to develop policies that address most of the issues that were outlined at the Beijing conference. However, there are some constraints on the implementation of some of these policies. These constraints range from lack of understanding of the policies to lack of commitment on the side of the service provider. The lack of knowledge about the available services and policies leads to a lack of demand for the service as women are not aware of the services and policies that are available to them. One of the objectives of this study is to improve the information on sexuality and health issues given to girls during the vukhomba. This could be a method for making women aware of the services and facilities available to them.

According to the Commonwealth Medical Association (1995:2), to improve the health status of women, programmes should address the following:

• women’s rights to health

• use of the life-span approach to enhance the physical, social and mental wellbeing of women

• women’s health needs that is, the mental, physical and social problems of women

• access to services and the quality of care
• women as health care providers

• research (multi-disciplinary research was recommended)

• follow-up mechanisms and resources for the successful implementation of women’s health policies

It is believed that some of these issues could be addressed during vukhomba for example: women’s right to health; women’s health needs; access to services, which are in line with the three approaches to improve the social and health status of women.

Huggard (1994: 4) suggests three approaches that can be used to improve the social and health status of women in the community: the human rights approach, the comprehensive and holistic approach, and the gender analysis approach. The human rights approach recognises that women’s health has been neglected in the past and aims to rectify this inefficiency by recognising women’s rights. These include rights to access to health services, freedom of choice, nutrition, and safety in the home, freedom from discrimination, educational opportunities, and occupational health. Furthermore, the human rights approach also addresses violence against women and disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

The comprehensive and holistic approach examines the factors that influence the societal and health status of women in a holistic manner. It covers the whole life span of women so as to identify the cumulative effects of adverse factors throughout the woman’s life, as all do not attend school. The comprehensive and holistic approach addresses the health consequences of violence against women, ill health resulting from women’s work, maternal health, nutrition (from infancy to old age), and female genital mutilation. The gender analysis approach addresses women’s health problems that are a result of women’s biology and gender-related factors.
The discussion above indicates that there are many factors that affect the health of women due to their biological make-up and status in the society. It is clear that a single approach cannot address all the women gender and health issues. Thus, a combination of all the approaches is needed to uplift the status of women and to address health issues throughout their life span.

There are many organisations in South Africa, governmental and non-governmental, that are fighting against sexism and gender discrimination, and working towards improving the status of women. In the government sector there are gender commissions in the different provinces that are guarding against gender discrimination. Some of the non-governmental organisations that deal with gender and women’s issues are the Women’s Health project, the African Gender Institute, the Centre for the Study of Violence and the Reconciliation and Sexual Harassment Education Project, to name a few. These organisations run different programmes that address gender issues and women’s health. However, since most of these organisations are urban based they have very little impact on the lives of the rural poor. The intervention programme for this study will provide some information of women’s health that will benefit the initiated women and initiated girls. The plans to expand the programme to schools and other women in the community will improve access to information in rural areas.

2.7. CONDITIONS THAT AFFECT WOMEN AND HEALTH EDUCATION

There are various conditions that affect women at different stages of their development. There are some conditions that cut across the stages for example, malnutrition and communicable diseases. It is important to have health promotion and health education programmes that address these conditions. The health education programmes must include nutrition and healthy eating and prevention of communicable diseases.

Conditions that affect the youth include substance abuse, anorexia nervosa, bulimia, sexually transmitted diseases, dysmenorrhoea, stress, and depression. Health promotion and education programmes in addressing these conditions should include sexuality
education and mental health programmes. In South Africa the life skills and HIV and AIDS programme in schools and youth clinics gives students skills that enable them to develop a positive sense of self, decision-making, problem-solving, assertiveness and negotiation skills. In the life skills programme by Rooth (1995:33-144) communication skills, countering prejudices and discrimination, prevention and management of stress are also included. The Planned Parenthood of South Africa (PPASA) life skills programme also includes contraception, teenage pregnancy, sexual abuse, and substance abuse. The above life skills programmes cover the aspects that the youth need in order to grow and be responsible citizens.

Adult women are faced with conditions related to reproduction, cancer of the breast and cervix, hypertension, diabetes, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, sexual and substance abuse, and sometimes depression. The proposed health promotion and health education programmes at this level should include parenting, the prevention of STDs, HIV/AIDS, cervical and breast cancer, and living with hypertension, diabetes and HIV/AIDS (Goosen & Klugman 1996:151-153).

Conditions that affect aged women are menopause, hypertension, strokes, heart attack, osteoporosis, arthritis, obesity, insomnia, and depression and memory loss. The health promotion and education programme for this age group should include exercise, safety, and coping strategies for physical problems and memory loss.

Since this study concentrates on the youth, the conditions that are addressed by the proposed health promotion and health education programme include STDs, HIV/AIDS, sexual and substance abuse, stress, and depression. Furthermore, the educational programme also includes nutrition, assertiveness and problem-solving skills. After reviewing the literature on the importance of health education for women’s health, it has become clear that an occasion when young girls come together is the ideal opportunity to inform them about reproductive health. This will prevent young girls experimenting with sex and then finding themselves pregnant. It could also assist in preventing STDs and
HIV infections. Since the vulkomba brings together schooling and non-schooling girls, it could be an ideal place where health education could reach all girls.

2.8. SUMMARY

There are clear differences in the way the concepts of puberty rites and initiation rites are used in the literature. However, there seems to be an agreement that puberty rites and initiation rites are rites of passage, from one state of being to another, namely from childhood to womanhood. Studies done in different countries suggest that the initiates go through ordeals and endurance to become part of the initiated society. Initiates are taught the rules and behaviours of their new social status and take an oath not to divulge the secrets of the ritual. Secret language, symbols and figures are used in the teachings of initiates. Scholars agree that the initiates are given sexuality education in these ceremonies.

There is an interrelationship between sexuality, gender, and women’s health as related to the improvement of the status of women. These concepts address gender discrimination in the society and health sector. Gender roles affect the health of women and men; though women are more affected than men, because of the multiple roles prescribed to them by society. The refusal by vulkomba elders to include information on the male reproductive system in the intervention programme might make it difficult to explain some health problems that are a result of gender roles prescribed to women and men.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the methodology and techniques that were used in the study are discussed in detail. The study involves exploratory qualitative ethnographic research. The research techniques used to collect data were participant observation, focus group discussion, semi-structured interviews, key informant interviews, and feedback workshops. The data were analysed and communicated to the communities involved through dissemination workshops.

3.2. STUDY DESIGN

The study was designed to be qualitative, exploratory, descriptive and contextual, and conducted in order to understand the activities in the puberty rites from the perspective of the community involved in the study. Ethnography was used as a strategy to discover the nature, attributes, characteristics, and meaning of *vukhomba*. This study is qualitative because one of its purposes was to describe and analyse the *vukhomba* as a cultural practice. It is exploratory research, because its purpose was to find out what is happening in *vukhomba* as a cultural event. Furthermore, this study is descriptive because the behaviours, events, beliefs, attitudes, structures, and processes occurring in *vukhomba* are documented (Leiningser 1991:112; Marshall & Rossman 1989:78).
3.2.1. Qualitative research

Qualitative research according to World Health Organisation (1994:4) is:

A research approach that seeks to describe and analyse culture and behaviour of humans and their groups from the point of view of the people being studied. Its emphasis is on providing a comprehensive or holistic understanding of the social setting in which the research is conducted.

In qualitative research, the researcher spends time with the community to develop rapport and identify potential sources of bias. Qualitative approaches allow the researcher to explore reality from the perspective of the participants - the emic perspective. Furthermore, qualitative research approaches are described as an inductive and interactive process that gives a holistic perspective of a cultural event. In qualitative approaches, much attention is paid to the meaning, understanding, and experiences of the research subjects (Brink 1996:12, 119). Data collection in qualitative research is done through observation, interviews, documents and audio-visual materials (Creswell 1994:151). During this research, the researcher spent a total of four weeks in the actual puberty rite. This enabled the researcher to closely observe the participants. The rite took place in the cultural environment, which enabled understanding of the experiences of the participants. Post vukhomba interviews made it possible to examine the initiates views about the rite.

This study described and analysed vukhomba as a cultural practice, the activities, events, and views of the different participants in order to provide a comprehensive report of this cultural event. Participant observation, interviews, and audio-visual techniques were used to collect data and these are discussed later in this chapter. This enabled the researcher to explore the process, meaning, and understanding of the vukhomba.
3.2.2. Exploratory research

Exploratory research describes the phenomenon in question and identifies themes, patterns and meaning. By using exploratory methods, much insight about the phenomenon is gained (Brink 1996:11; Marshall & Rossman 1989:78). The strategies used in exploratory studies are field and case studies and data collection is through participant observation and interviews. Woods and Catanzaro (1988:50) explain “explore” as scrutinising unknown regions with the purpose of discovery. The exploratory methods used in this study included participant observation and interviews. As the researcher was an adult initiate, she could participate in the initiation process. Rapport was achieved which assisted with the interviews. Insight into the rite and experiences of the participants was gained. In this study the unknown territory of this rite was explored to gain insight into the various phenomena involved, and to determine what health education was given to the girls. This method also suggests that the researcher be prepared not to let pre-conceived ideas influence the research study (Mouton & Marais 1993: 431).

3.2.3. Descriptive research

Descriptive research documents and describes the behaviours, events, beliefs, characteristics, attitudes, structures and processes that occur in a phenomenon. It gives complete and accurate information about the phenomenon that is being studied. This information is gained through participant observation and interviews. The documented information on the phenomenon is analysed and classified to provide new insight into the phenomenon (Brink 1996: 10-11). In this study, an accurate description of the vukhomba was achieved through phenomenological interviews and observations. With the assistance of audio-visual equipment an accurate description of the behaviours, events, beliefs, characteristics, attitudes, activities and processes of vukhomba could be given. The interviews and follow-up interviews further enhanced accuracy.
3.2.4. Contextual research

The contextual approach describes uniqueness and differences, and distinguishes characteristics (Botes 1991:7). This research considers the experiences of the girls who attend the vuKhomba in certain areas within a certain region of the Northern Province and therefore refers to a specific group of people at a specific time in a specific region. Within this context there is a need for change to improve the health education received by young girls.

3.2.5. Ethnography

Ethnography is referred to as a strategy for or a method of qualitative research. It is a means of accessing the beliefs and practices of a culture. It is described as a “strategy rather than a method” that can be used in conjunction with other approaches, such as qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, to describe a culture. In other words, ethnography allows the researcher to “understand another way of life from the point of view of those being studied” (Hudelson 1994:79). Ethnography is the study and analysis of the viewpoints, beliefs, experiences, and practices of a particular culture. Ethnography “must include both a description of behaviour and demonstrate why and under what circumstances the behaviour took place” (Morse & Field 1996:6). A description of the behaviour of the initiates during vuKhomba is given in the analysis of the data. The views of the participants in vuKhomba were gained through the interviews conducted after completion of the initiation process.

According to Brink (1996:121), ethnography uses the following data collection methods, participant observation and unstructured interviews. Interviews are usually conducted with the most knowledgeable person. These are known as key informant interviews. Ethnography describes the phenomena from either the emic or the etic perspective. The emic perspective describes a phenomenon from the perspective of the researched “insider’s point of view” while the etic perspective describes it from the researcher’s
(outsider) point of view. In this study the emic perspective was used to describe and interpret events and practices in the *vukhomba*.

Although ethnography developed from social anthropology it has also moved to other disciplines for example, nursing. Ethnography in nursing was popularised by a nurse anthropologist called Leininger. She developed her own understanding and interpretation of ethnography and named it ethnonursing (Brink 1996:121). According to Leininger (1991: 74-79), the purpose of the ethnonursing research method is to establish a “naturalistic and largely emic open enquiry discovery method to explicate and study nursing phenomena related to Culture, Care, Diversity, and Universality”. In other words, ethnonursing assists nurses to systematically document, describe, understand, and interpret the meaning of people’s daily life experiences and symbols that have a bearing on the human care, health, and well being of individuals and communities. According to Morse & Field (1996:6), health care researchers are involved in studying cultural practices and beliefs so that the provision of health care may be culturally acceptable and relevant to the needs of the community. This study sought to examine the practices and beliefs of *vukhomba* to determine how health education that is acceptable and relevant to the needs of the community in the areas studied could be implemented. The experiences of the initiates during *vukhomba* as they relate to their health and well being are systematically documented and described in the following chapters, 4, 5 and 6. The needs of the young adults were identified and made culturally acceptable by presenting a a programme prepared by the researcher to the community, discussing it with them and making changes accordingly.

### 3.3. THE POPULATION AND SAMPLING

A population is defined by Brink (1996:132) as a group of people or objects that are of interest to the researcher and meet the criteria the researcher wants to study. In this study the population included all girls who were initiates during January 1998 and December 1999 at Valdezia, Mukhomi and Ntlhaveni (Mashobye); and all participants in the initiation. One puberty rite in each of these villages was studied. The selection of the
puberty rites was done through a random sampling method. The puberty rites scheduled during the time of the study in each village were listed and one rite was selected. This was done to reduce sampling bias. Purposive non-probability sampling was used to select subjects who participated in the focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. This method was used to select individuals who were involved in initiation and had knowledge about *vukhomba*. Secondly it gave the researcher an opportunity to select subjects who represent individuals who had no knowledge of what was happening in the initiation and were also not participating in them. The advantage of the purposive non-probability sampling is that it gives the researcher an opportunity to select the sample based on knowledge of what is being studied. Its disadvantage is that it easily lends itself to sampling bias, and generalisation of the results is very limited (Brink 1996:141).

3.4. RESEARCH METHODS/TECHNIQUES

Table 3.1 below shows the research methods/techniques, the total number of focus group discussions and interviews conducted, and the number of participants or respondents for each instrument.

Table 3.1: Research methods/techniques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research instrument</th>
<th>Total number of discussions conducted</th>
<th>Total number of participants or respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus group discussion with <em>vukhomba</em> elders</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group discussion with initiated women</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group discussion with initiated girls</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group discussion with church women</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group discussions with girls who have reached puberty (<em>Thugamama</em>)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interviews <em>murileri</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview with parents</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview with <em>mudzabi</em></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview with initiates</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key informant interviews: Chief supervisor of <em>vukhomba</em></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key informant interviews: Traditional leaders</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key informant interviews: Teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key informant interviews: Church elder</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback workshops</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
<td><strong>247</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4.1. Participant observation

Participant observation was conducted in the three villages where permission was granted. The researcher stayed in the village in order to gain access to the events and activities in the life of an initiate. The researcher attended one randomly selected vukhomba in each area and was present during all the steps of the ritual. The researcher spent days and nights in these villages. Thus, an in-depth study of the puberty rites was done at Nthhaveni (Mashobye), Mukhomi, and Valdezia. Table 3.2 below indicates the average number of people per initiation. The researcher was only allowed to use an audiotape to record the proceedings in the initiation. Since the light in the initiation area was poor, note-taking was not possible. Transcriptions of the recordings were done immediately after each session in a well-lit area.

Table 3.2. Average number of participants in each initiation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Initiation Participants</th>
<th>Nthhaveni</th>
<th>Mukhomi</th>
<th>Valdezia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of initiates</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of vadzabi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of varilerti (plural of murilerti)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of initiated girls per day</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of initiated women per day</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of vukhomba elders per day</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Bernard (1988:150, 182), participant observation is a strategy that facilitates data collection in the field for both qualitative and quantitative research studies. The researcher as participant observer tries to experience the life of the informant as much as possible. The researcher becomes the research technique and therefore she or he must be able to speak the language of the people under study.

The investigator participates in any activities appropriate for a person of the status which is assumed, observes what others do and sees through the eyes of a member of the culture rather than through those of an outsider (WHO 1994:18).
Participant observation is an all-encompassing strategy and is continuous over a long period of time. It does not single out certain individuals in the situation, and it includes all participants, not just the role players. Participant observation allows the researcher to become part of a particular situation to experience, observe, and get a clear, comprehensive understanding of the complexities of that situation. Two types of participant observation exist: structured and non-structured. Unstructured observation was used in this study (Polit & Hungler 1987: 270-271).

The researcher in this study speaks the language of the people studied and has gone through the adult initiation in order to be accepted as a member of the initiated community under study. Furthermore, through observation the researcher planned to understand the processes, events, norms, values and social context of the vukhomba practices.

Although the researcher attended the adult initiation and spoke the same language as the participants, it was sometimes difficult to understand the language that is used in the initiation for example, ku xangula. This means to undress, but in normal Xitsonga to undress is called ku hluvula. Furthermore, the general perception in society that female circumcision occurs in South African female initiations created some stressful moments for the researcher during her first observation. The researcher was not sure how she would react when it was performed. It is important to mention at this stage that her own initiation was far different from the initiation that she observed. This unavoidable anxiety could have had an influence on the data collected during this stage.

The company of the guide (research assistant) assigned to the researcher proved to be helpful and was much appreciated, because the research assistant explained to the researcher activities and occurrences she could not understand. Another important point to mention is that the researcher felt like an alien in a different world. This made her realise that she knew very little about her own culture and language, and she sometimes felt sad about this. The three months period between the observations gave the researcher enough time to recover and observe each initiation as an entity. The interviews that were
held with different participants clarified some of the questions that the researcher had concerning the observed initiations. This also gave the researcher a chance to check her findings.

The advantages of participant observation are that it:

• reduces the problem of reactivity among the participants

• enables the researcher to understand the meaning of the data collected and make valid statements about the culture being studied

• gives the researcher an opportunity to formulate appropriate questions in the language of the people being researched.

• assists the researcher to understand processes, events, norms and values within the context of that particular culture

• enables the researcher to experience the underlying motives and emotions of the group under observation (Maier, Gorgen, Kielmann, Diesfeld and Korte 1994:52, Bernard 1988: 150-152).

The disadvantages of participant observation are that

• it is time-consuming and sometimes costly

• the data obtained are open to bias and distortion

• it requires that the observer must be able to speak the local language

• it is almost impossible to check on findings by repeating the study
- the emotions, values and prejudices of the observer can influence the way behaviours and events are observed

- it requires a skilled observer who is able to observe detail

- The observer must have a good memory and writing skills (Brink 1996:152, Hudelson 1994:29, Maier et al 1994:52).

NB: Although Brink (1996:152), Hudelson (1994:29), Maier et al (1994:52) have mentioned the statements in the last two bullets above as disadvantages of participant observation, in fact these are preconditions for effective research. In other words, virtually all good research requires a skilled observer who is able to observe details, and has a good memory and writing skills.

3.4.2. Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were held with six initiates, four vadzabi, three parents of the initiates, and three murileri. In semi-structured interview guidelines were used to guide the researcher through the interviews. The guidelines consisted of questions and topics that needed to be covered. The interview guidelines also allowed the researcher to probe for more information. This flexibility allowed the researcher to follow new directions in the discussions. The above people were interviewed at different times in different areas where they were found (Brink 1996:158, Hudelson 1994: 12-13, Maier et al 1994:18).

3.4.3. Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions were conducted with the vukhomba elders, initiated women, uninitiated and initiated girls. The focus group discussions were held with each group on different days to prevent the groups from influencing one another. The data gathered through tape recordings were later transcribed word for word by the researcher. A total of eleven focus group discussions were conducted, three with vukhomba elders, three with
initiated girls, three with initiated women (vabvana), one with church women and one with uninitiated girls who had reached puberty (Thugamama). The total number of participants was one hundred and sixteen.

In one focus group discussion the researcher started with thirteen participants, but because of an emergency in one of the families, five of the participants left in the middle of the discussion. Those that remained behind took some time to recollect and continue with the discussion. The focus group discussion with churchwomen was organised by the church elders. The researcher was given permission for the interview, but when she arrived she was informed of a new arrangement. Since there were fifteen women the researcher conducted a focus group discussion. The group consisted of initiated and uninitiated women. The focus group discussion with uninitiated girls who had reached puberty came into being as a result of the information collected from the focus group discussion with initiated girls. The researcher realised the need for getting the views of uninitiated girls before a decision was made on whether they would be initiated or not. Only one focus group with uninitiated girls was conducted, as permission was not granted in the other areas.

A focus group discussion is described as "a group discussion with people who have been selected, because they share certain characteristics, which are relevant to the topic to be discussed." It is a planned discussion usually comprising six to ten people and is designed to obtain information on participants' belief and perceptions within a defined area of interest (WHO 1994:24). In this study focus group discussions were used for getting the beliefs and perceptions of the subjects about the rite and to assess the sexuality health needs of the teenagers; also for developing intervention and structuring a programme for improving sexuality education in the vukhomba. A structured focus group discussion set of guidelines was used to ensure that all the relevant issues were covered (Hudelson 1994:22, WHO 1994: 27-28).
3.4.4. Key informant interviews

A total of eleven key informant interviews were conducted, four with traditional leaders, three with the chief supervisor of vukhomba (*Phorisa ra vukhomba*), three with teachers and one with a church elder. It was difficult to get males to participate as key informants and also to get information from male informants, because the majority of them felt they had limited knowledge about the initiation of girls. Furthermore, the male informants seemed uncomfortable about discussing *vukhomba*, and immediately referred the researcher to women. Since the discussions about *vukhomba* seemed to be causing uneasiness to the males, the researcher respected their feelings and did not pursue the reasons for their uneasiness.

Key informant interviews are interviews that are conducted with people who have a special position in the community. Key informants possess special knowledge and are willing to share this with the researcher. They have access to the culture under study in a way that the researcher lacks (Hudelson 1994:43). The transcribed key informant interviews are available from the researcher.

3.4.5. Feedback workshops

According to Broerse (1998:209), feedback workshops are conducted in qualitative research to give the respondents an opportunity to review and criticise the findings, legitimise them, allow room for new contributions, and enhance the visibility of the community needs. Furthermore, feedback workshops serve as a means of generating support for the research process and of involving the respondents in the development of an intervention programme for the identified needs.
In this study nine feedback workshops were conducted, three in each village. The workshops were conducted as follows:

- One workshop for the *vukhomba* elders

- One workshop for the initiated women (*vabvana*)

- One workshop for the initiated girls

The workshops were conducted, firstly, to verify the information collected through the above-mentioned instruments. Secondly, to present the analysis and findings. Thirdly, to plan an intervention programme with the participants. The workshop participants made corrections and additions to some aspects of the reports presented. The corrections and additional information were recorded and changes incorporated in the final report. The researcher also had a list of concepts that needed clarification, and this was done. A set of guidelines was used to guide the workshop process.

3.5. COLLECTION OF DATA

Data were collected from January 1998 to July 1999. Feedback workshops were conducted from February to March 2000 to verify the information collected with initiated elders, and with women and girls in the participating communities.

To gain entry into the villages where the study was conducted the researcher wrote letters to the community leaders to get permission for the study. *(See annexe A).* In three of the villages, the researcher was invited to a meeting with initiated women. A woman chaired each of these meetings. In all the meetings the letters were brought to the meeting and read. The researcher was asked to explain the reasons and purpose of the research.
To gain the confidence of the initiated women the researcher explained to them that she had attended the initiation for adults. In one of the villages permission was immediately granted, because all the women had participated in her adult initiation. In another village the researcher was asked to bring someone who had participated in the researcher’s initiation to the next meeting. Three elders who participated in the researcher’s initiation were brought in. They assured the women that the researcher was not a xivuru and a letter from the community leader confirming that the researcher had paid a certain amount to attend the adult initiation was handed to the women for inspection. Permission to research was then granted.

In the third village the researcher encountered problems with the initiated women in the meeting, because they found it unacceptable that she should ask for permission to talk about vukhomba from a man, the traditional leader. The researcher apologised for her ignorance and the meeting was rescheduled for another date. In this later meeting the researcher explained the reason and purpose of the research and told them that she herself had been initiated. Fortunately a member of this village had visited the village where the researcher had gone through her adult initiation and she explained to the group that the researcher had indeed been initiated and that she had been in attendance. She then reminded them that she had spoken about it some time back and they all nodded their heads in agreement. They also wanted to be assured that the information collected would only be used for academic purposes and that the vukhomba activities would not be televised. Permission was then given.

In the fourth village the researcher was invited to a community meeting in the tribal office. Leaders of the different zones of the village attended the meeting. The researcher requested permission to explain her visit. She then explained her research, its purpose and reasons. Furthermore, she explained that she had been initiated herself. Permission was granted to her and two women were assigned to organise a meeting where the researcher could address women responsible for the initiation of girls. Three meetings were organised on different days and the researcher was informed about the dates and venues. On each occasion, however, the researcher found neither participants nor organisers. A
follow-up meeting was arranged and two leaders indicated that the people in this village were no longer interested in the initiation, because they were Christians. Checking with the tribal office the researcher found that an average of seven initiations per year were recorded in this village. The researcher then excluded the village from the study, except for the interview conducted with the traditional leader, which happened before the discussion with the community.

3.5.1. Participant observation

The researcher participated in the initiation by singing and occasionally by dancing when requested to do so. Since she was an accepted member of the group, the process of the sessions in all the initiations was not influenced. As already indicated above, the researcher was allowed to use an audiotape to record the proceedings. Since there was poor light where the initiation activities were taking place, the taking of notes and recording of events were done immediately after each session. The researcher was also allowed to take pictures of geregere, vujelejele, and the celebration feast on Saturday and Sunday.

According to the participants, puberty rites are one week long and take place during school holidays. The length of the initiations observed were, however, different, ranging from five days to fourteen days. It was mentioned in these villages that under normal circumstances initiations start on a Friday and end on Saturday of the next week. One of the observed vukhomba started on Monday, due to a death within a family, another one was two weeks long, because the initiate’s mother wanted it that way, and the last one started on a Friday and ended on a Saturday of the following week. Two of the initiations took place during the holidays and the two-weeks long one started during the holidays on a Friday and carried on into the first week of the third school term.

After each session, the researcher wrote down all she had seen, felt, and experienced during the session. The researcher later systematised the events according to the chronological order in which they took place, as indicated below, demonstrating that the
initiation followed a certain pattern, rules, and procedures. These were communicated to the research assistants for verification. Furthermore, they were also verified in the feedback workshop and the information incorporated in the discussion. The feedback workshops were discussed in 3.4.5.

Focus group discussions were conducted using a set of guidelines. It was difficult for the researcher to conduct focus group discussions during the process of initiation, as most of the women were not in a position to remain behind after vukhomba activities. It would have been better if the focus group discussions had been conducted when there was an initiation in progress. Another problem encountered was that the participants were not comfortable discussing vukhomba outside it. This could not be avoided, because after the initiation activities at night they were in a hurry to get home and sleep and none agreed to stay behind for an interview. During the day they were busy with their daily chores so that they could be free in the evening to attend the initiation rite. After collecting the initiates from the river they were in a hurry to prepare lunch for their families and children who were at school. The only feasible option for the researcher was to make appointments with the different groups and conduct the focus group discussions.

The researcher introduced herself and the purpose of the study. The participants were assured that the data collected would be kept confidential and would not be discussed with anyone except supervisors. All the groups agreed to be tape-recorded and recorded data were transcribed immediately after the data collection. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English and then analysed.

3.5.2. Research assistants

There were three research assistants, one in each study area. They were initiated elderly women who were nominated by the community leader as contact persons for the researcher. Their role in the study was to guide the researcher on the process and activities of the initiation and also to inform her about the venues where certain rituals would take place. They also assisted the researcher in the translation of certain phrases
and concepts from the *vukhomba* language into everyday Xitsonga that the researcher understood. For example, a phrase like *ku borisa khomba* was not familiar to the researcher. Discussions with the research assistants were also held after each session to gain a full understanding of the activities. The research assistants were also involved in informing the different categories of people participating in *vukhomba* about the dates and venues for focus group discussions and feedback workshops. As the research assistants seemed to be respected women in the *vukhomba*, they were excluded from all the focus group discussions and interviews, because the researcher felt that their presence might influence the discussions and thus influence the study.

### 3.6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research proposal was presented to the Research and Publications Committee of the University of Venda for ethical consideration, and was approved. (*Annexure B*). It was also sent to the Regional chairman of the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (CONTRALESA) for approval, and the researcher was advised by the CONTRALESA chairperson to seek permission from the four traditional authorities where the research was to be conducted. See *annexure A* for letters requesting permission to conduct research. Permission to meet with the *vukhomba* elders was granted in the meetings held with the traditional authority in the study areas. Permission was also sought from *vukhomba* elders in the areas where the study was conducted. The researcher also went through the adult rite in order to be allowed into the *vukhomba*. Anonymity of the participants was maintained and an assurance was given that all information would be treated in absolute confidence. This would include all records of the information collected, written and audio-visual. All participants were assured of the maintenance of confidentiality and an informed consent of all the participants was obtained.

Since *vukhomba* is a secret ritual the researcher had to obtain special permission to place copies of the thesis in libraries, and to publish material from it. The *vukhomba* elders granted her the necessary permission. Because of the previous experience the researcher had at the beginning of the study, after getting permission from the *vukhomba* elders she
enquired from them if she also needed permission from the traditional leaders to publish the results of the study. The *vukhomba* elders indicated that their permission was enough, because the traditional leader would also consult them and ask them to give permission to the researcher. However, the researcher was advised by the *vukhomba* elders to inform the traditional leaders that she had finished her study. The researcher informed the traditional leaders, as advised, and written permission to publish was given in each area. See Annexure C.

The decision to undertake this study was the researcher’s choice and sponsorship had no influence on or input into the study. The loyalty of the researcher is only to the informants.

3.7. DATA ANALYSIS

The process of analysing the data started during the collection stage in order to identify recurrent patterns that constitute the puberty rites. According to Maier et al (1994: 88), the analysis of qualitative data is a creative process of making sense of the findings and meaning of collected data. In this study a combination of data analysis guidelines from Maier et al (1994: 86-88), Cresswell (1994: 153-156), and Streubert and Carpenter (1995:98-318) was used. The collected data were transcribed from the tape recordings verbatim, translated into English, and analysed. Individual analysis of the transcriptions was done and categories were formed to allow the researcher to identify similarities, differences, and relationships. The developed categories were then grouped into themes.

The key informants interviews and semi-structured interviews were analysed using the Maier et al (1994:86) steps of data analysis as a guide to developing categories from tape recordings. The data were analysed according to the following steps:

- The collected data were transcribed from tape recordings and recorded verbatim. Comments on non-verbal behaviour were added to the transcription.
• The researcher analysed the transcribed information obtained with each research method separately. For example, the researcher started the analysis with the participant observation data followed by the data collected using the focus group discussions. The data were read several times and key concepts were underlined and categories formed. At the end a summary of the contents was made and an emphasis placed on special characteristics. Categories were then defined according to the research questions. The relationships between the categories were described and compared.

• The researcher then developed the common ground between the different findings and also identified the differences. The relationships between the categories were described and compared. The main tendencies were explored and different types of people and answers were established.

• The findings were presented in writing and the information gained from the findings was counter-checked with material available and the findings of the independent coders. If there were divergences in the findings the researcher re-examined the data analysis process or discussed it with the independent coders until consensus was reached. Furthermore, the findings were presented to the participants in a feedback workshop and their inputs were added to the analysis.

The analysis of focus group discussions and recordings during initiations were examined using Cresswell’s steps of data analysis as a guide to developing categories from tape recordings.

1. The researcher listened to the tapes to get an overall sense of their contents. The researcher repeatedly listened in order to internalise their contents and then transcribed them verbatim. The transcription was then read through and ideas written down.
2. The researcher then randomly took one of the transcriptions and read through it, thought about the underlying meaning, and wrote down the thoughts that came into her mind.

3. When the above had been done a list of the emerging topics was made.

4. These were then matched to the appropriate sections in the transcriptions to see if more categories could still emerge.

5. Descriptive wordings for the topics were selected and turned into categories.

6. Interrelationships between categories were noted

7. Data related to the categories were assembled

8. Existing data were recorded.

Creswell (1994:155)

The field notes stemming from participant observation, tape recordings and workshop reports were analysed using the Streubert and Carpenter (1995: 98-318) approach to data analysis in ethnography, which has the following stages:

- **Making ethnographic records**

The researcher documented all the experiences. The facts were recorded as facts and conversations were recorded verbatim. The data collected were systematised according to the chronological order in which they occurred.
• **Making descriptive observations**

The researcher used the nine dimensions described by Spradley (1980) in Streubert and Carpenter (1995:102), namely, space, actor, activity, object, act, event, time, goal and feeling, to describe the situation under study.

• **Making focused observations**

Here the researcher explored the roles and relationships among the different role players in the initiation by asking questions. The researcher also used the research assistants to clarify some activities and rituals that were performed during the initiation of girls. Furthermore, the domain categories that needed further development were identified, and then the researcher returned to the research site again to check the information. The analysis and findings were presented to the participants for their inputs and verification.

• **Making taxonomic analysis**

Here the researcher identified larger categories. This was done through an in-depth analysis of the domains identified earlier and identification of relationships among the parts or relationships to the whole. At this stage the researcher asked additional questions and made further observations.

• **Making selected observations**

The selective observations were done to identify similarities and contrasts in the identified domains. For example, selected observations were made to identify the similarities and differences in the activities of murileri and mudzabi.
• Discovering cultural themes

During this stage the researcher identified tacit and explicit patterns that constitute the culture under study and developed cultural themes. Spradley (1980) in Streubert and Carpenter (1995: 108-109) suggests six cultural themes called universal themes, though these were not used in this study. The researcher developed themes related to this study and these are discussed in chapter 4.

• Taking a cultural inventory

The cultural inventory provides an opportunity to organise collected data. The data collected through participant observation were systematised according to a chronological order in which the events and activities took place. See chapter 5.

All transcripts and tapes were given to independent coders with clear instructions on the process to use for the analysis of the data. The guidelines on the processes were given to the coders. The categories developed by the independent coders were compared with those of the researcher. Categories that were similar were adopted and the differences were discussed and consensus reached.

The analysis and findings were presented to the participants in a feedback workshop for their inputs and verification. Furthermore, the assistance of peers was sought to help in the examination of transcripts and field notes to ensure reliability. A professional translator was used to check the English version and some parts that needed the expertise of a translator. The independent coders, translator, and peers were women who had to sign an agreement not to disclose any information about vukhomba. See annexure E.

3.8. COMMUNICATION OF THE FINDINGS

Feedback workshops were conducted on the draft report. Dissemination workshops with initiated women and girls were held in the areas where the study was conducted. The
researcher will give papers on the findings in conferences and will publish articles in professional journals.

3.9. VALIDATION OF DATA

As already mentioned above, the preliminary data analysis and findings were presented to the participants in a feedback workshop for their inputs and verification. Secondly, triangulation was used for the purpose of generating meaningful data and to validate it (Streubert and Carpenter 1995:318).

3.9.1. CREDIBILITY AND CONFIRMABILITY

The researcher stayed in the research setting for the period of the initiation. Different methods/techniques were used for data collection. Notes, tape recordings, pictures and video recordings of different activities were involved. Data generated by each method were first analysed separately and then triangulated with the other methods. The collected data were also given to peers with clear written instructions to check the transcripts and field notes to ensure credibility and to categorise and develop themes from the data. The categories and themes were compared with those identified by the researcher. There were similarities and differences in the categories and themes. Similar themes were adopted as themes for the analysis and the differences were re-examined and regrouped and given new names. The use of the feedback workshop strengthened the credibility of the study. The analysed information was then compared with other findings.

3.9.2. TRANSFERABILITY AND DEPENDABILITY

Four areas were identified using purposive sampling of the research areas. In each area one puberty rite was chosen through random sampling. Different methods were used to collect data. The data were transcribed, translated, coded, and analysed individually. Coding of the data was done through highlighting words and phrases that appeared frequently. These were grouped together into categories. The categories from the data
collected by different research instruments were grouped into themes, which were compared with each other, including analysis by peers.

3.9.3. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was limited to a small area and a small group of the population and therefore the results may not be representative enough. The study only concentrated on one type of puberty rite for girls within one cultural group, making it difficult to generalise the findings as being representative of all puberty rites in the Northern Region. The fact that the puberty rites are secret could have influenced the respondents to withhold some information that they regarded as highly confidential. Another limitation was that the privacy of informants could have been invaded in the process of the study.

One in-depth study was done in the three areas. That is, a total of three ceremonies were studied, due to financial constraints. The results of the study cannot be generalised to other cultural groups in the region, though they will be made available to interested people. The methodology used for the study and intervention programmes will be made available to all interested parties.

3.10. SUMMARY

Qualitative research methods were used to gain a comprehensive understanding of the puberty rites. Different methods for data collection were used. Participant observation shed much light on the practices, events, norms and values of the rite. Semi-structured interviews with initiates, their parents, mudzabi and murileri were conducted to secure their understanding of the nature and meaning of the puberty rites. Focus group discussions with initiated girls, women, and elders elicited further information about the rites. The focus group discussion with uninitiated girls who had reached puberty (Thugamama) highlighted the perceptions of the uninitiated about vukhomba. Key informant interviews with the traditional leaders and the chief supervisor of vukhomba revealed the meaning of the puberty rites in the Xitsonga culture.
CHAPTER 4.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Data analysis is discussed in chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 presents an analysis of all the data collected, while Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the actual puberty rites. The process of analysing the collected data is discussed in Chapter 3. The process of analysing the data was a combination of the processes of analysing qualitative data described in Maier et al (1994:86) and Cresswell (1994: 153-156) and the process of analysing ethnographic data described in Streubert and Carpenter (1995: 108-318). Although the researcher did not use the universal themes as described by Spradley (1980) in Streubert and Carpenter (1995:109), the idea was used in developing the themes for this study. The following themes were developed:

1. The initiation process in the puberty rites for girls (Discussed in Chapter 5)

2. The meaning of menstruation and reactions to menses by the girl, family and peers

3. Perceptions and myths related to the puberty rites for girls
   - Initiated women and girls
   - Uninitiated women and girls

4. The factors that encourage girls to be initiated

5. The knowledge and experience gained by girls in their puberty rites.

6. Gender and health issues related to the *vukhomba* practice
7. The role of the different participating groups and key people in the puberty rites for girls

8. The contribution of kukhomba to the prevention of HIV/AIDS

4.2. THE MEANING OF MENSES AND THE REACTION OF THE GIRL, FAMILY AND PEERS TO THIS.

In Annexure D the questions that led to the information below are given.

**Table 4.1** indicates the meaning of menses, reactions of the girl towards menses, the reaction of the family, and the reaction of peers.

**Table 4.1: The meaning of menses and the reaction of the girls, family and peers to this.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaning of menses</td>
<td>Milestone (<em>u kurile</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No playing with boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Start doing women's work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Slept with boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactions of the girls towards menses</td>
<td>Crying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refuse to get out of bed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequent baths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confide in someone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miserable, confused and afraid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No crying, asked for sanitary pads, not afraid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some do not tell anybody about it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refuse to eat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refuse to go to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactions of the family</td>
<td>Inform the family members and relatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Start preparations for initiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Ku laya nhwanyana</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Putting the girl away (<em>Ku veka khomba</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactions of peers</td>
<td>Laughing at girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supportive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.1. The meaning of menses.

Transformation to womanhood

Menstruation was viewed by participants in three focus group discussions as a milestone in the development of a girl. It means that the girl has grown up (u kurile) and is now fit to start learning women’s work. According to Lutkehaus & Roscoe (1995:36), menstruation among the people of Kalabu village in Central Abelam means the girl has become a woman. Among the Chiricahua Apache, as among the Vatsonga/Manchangana, the presence of menstruation does not transform a girl into a woman. Among the Chiricahua Apache, the transformation of a girl into a woman only occurs after she has gone through the mandatory initiation rites (Cohen 1964:115). This is different from the practice among the Vatsonga/Manchangana as described in 1.10.2. The puberty rites and menses do not in themselves transform a girl to womanhood. She becomes a woman once she becomes sexually active. This implies that a girl can be a woman long before her first menses.

This early transformation from girlhood to womanhood due to teenage pregnancy creates a problem in the allocation of tasks during the vukhomba. In one of the focus group discussions with the vukhomba elders a participant complained about the small numbers of girls in the vukhomba:

Nowadays there are no girls they are all women (vabvana). We experience problems when allocating tasks in the initiation, because there are very few girls. We do not know how to deal with them, because they are still too young to be vabvana and would like to be with their friends who do not have children. Sometimes when you allocate them a job with the girls, the girls reject them or sometimes they themselves will turn around and say they are not girls anymore, because they have given birth.
In two of the feedback workshops, the participants debated this issue of sexual activity transforming a girl to womanhood. The participants indicated that a man who engages in sexual activity with a girl before she starts menstruation has raped the girl. They were quick to indicate that in the olden days men did not engage in sex with children. In another workshop, they indicated that they did not have this type of behaviour in the olden days, but that when this now happens the man has taken away the girl’s childhood and made her a woman. In this workshop, the younger group felt it was unfair, because the girl might not have consented. One participant cited a case where a man raped a six months old child. One of the elder participants indicated that although society would not refer to the child as a woman that man has made her one. *Hi Xitsonga xa ka hina loko wanuna a bvanganya (ku pfinya) munhu tani hi leswi Nwa M. a nga swivula hi tala ku swi veka hi ndlela leyi. Mani-mani u bvangengetile mwana i vi a mwi endla wansati.* This means “In Xitsonga when a man catches a person and rapes her the way that man did to the child mentioned by Miss M, we usually say Mr N, caught a child and made her a woman”. The participants did not believe that a normal female can reach old age without becoming sexually active and they felt that all females reach womanhood through sex.

*Learning women’s work*

The phrase, “she is now fit to start learning women’s work” seems to suggest that menstruation means a girl has become a woman, hence the learning of women’s duties. The phrase mentioned above was clarified in one of the feedback workshops. One of the participants indicated that in the olden days the initiation used to be six months long and that during this period the initiates were taught women’s chores, e.g. fetching firewood, and that she was expected to continue doing women’s work after initiation. According to initiated women the duration of the initiation changed, because of schooling to allow initiated girls to go back to school. No literature could be found that confirmed the six months period of initiation, though, according to Cohen (1964:103), initiations rarely last more than four months.
According to Schapera (1946:113), among the Bapedi the initiation of girls seems to last about three months as he indicated that they occur in parallel with male initiation, which then lasted three months. The initiation period of the Chisungu of Bemba is more than a month (Richards 1956:55). A one-month period of initiation was also mentioned by one of the women (vabvana) in a focus group discussion. One of the initiations studied was two weeks long and the other one-week. If puberty rites lasted six months at a certain stage and now are one week long, it would be interesting to find out what participants were doing during this period and what has since been left out of the initiation process to shorten the initiation period. As this is not within the parameters of this study, it was not investigated.

*Should not play with boys*

According to participants in the three focus groups, menstruation also means that the girl should not play with boys i.e. the girl should not have sexual relationships with boys. However, according to the initiated girls in the focus group discussions, the vukhomba elders and family members do not explain what they mean by not playing with boys. Girls sometimes only realise the meaning when they are already pregnant. The participants in a gender and health workshop described this as strange, because boys are not told to stop playing with girls, and this was viewed as discrimination against women and a gender issue (Maluleke 1997:24).

*Slept with boys*

The meaning of menses to young girls who have not reached menarche is that the menstruating girl slept with boys. What is interesting is that they do not see it as sleeping with a boy, but boys. It is not clear whether they view vaginal bleeding as a sign of injury during intercourse with many boys or the bleeding is associated with gang raping. Some
learnt this from adults who are trying to discourage and scare young girls from indulging in sex by telling them that sleeping with boys will cause vaginal bleeding. Associating menstruation with sleeping with boys causes emotional trauma to girls when they reach menarche. These emotional reactions are discussed in 4.2.2. and 4.2.4.

4.2.2. Reaction of the girl to menses

In all focus group discussions with elders, it was mentioned that the reaction to menses differs from girl to girl. The most common reactions are summarised in table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2. Reaction of girls to menses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crying</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not crying</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confiding in someone</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusing to get out of bed</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusing to have meals</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent baths</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reaction to menses is influenced by the knowledge that the girl had before her first menstruation. The elders were divided on the issue of knowledge. Some felt that having knowledge about menses leads to better acceptance, while some viewed it as a disgrace. The reaction is also influenced by the way the girl learns about it and who is with her at that moment.

Crying

Crying was mentioned as the main response to the first menstruation and viewed as standard by others. Crying is also a result of the strange information given to girls. In all focus group discussions with the vukhomba elders it was mentioned that reactions to menses differ from girl to girl. Crying was mentioned as the most common reaction and was viewed by some vukhomba elders as the normal reaction, while “not crying” was viewed as an unacceptable and abnormal reaction. The girls cry, because they have no
knowledge about menses until they themselves reach menarche. Girls who do not cry seem to have knowledge of the menses. They ask for sanitary pads and sometimes do not tell anybody about their menses, because they understand what is happening to them. Some of the vukhomba elders found it unacceptable to have knowledge about menses before one’s own menses, while others felt that having knowledge helps in reducing the misery girls go through when they do not have it. One participant said, “When a ‘normal’ child menstruates for the first time, she cries, because she is scared”. Crying in this sense is a sign of normality. It could be for the same reason that during vukhomba the initiates are requested to cry to show that they are normal.

Confiding in someone

It was indicated in all the focus group discussions with elders that there was no stipulated cultural procedure that a girl must follow to inform the family about her menses. However, the most common process used was to inform a female who could be a family member or relative or neighbour. After getting this information this person informs a member of the girl’s family, who will then inform the whole family. Although this process is not used by all the girls, the fact that the Manchangana/Vatsonga have the word murileri for the person the girl informs when she sees her first menses indicates that crying could be the expected response. Furthermore, this indicates that society expects the girl to cry and inform a woman who will later participate in her initiation. This is confirmed by the fact that the murileri also plays a major role in the initiation of the girl.

This is similar to the finding of Richards (1956:54) among the Bemba people that as soon as a girl is aware of her first menses she informs older women who perform the appropriate ritual. The girl then waits until it is convenient for her chisungu rite. Among the Bapedi as soon as the girl sees her first menses she is secluded in her hut with her biological mother and close relatives looking after her. The initiation in this case is done by women who have passed the childbearing age, and after the initiation the girl is called kgarebe meaning “mature girl”. There is no mention of the girl’s reaction to menses in this literature by Mönnig (1967:125).
Refuse to get out of bed and refuse to have meals

The girl's refusal to get out of bed and to have meals is a sign of fear. The girl is afraid of the blood and might be thinking that she is dying and does not see a reason for eating or getting out of bed, because she is dying anyway. This reaction is caused by lack of information about menses before the girl gets her own menses.

Frequent baths

The frequent baths are also a result of lack of information, because the girl does not know that she should use sanitary pads or tampons to prevent blood from soiling her panties and clothes. If the girl had the correct information about the menses she would use sanitary pads and not have a bath frequently. Although frequent baths are encouraged during menstruation, in this instance the girl is having these baths, because she does not have what is necessary for menses. Having knowledge about menses before the girl's own menses would prevent many girls from going through this traumatic experience, because they would know what to do to prevent blood from soiling their clothes.

4.2.3. Reaction of the family to menses

Inform family members and relatives and start with the preparations for the initiation.

The reaction of the family to a girl's menstruation also differs depending on the family. In many families after receiving the news, the female family elders would have a meeting with the girl. They would explain the meaning of the menses, what to do when she is having her menses, things to avoid during menstruation and also tell her to avoid sexual relationships with boys, because she would become pregnant. This is called ku laya nhwanyana. The maternal and paternal family members and relatives are informed. The maternal family set the date for the initiation. The maternal family sets the dates of the initiation, because they have more responsibility for the initiation of their granddaughter. According to Schapera (1946: 94), among the Manchangana/Vatsonga the maternal
family plays a major role in the life of their daughter's children. A man is expected to be protective to his sister's children, sacrifice for them, and maintain contact with them at all times.

_Ku veka khomba (putting the girl away)_

It was indicated in one of the focus group discussions with vukhomba elders that in the olden days once the family noticed or was notified that the girl was having her first menses, she would be given herbal soft porridge in a small clay pot. After finishing the soft porridge, the pot was put upside down in a safe place. The girl would not have menses until the pot was placed on its base. This herbal soft porridge would stop the menses and give her a chance to develop secondary developmental features. This was called _ku veka khomba_ (Putting the girl away). _Ku veka khomba_ also gave the family enough time to prepare for her initiation. The waiting period was usually one to five years. In other words the initiation depended on the readiness of the family and the availability of food. Girls from poor families would wait for a longer period than girls from rich families.

Initiation will never be begun during a period of drought, since it hampers many of the economic activities, and a considerable amount of food is necessary to feed the initiates (Mönnig 1967:113).

_Ku veka khomba_ is not done anymore for religious reasons. One of the participants said, “It is not done anymore, because most of us are Christians and we do not use African medicines anymore”.

Among the Bemba the girl informs older women, who perform the _ukusolwela_ rite, which is meant to show fire, because the menses have rendered her cold. The girl is given some doctored seeds cooked on a fire or sometimes washed with medicines cooked in a special pot and given some of it to drink. The _chisungu_, like the _vukhomba_ is also performed when the family is ready (Richards 1956:54). Among the Vhavenda the girl also informs
an older person in the family and she is given medication from the roots of *ndulwana (Solanum incanum or solanum pundaroeforome) to drink and to bath in to prevent stretch marks. The girl will be initiated when the family is ready and there is an initiation at the chief's kraal (Blacking 1959:1). Initiations among the Vatsonga/Manchangana in the Northern Region also take place when the families are ready.

The initiation rite for girls after menstruation among the people in Central Abelam village is called *Wambusuge*. As soon as the girl starts menstruating she is sent to the menstruation hut and her mother informs her husband and then her own brother. Together with her brother they set a date for initiation and the feast. In preparing for this the mother of the initiate is helped by her sisters, her brother's wives, her husband and his relatives. The maternal relatives have a major part to play in the initiation of the girl (Lutkehaus & Roscoe 1995:36). In this study the maternal relatives also have a major part to play in the *vukhomba*. They set the date for the initiation, but only come at the end of the ritual, i.e. during *vujelejele* and *nyimbo-nyimbo*, to give presents to the initiate.

4.2.4. Reaction of peers towards menses

There is a difference in the reaction of peers who have reached menarche and those who have not. Those who have reached menarche are supportive and caring. While peers who have not reached menarche laugh at the girl, because they believe she has slept with boys. The reaction of girls who have not reached menarche is judgmental and also shows a lack of knowledge of the physiological functions of the body. This indicates that many girls reach menarche without knowledge of a human's physiological development. This lack of knowledge makes it difficult for the girl to cope with the 'crisis' she is facing. This lack of information could also be responsible for teenage pregnancies.

In one focus group discussion the *vukhomba* elders also viewed knowledge about menses as helpful for the girl because it saves her from embarrassment. One participant remarked:
...My friends discovered me as we were getting out of the classroom. You can imagine what they did. They laughed at me saying that I had slept with boys. When the older girls came to my rescue I was crying bitterly. The girls took me home and I stayed for the whole week at home without going to school.

The belief that a girl gets her first menses because she has had a sexual relationship is not only found among young girls who have not reached menarche, but even among some adults. In a workshop cited in Maluleke (1997:24), a woman indicated that when she reported her first menses to her grandmother she was told that the blood meant that she had slept with a boy. “When I realised that I was bleeding from my vagina I told my grandmother, who scolded me and accused me of sleeping with boys. I was shocked and disappointed and I cried bitterly”. The reason for giving this strange information could not be established. It could be a way of making the girl cry, since crying has been indicated as the normal reaction of a girl to menses or it could be that her grandmother reached menarche after she herself had had sex with someone. On the other hand, this could be an indication that even adult women do not understand the physiology of the woman’s body. Furthermore, the strange information that is given to girls when they reach menarche and the hostile reaction of peers and family members to their first menses create negative feelings about their menses and body.

4.3. PERCEPTIONS AND MYTHS RELATED TO THE PUBERTY RITES FOR GIRLS

The interview guidelines given in Annexure D were used to get the following information.

- The perceptions and views of initiated and uninitiated women and girls about the puberty rites are different.
- The uninitiated women and girls perceive vukhomba as an evil and dangerous practice, while the initiated view it as a form of entertainment and as a safe refuge for women from harassment and violence by their male partners.
• Men see *vukhomba* as privacy for women and a space they cannot invade.

• In the community *vukhomba* is a respected ritual that the community identifies with, and it is also a source of revenue for the community.

**Table 4.3** below indicates the perceptions and myths related to the puberty rites for girls as perceived by initiated and uninitiated women and girls. The following categories were developed under this theme:

• Culture

• Traditions

• Social activities

• Myths
Table 4.3. : Perceptions and myths related to the puberty rites for girls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Initiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Cultural practice, promotes culture, <em>ubuntu</em></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evil cultural practice</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditions</td>
<td>Place where girls learn traditional life and dances, traditional school</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Useless practice</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No quarrels in the community, creates a happy mood in the community</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social activities</td>
<td>Place where women enjoy themselves</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Place for entertainment, women coming together to enjoy themselves</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Telling the public that the girl is now ready to get married</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myths</td>
<td>Cutting of private parts and making the initiate eat the cut flesh; cut and join the vagina to the anus, cutting of genitals, stretching of labia minora</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insertion of horn, maize cob or clay penis into the vagina</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Makes initiates eat food mixed with their own faeces</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uninitiated will not have children</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is a monster that comes at night to swallow the initiates</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls are taught to be submissive to men</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.1. Perceptions of uninitiated women and girls

The perceptions of uninitiated women and girls could be categorised into culture, tradition, and myths. Since there is a close relationship between culture and tradition, these categories are discussed together.

*Culture and tradition*

In the two focus group discussions with uninitiated women and girls, and also in the interview with the teacher, the puberty rites were described as a useless cultural practice that teaches girls to misbehave. The participants felt that since this rite is kept secret and
obscene language is used therefore vukhomba is evil. If female circumcision and the insertion of a horn into the initiates’ vagina were done in vukhomba then the uninitiated women and girls would be justified in calling it evil. These could deter girls from being initiated. However, the secrecy around the rite does not allow them to verify their information. In other words, there is no way of verifying this information unless one is initiated.

The arrival of missionaries in the areas where the initiations of women were taking place also contributed to the perception that the initiation is evil. All missionaries were opposed to initiation in the communities where they were operating. The result of this was that most Christian families stopped taking their children for initiation, while non-Christians continued (Mönnig 1967:112).

**Social**

Although the uninitiated women and girls do not view vukhomba as a place of entertainment, they participate in the Saturday and Sunday celebration discussed in **chapter 5**.

**Myths**

It was indicated in the focus group discussions with uninitiated women and girls that in the puberty rites the vukhomba elders insert a horn into the girl’s vagina and cut her clitoris. However, none of them had seen a woman who had been circumcised. Although some of the participants had initiated friends, their friends would not discuss what happens during the puberty rites.

The perception that female circumcision is done in the vukhomba was also evident in the focus group discussions that were conducted with initiated girls and interviews with the initiates. However, no evidence of female circumcision was found. In one of the interviews with initiates, the initiate mentioned she was scared and wanted to run away
on her way to the tree, because she thought they were going to cut her clitoris. "In my mind I thought they were going to cut me", she said.

In one of the focus group discussions a participant said:

> My friend has been initiated and when I ask her about what they are taught there she always says, 'They do not teach us anything, there is nothing happening there'. But come holidays she goes there and you always hear them laughing like they are enjoying themselves. I do not know, but I think she is scared to tell me that they also inserted the horn into her vagina.

It was indicated in one focus group discussion that men also hold this perception about initiated girls.

> Teacher Z would call you and ask you to carry his books to the staff room. When you got there he would propose to you and when you refused he would say his penis is smaller than the horn that you were carrying around for the whole week.

There is a general perception among uninitiated women and girls that initiates are taught about sexual relationships with men which result in teenage pregnancies. It is indicated in the International Confederation of Midwives World Health Organisation (2000:6) that during puberty rites girls are taught about sex and also encouraged to practice it. A participant said,

> Initiated girls like men, which means that they are taught about sexual relationships with men and they are putting that into practice without any knowledge of contraception and getting children.

However, on the other hand, they indicated that there was no difference in a teenage pregnancy between the initiated and uninitiated girls. One participant said,
No, there is no difference. When I refused to be initiated my grandmother told me that I would not have children and I have proved her wrong since I got my child at the same time as the initiated girls. So I now know you can have a child without initiation.

Initiated women also indicated that teenage pregnancy is a problem in the villages for both initiated and uninitiated girls. They further suggested the inclusion of contraceptives in what is taught in vukhomba. The inclusion of contraceptives in the intervention programme was also suggested in the feedback, but the vukhomba elders were totally opposed to this. The researcher had to leave it out of the intervention programme. The vukhomba elders believe in abstinence until marriage, which is not happening, and they are not prepared to accept an alternative. Abstinence is also recommended for the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

One vukhomba elder said:

Contraceptives make the girls start fooling around. In vukhomba we are saying they must not sleep with boys, but when you give them contraceptives you are saying to them go and sleep with boys.

Some sexuality education teachers in the United States of America also hold this view. A study by the Alan Guttmacher Institute (2000:1) suggests that sexuality education teachers in the USA’s public schools focus on abstinence-only as the only way of preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

... teachers think that students who receive sexuality education that stresses abstinence are less likely to have intercourse than students who do are. ... teachers think that students who are taught to use contraceptives if they are sexually active are more likely to do so than students who do not receive similar instruction (The Alan Guttmacher Institute 2000:1).
The uninitiated women felt that *vukhomba* must be stopped, because it is dangerous for the girls. One participant said,

> Do you think people can just give these girls many presents for nothing? They give them presents to make up for the ordeal they have been subjected to".

Another one said “It is true that girls, unlike boys, do not go to the hospital after the circumcision, but I think it is because women are stronger than men when it comes to pain.

Vilakazi-Tselane and Mbere (1998:5) classified puberty rites among the Vhavenda as dangerous cultural practices, because of the presence of genital mutilation. However, no evidence of the presence of genital mutilation was cited in their study. According to Khupiso (2000:2), however, female circumcision is practised in some puberty rites in South Africa. It is reported that two teenagers were abducted and forcefully circumcised. The researcher followed up the incident at the hospital mentioned by the journalist, but did not find information related to the incident. In all puberty rites attended, the researcher did not find evidence of genital mutilation. However, more studies on female initiation among other South African groups are needed to establish whether female circumcision is a myth or a reality in South Africa.

It is well documented that female circumcision is practised in some parts of Africa to maintain virginity. For example in Egypt the courts have legitimised female circumcision and a Demographic Health Survey conducted in 1995 indicated that 97 percent of married women between 14 and 49 years of age were circumcised. These women had their clitoris partially or totally removed and their labia minora removed. In severe cases the external genitals are removed, the vaginal opening reduced to just a very small vaginal opening (El-Sayed 1997:17).

In the focus group discussion with girls who had reached puberty (*Thugamama*) there were mixed feelings about initiation. Some indicated that they wanted to be initiated, but were afraid that the old ladies would insert the horn into their vaginas. One of the participants mentioned that her mother told her that in the *vukhomba* the initiates are
made to eat food mixed with their own faeces. Another one was told that a monster visits the initiation hut at night to swallow the initiates. It seems in this case that the myths were used to discourage these girls from attending the initiation. However, in some instances myths are used to encourage girls to be initiated. For example in the focus group with Christian women one of the uninitiated women indicated that her grandmother told her that she will not be able to get children if she is not initiated. Some of the girls indicated that they wanted to be initiated, because they also wanted to receive presents afterwards. One participant said, “When girls come from the initiation they are beautiful, because they do not do anything there, they are just fed and made to dance”. Another participant said, “I want to be initiated because I do not want to be called a child forever. I want my younger brothers and sisters to respect me”.

- There was no mention of the stretching of the labia minora in all focus groups and interviews. This was also not observed in all initiations. This question was raised at the feedback workshops. It was indicated in the feedback workshops that stretching of the labia is not done during vuKhomba. It is done by young children and is called kuTlangisa. The children are instructed to do this procedure by their mothers and grandmother. The stretching of labia minora takes place before menarche, because it is believed that the labia minora cannot stretch after the first menses.

4.3.2. Perceptions of initiated girls, initiated women, and vuKhomba elders

Culture and tradition

Initiated women and girls described vuKhomba as a school where women other than their own mothers teach initiates the facts of life. They are taught ubuntu and respect for elders and for one another. Puberty rites also prepare girls for acceptable behaviour in their culture (International Confederation of Midwives World Health Organisation 2000:6). They are also taught about their culture through poetry, dances, singing and story-telling. According to Schapera (1946:99), puberty rites offer formal education, which plays an important role in the life of an individual. Richards (1956:26) views puberty rites as ways
of raising the name or enhancing the social reputation of the adolescent and family. Puberty rites among the tribes of erstwhile Tanganyika, the present Tanzania, are viewed as a symbolic rebirth and the creation of a new useful member of the tribe (Cory 1956: 27-29).

Initiated women described vukhomba as a rite to mark the end of puberty (Thugamama) and the beginning of girlhood (nhwanyana): a place for teaching a girl the facts of life and women’s work. The initiates learn to respect elders and to listen to them. Furthermore, it teaches traditional dances and milawu to initiates. Milawu are discussed in 4.5.1. The rite encourages the girls to maintain their virginity by stressing no sex before marriage.

People have thrown away this tradition. Look at the girls nowadays they get married and have children at a very young age and suffer from ricilana...

One participant in the focus group discussions with the elders indicated that during their time they were taught not to allow men to come near them.

As a girl I knew that if a man said he loves me I must direct him to my home so that he could send his people to propose. If I loved him I would agree and he would pay lobola.

Initiated women felt that vukhomba is a cultural practice that upholds African culture.

Social

Initiated women and girls view vukhomba as a place where they enjoy themselves without fear. Also as a safe place for women to use language that is not normally used and which is considered vulgar by the community. It offers an environment where women feel free to perform nude dances. One participant said, “Vukhomba is a safe environment, because what you do or say in there, will never be known by the outside
world”. In all the focus group discussions initiated women and girls indicated that *vukhomba* teaches respect and *vumunhu* or *ubuntu*.

One participant observed, “When you are uninitiated you do not respect your elders, you even use obscene language in the street. Initiated women know where vulgar language is used”. Another participant said, “What I like about the insults is that they are levelled at men, because they insult women when they are in their own initiation”. In relation to the use of obscene language in *vukhomba*, they felt that the obscene language deters men from coming close to the area where the initiation is taking place. “When we see a man approaching we substitute the words in our song with the names of their private parts. You will see him run away”.

Although the participants only refer to males, they also use words that are not normally used to describe female reproductive organs. *Vukhomba* tries to preserve the language and to teach the initiate correct concepts. For example, in normal day-to-day language in the community the reproductive parts of a woman and man are referred to as the front of a woman or the front of a man (*hala mahlweni ka wansai* and *hala mahlwane ka wanuna*). The front of a person can mean many things. The correct names for the external reproductive organs are as follows: pubic hair is called *makaka*, the vagina is called *xitombo*, and the clitoris is called *ntisingi*, the labia *mileve*, the penis *mbolo*, and the scrotum *makende*.

The use of the correct names for these body parts is considered vulgar or obscene in the community. The only acceptable place to learn the correct names is during the initiation and the initiate is told not to use the words in public. This is different from learning them in the streets, because they are usually used in a derogatory manner to insult people. The uninitiated women and girls learn about them in the streets.

All initiated girls indicated that they were taught not to sleep around with boys and to save their virginity for their husbands. When asked why some of them have children, one respondent said:
You just want to try it like any other girl, but when you are initiated you try and hide from the elders, because you always remember what they told you in the *vukhomba*. Uninitiated girls do not respect the elders, they walk with boy friends in front of the elders.

Some participants indicated that the puberty rites prepare the girl for marriage. "*Vukhomba* prepares you for marriage and future relationships and it stresses the importance of sex after marriage. It prevents girls from fooling around". However, not all the girls get married after *vukhomba*. It was mentioned in one focus group discussion that getting married after *vukhomba* depended on the availability of a man who wants to marry the initiate.

Some initiated women (2) felt that the puberty rites create a happy mood in the community, because quarrels or fights are not allowed when there is a puberty rite going on in the village. Anyone who contravenes this is fined or physically punished by the women. During all the *vukhomba* observed, women seemed to be in control of the villages. It seems as though *vukhomba* enhances the power of women. The traditional leader has no power over the decisions made by these women. It is important to mention at this stage, however, that women can only take decisions on issues that contravene the taboos and rules related to *vukhomba*, but other village issues are still the responsibility of the traditional leader. An example of this was given by one of the participants.

Mr Y. had a fight with his wife at night thinking that no one would hear them. In the morning the elders visited the family to lodge a complaint and a fine. The man was aggressive and refused to pay the fine. Singing, dancing and drumming we invaded his house. He ran away and we left the initiates in his house with the instruction that he should initiate them. When he came home and found the elders and initiates in his house he was so scared that he ran to the chief’s kraal for help, but in vain. He came back to apologise to the elders and paid the fine, which was a cow.
In one focus group discussion, the participants felt that *vukhomba* does not tell them where a child comes from and is not explicit about sexual intercourse. They only realised the meaning of not playing with boys when they were already pregnant. One participant said that when she was pregnant she used to think that the baby would come out through her mouth. She got the shock of her life when she was told at the clinic that the baby would come through her vagina. She said when she got home she put her finger into her vagina and realised it was too small for a baby’s head.

The Rauto puberty rites, according to Lutkehaus & Roscoe (1995: 20-21), is concerned with fertility, power and social regeneration. It is sometimes viewed as a form of love magic, because its principal aim is to make the initiates attractive to men. It enhances the beauty, social attractiveness, and health of the initiate. The Manam puberty rites are also concerned with health, growth, and personal attraction, and are associated with the beauty and sexual desirability of women and men. The attention that is given to physical appearance signifies a cultural theory of the relationship between beauty and power. Although it is not mentioned in any of the discussions with informants, the gifts that the girl receives suggest that they want her to look beautiful and attractive (Lutkehaus & Roscoe 1995:21).

Mönning (1967:112) describes the initiation of the youth among the Bapedi as a sacred institution that is a cornerstone of the whole social and political organisation. It is a way in which the individual acquires the status of citizenship of the tribal community, which will allow her full participation in the social, political and juridical activities of the community.

The initiation ceremonies prepare the initiates for a new step in the life of the individual. The ability to bear children and the strength, courage and endurance needed in daily work were identified by Schapera (1946:107) as the qualities necessary to succeed in life. Furthermore he praised the initiation for managing to inculcate obedience, discipline and general good behaviour among the initiated. The focus of puberty rites is a social rather than natural change. Initiations are public affairs, though the activities and knowledge
gained are kept secret. The purpose of all initiations is to transmit knowledge and powers that are exclusive to the initiated. Lincoln (1981:90) views the initiation as a way of transforming a girl and radically separating her from her childhood existence. Furthermore, initiations for girls endow the lives of women with a sense of the meaning and dignity of their status in the community. The emphasis in the initiation is on learning new skills.

Myths

The cutting of the clitoris and insertion of the horn was indicated by the initiated women as a way of detecting uninitiated people. When they were asked about it in the focus group discussions they all laughed.

Uninitiated people always mention these things, even your own husband believes that these strange things happened to you. They do not believe when we tell them the truth about the initiation. So we just let them believe what they want to believe.

When asked if they knew about these stories before going for initiation the majority said they did not know. “During our time children did not talk about vukhomba, it was difficult to know”. The majority of the women indicated that they had no choice. They had to be initiated because it was non-negotiable during their time. “Vukhomba was our school and, as a girl, you had to attend, otherwise you would feel out of place and nobody would respect you”.

The views of the initiated girls about vukhomba before they were initiated themselves were similar to those of the uninitiated discussed above. They also referred to the issue of the clitoris cutting and the insertion of a horn in the vagina.

The majority of the girls indicated that they expected the cutting of the clitoris and the insertion of the horn. When asked about the horn, they also laughed and said that it was not true. It was simply “a story that comes from uninitiated women. When you are in the
vukhomba nobody touches you except mudzabi. When do they get a chance to cut you?” According to Mashego (1997: 26-116), female circumcision is done in the Bushbuckridge area among the Mapulana people. An investigation is necessary to confirm the reality of this and to protect the female youths from these “unkindest cuts”.

Although there is no evidence of genital mutilation, evidence of beating in the initiation can still be found. In one of the initiations observed, the initiate’s sister beat the initiate because she failed to cry when she was requested to. According to Schapera (1946:100), at the vhusha rite the initiates are beaten and made to stand in water. In the three puberty rites that the researcher attended as a participant observer, no cutting of the clitoris or insertion of a horn was observed. The only horn (Kudu’s horn) the researcher saw during the initiations was the one that is blown now and then. Another observation was that the vadzabi were the only people allowed to touch the initiate, because other people might bewitch her and render her infertile.

4.4. THE REASONS THAT ENCOURAGE GIRLS TO BE INITIATED

Analysis of all the information obtained in the focus group discussions and feedback workshops with girls indicates that girls subject themselves to initiation for material, honour, and curiosity reasons. Table 4.4 indicates material gain and respect (5) as the main motivators for getting initiated, followed by curiosity (4). Vukhomba as a tradition and culture (2) and peer pressure (1) ranked the lowest.

Table 4.4. : The reasons that encouraged girls to be initiated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Reasons given</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for initiation</td>
<td>To gain respect, not to be called a child, not to be a thugamama forever; tradition, culture, peer pressure</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Getting new clothes, a bedroom suite, duvets</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curiosity, entertainment, wanted to experience what others have experienced</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Girls are initiated in order to gain respect at home and in the community. After the initiation, they experience a change in the way their parents, siblings and community address them. One participant said, “I experienced a change at home. My younger siblings started calling me sesi, meaning sister. My grandmother used to scold me and call me names she is not doing it anymore”.

Girls want to be initiated, because they view the vukhomba as a form of entertainment and a meeting place for friends. One participant said, “I wanted to be initiated because I did not want to be lonely during the holidays. I have seen how uninitiated girls get lonely when the other girls are enjoying themselves at the vukhomba”. “Vukhomba gives us a chance to be with our friends during the holidays. It is a form of entertainment” Another participant mentioned that she refused to go to the Christian rite because she wanted to be with other girls. “I wouldn’t be allowed in the traditional one if I was initiated in the Christian way”.

The elders and women expressed concern over the factors that motivate the girls to get initiated nowadays. One participant remarked, “In my view the girls want to be initiated to get gifts and not to learn milawu. They even give you a list of what they want long before they are initiated and usually they want jeans”. Another participant said “Nowadays they do not even attempt to know milawu. The milawu end up in a paper that the initiate is given by the mudzabi to read”. These are discussed in 4.5.1 below.

4.5. THE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE THE INITIATES GAINED DURING THE VUKHOMBA

An analysis of the transcribed interviews recorded the following:
Table 4.5: What vukhomba teaches to the initiate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Initiated</th>
<th>Uninitiated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Respect: respect for elders, listening to elders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaches girls to misbehave, encourages promiscuity</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obscene language</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Milawu ya viotimi and milawu ya vukhomba teaches:</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• respect for human life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• how to solve problems in their society</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• recitation, singing and poetry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• the art of memorising</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>• no sex before marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• no sex when having menses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• not to have sex with someone else’s husband</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• virginity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• do not allow men to touch you</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• fooling around with boys will result in pregnancy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hygiene</td>
<td>• keep yourself clean</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• hide menses from other people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• people must not know when you have menses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• a man might die when he has sex with a woman who has menses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morals</td>
<td>• Vumunhu, ubuntu,</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• how to live with different people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• morals of the society</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• good manners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• self control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditions</td>
<td>• traditional dancing</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• how to greet people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• how to relate to family members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• accepted behaviour</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

There is a difference between what the initiated and uninitiated girls and women know about what is learnt in the vukhomba. Uninitiated girls only had negative ideas. They mentioned that vukhomba teaches girls to misbehave and to use obscene language.

4.5.1. Respect

According to the initiated girls and women, there are two types of milawu (milawu is plural of nawu) that are learnt in the vukhomba - milawu ya viotimi (facts of life) and milawu ya vukhomba (poems, songs, and formulae). These milawu teach respect, respect
for elders, listening to elders, respect for human life, how to solve problems in their society, recitation, singing and poetry and memorising. Furthermore, milawu teach the initiate about keeping secrets. A mother of one of the initiates mentioned that she can now confide in her initiated daughter, because she knows very well that her daughter will keep the discussion secret. The milawu seem to be the formulae and mummeries referred to by Schapera (1946: 101). According to him, the formulae are concerned with sexual functions, but milawu that were recited in vukhomba did not address these functions. For example, Mphuu! Dzwi-dzwi-dzwi addresses the dangers of walking when it is still dark. Mphuu! Gireyi ximbhebhe makundumule! is about heavy rains and floods that kill people and cattle. It teaches respect for human life and the reason why society must mourn for the loss of human life. Phu! Xilungu teaches about the treatment that black people receive as labourers from their white masters. It conveys the feelings and frustration blacks have about their work situation and the depression they will suffer when their masters dump them when they are no longer useful.

Mathivhando was explained in the feedback workshop as nawi that was used for challenging other initiated girls to compete in reciting milawu (poems, formulae and some work songs). The participants indicated that in the olden days each bead on a girl’s neck represented a poem, formula or song and an initiated girl was supposed to recite or sing all of them using her beads. The initiated girls were not allowed to pause while reciting them. They used to compete on speed and sequence when reciting or singing them.

Since learning in vukhomba takes place through poems, rhymes and songs the participants in the intervention programme will be encouraged to use their creativity to compose songs, poems and rhymes that can be used for sexuality education.
4.5.2. Sex

There is a view among the vukhomba elders and initiated women that the initiated girls do not take what they learn in the initiation seriously. One participant observed, “Although in the initiation we tell the initiates not to play with boys, within a week they will be standing with boys holding hands. They do not have respect for the elders”. The sexuality education in vukhomba is about maintaining virginity by not indulging in sex before marriage. Furthermore, it does not give the initiates information about the result of sexual relationships, which is pregnancy. The puberty rite does not mention diseases that a person can catch in sexual relationships.

According to Cory (1956: 27-29) the teaching during puberty rites concerns sexual matters. All the secrets of sexuality are learned and observed by the initiated. The method of instruction in the puberty rites involves songs and figurines, though not all the songs and figurines have an instructive purpose. The aim of puberty rites is to instil a sense of discipline into the initiate and to increase her self-confidence and bravery. The figurines and the songs in vujelejele give information about relationships. Hence, for example, the figurine of two doves and the song Guu-guu i tava ha randzana (Guu-guu it is a dove. We love each other. When the dove sings it is calling its lover). However, the initiate is not given explicit sexual information that is easy to understand. For example, the penis and the song that is sung when the initiated girls are showing the penis figurine to the initiate seem to be aimed at discouraging the initiate from sexual relationships. The song wayi vona ya rhemelela is a combination of Xitsonga and Sepedi. The song is saying, “Look at it. Do you see it? It cuts”. Although the elders also shout some additional information during the performance, warning the girl not to indulge in sex, the information is not explicit. It seems they leave it to the individual to decide. The reaction to this might be twofold. It could encourage girls to experiment with sex or discourage them. Another song that encourages sexual relationships is ndzi tsakisiwa hi yona (“I enjoy it”, meaning sex).
4.5.3. Hygiene

Initiates are taught to hide their menses from other people. That is, people must not know when you have menses. Furthermore, they must not have intercourse when they have their menses, because a man might die in this situation. According to Paige & Paige (1981: 1-2), sexual contact with a menstruating woman is strictly prohibited by behavioural taboos. The menstruating woman is expected to conceal her condition, especially from men. Men are not supposed to know or see the menses. Menstruating women should keep themselves clean to make sure that people do not detect that they are menstruating.

The health issues indicated by the initiated girls were related to personal hygiene during ku borisiwa ka xikhomba. In the observed initiations the initiates were not allowed to have a bath or even to wash their hands before eating. All initiated girls disliked this ritual, because they felt that they needed a bath every day, especially after the strenuous exercises they had undertaken. Another unhealthy practice that was mentioned was the lack of sanitary pads for girls who had their menses during the initiation.

The information given to the girls and the practice in the initiation contradicted each other. The girls were taught to conceal their menses and keep themselves clean while in the initiation hut they were not even given clean clothes or a sanitary pad to use when they were having their menses. This was worse on the day the initiate was not allowed to have a bath.

4.5.4. Morals

According to the initiated women and girls, vukhomba initiates learn respect, accepted behaviours, personal hygiene, and the morals and traditions of society. The initiates learn the poems and rhymes of the initiation (milawu ya vukhomba) and the facts of life (milawu ya vutomi). Both types of milawu are not related to sexuality education but to the activities and morals of the society.
4.5.5. Tradition

According to the initiated girls, *vukhomba* teaches them traditional dances and how to greet and relate to people and family members. In one of the focus group discussions with initiated girls one participant said, "Before I was initiated I used not to greet people when I met them, but after initiation it was difficult for me to pass a person without a greeting". It seemed as if this initiated girl had been transformed from what she was before the initiation. This transformation, according to Lincoln (1981:97), is the ultimate aim of the initiation.

The goal of initiation is not merely to make a better, stronger, or knowledgeable person of the initiate, ... but to transform her utterly, make her totally different from what she had been, and radically separate her from childhood existence (Lincoln 1981:97).

According to participants in the focus group with initiated women, *vukhomba* does not teach initiated girls things they need to know. It teaches them about traditional life and dances. They mentioned that teaching the initiate about contraceptives would reduce the problem of teenage pregnancy. In a study conducted by The Alan Guttmacher Institute (2000:1), declines in teenage pregnancy in the USA were achieved through changes in sexual behaviour and changes in contraceptive use. Furthermore, fear of HIV, changing attitudes about sexuality, and availability of new contraceptives have lowered teenage pregnancy. To improve *vukhomba* the initiates need to gain quality knowledge about HIV/AIDS, STDs and contraceptives. Furthermore, they need to change their sexual behaviour.

4.5.6. The views of uninitiated girls, women and men

Three of the uninitiated women view *vukhomba* as a place where girls are taught obscene language. In an interview a traditional leader indicated that he was uncomfortable with the songs and language used in the *vukhomba*, because they insult men. However, he encourages and supports *vukhomba* in his village, because it is a source of income. A
female teacher (uninitiated) described vukhomba as an evil useless practice that teaches girls to misbehave. She called it evil, because she holds a view that female circumcision is done. However, her observation is that initiated girls were more obedient than uninitiated girls. Uninitiated Christian women also view vukhomba as an evil traditional practice, which should be abolished. However, the church does not prevent Christian women and girls from participating in the initiation. Furthermore, both initiated and uninitiated Christian women suggested a Christian type of the initiation, which will not use the obscene language.

Uninitiated women and men were also uncomfortable with the rules and taboos that must be observed during the vukhomba. For example, adults within the family of the initiated are expected to abstain from sex during the vukhomba. Men and uninitiated women and girls are expected to stay indoors or leave the homestead in the evening when the initiation process is taking place. One traditional leader complained about the vukhomba rules and taboos and said: “We are not told in advance about them they wait until you make a mistake and come and charge you. Once you are charged you have to pay”.

4.6. GENDER AND HEALTH ISSUES RELATED TO THE VUKHOMBA PRACTICE

Although men are not part of the puberty rites for girls, the roles and expectations that society prescribes for women and men were reinforced in the vukhomba. For example, a woman is viewed as a “nurturer” and a man as a “provider”. The song A va nwi layeni dictates how initiates must look after her family members and give them food, and it further determines gender relations by prescribing roles for women and men. Making the initiate cry is another gender issue that promotes the stereotype that females cry and males do not. In one of the initiations studied during the morning, tingoma women dressed like male mine workers demonstrated the hardship males faced in the mines in order to provide for their families. In another episode a man came home and his wife cooked, washed and nurtured him, but at a later stage this same man was beating her.
These demonstrations reinforce gender roles and the beating of the woman did not seem to bother the participants.

4.6.1. Submissiveness to men.

In all the focus group discussions with the vukhomba elders, they disagreed with the view that vukhomba encouraged women to be submissive to men. One participant commented, “Girls in the initiation are taught to respect men and women and not to be submissive”. Another participant said, “In the vukhomba we do not teach girls how to behave towards men, because they are supposed to wait until they are married and be told how to behave towards their husband when they are taken to the husband’s home”. In one of the interviews with the teachers it was mentioned that initiated girls in school are more obedient than uninitiated ones. There is no evidence that suggests that being more obedient at school the initiated girls are submissive.

4.6.2. Sexual relationships

It was mentioned in one focus group discussion that early sexual relationships result in a disease, the descriptions of which was similar to cancer of the cervix.

People have thrown away the tradition of ku veke khomba. Look at the girls nowadays. They get married and/or have children at a very young age and suffer from ricilana.

Ricilana was described as a disease that affects women who ‘know men’ (become sexually active) at a very young age. They become pale and frail and usually die young. *Munhu wa kona ubasa a ku paa! onge i phepha a thlha a vonikela onge a nga na ngati.* They feel cold and like basking in the sun the whole day. They usually have a bad smell coming from their vagina, because the man’s blood (meaning semen) goes rotten in them. Sometimes they have bad smelling menses that are heavy.
It was mentioned in one of the focus group discussions with initiated girls that *vukhomba* does not teach them about all the things they would like to know e.g. about their bodies, menses, and contraception. It was suggested that these should be included in the initiation. Furthermore, some of the initiated girls suggested that sex education should not be taught at school, but in the initiation. Sex education to them meant the reproductive system in biology, meaning that no sexuality education is offered in their schools. The initiated girls were uncomfortable with the way it is taught at school and would prefer learning about sexuality in the absence of males, and *vukhomba* seems to be a good place for them. Male teachers make jokes about the female reproductive system, while female teachers totally avoid teaching about the reproductive system. This information is important as it gives guidelines on topics to be included in the proposed intervention programme.

The majority of girls would like the *xideka* to be changed, because it causes pain and bruising between the buttocks. Furthermore, they suggested the adoption of G-string panties to replace it. “If they can change and adopt the G-string panties it would be easier to dance”.

4.6.3. Teenage Pregnancy.

Regarding the prevention of teenage pregnancy and AIDS, the *vukhomba* elders felt that the checking of girls’ virginity should be reinstated in the puberty rites. Television was blamed for promiscuity among the teenagers.

My problem is with television and its shows. The television must not show films that show people kissing and sleeping, because the girls’ blood runs fast when they see these films. It makes the girls want to have sex.

Initiated women in one of the focus group discussions indicated that talking about men and women relationships would not be possible. Relationships with men are discouraged. The *vukhomba* elders make sure that there is nothing that discusses the relationships between men and women. They removed some topics from the intervention programme.
that the researcher suggested, which were viewed as encouraging relationships between men and women. For example, information on the male reproductive system and contraceptives had to be removed from the intervention programme.

Although virginity checking is no longer done, it was a gender issue, because society expected girls to be virgins and they were even punished if they were found deflowered. For example, in one focus group discussion with the vukhomba elders it was mentioned that after checking the hymen the vukhomba elders would ululate in a funny way if the girl was found deflowered and the whole community would understand what it meant. The community used to ostracise girls who fell pregnant before marriage, but nothing was done to the man who made her pregnant. “They would even compose a song about you”. It seems as if vukhomba encourages abstinence and has no alternative for those who cannot abstain. According to Fine (1988:43), sexuality education that encourages abstinence among the youth does not encourage the development of sexual responsibility among the youths.

Another initiated woman indicated that in the olden days initiated women and initiated men had to follow a certain procedure before their first sexual relationship. According to her, this prevented women and men from indulging in sexual relationships before marriage. The procedure was described as follows:

In the olden days, we were taught at the initiation that when you fall in love with a man, do not allow him to touch you, he must come and pay lobola first. We were also told that when you get married you must not allow your husband to sleep with you before paying a certain amount of money, this is called ku lula nsati. He will then ask you to show him his child (the child he is referring to is the decorated nxanga) and pay a certain amount to see it. How much, depended on you. It was only after doing this that you will have an intimate relationship. If the girl fails to produce the nxanga there would not be a sexual relationship. The husband waits for it and if he does not get it, the marriage is dissolved, because it meant that the girl had a sexual relationship with another man elsewhere.
Some of the vukhomba elders found it unacceptable for the parents not to scold or punish their daughter when she is pregnant and for sending her back to school after delivery. In their view the girl was not supposed to continue with schooling, but they did not say anything about the man who made the girl pregnant. The mother of the girl was always blamed for this and they were silent about the father. One participant said,

> Nowadays a girl does not even leave school, she continues with schooling until delivery. After delivery she immediately goes back to school. I have seen it with my granddaughter. She delivered on a Thursday and went to school on Monday.

Teenage pregnancy is perceived as a problem by all the participants in the initiation of girls, but no participating groups are taking any action to deal with it. Lack of knowledge about sexual development, human reproduction, and healthy sexual behaviour seems to be the cause of teenage pregnancy.

In one of the focus group discussions an initiated women indicated that teaching initiates about contraceptives could reduce the number of teenage pregnancies.

> In my view it would help if initiates were taught something about contraceptives may be it would limit the problem of having children before marriage.

This dispels the notion that vukhomba is about sexuality education, because it does not address all aspects of sexuality education. Vukhomba seems to address sexuality, because it makes the initiate feel comfortable. This is achieved by keeping her almost naked for the whole period of initiation. Furthermore, the celebration and gifts after her initiation make the initiated girl feel good about herself and important in the society.

Knowledge and understanding of sexual development, human reproduction, and sexual health are clearly lacking in the education of vukhomba. In other words, vukhomba addresses sexuality and not sexuality education.
4.7. THE ROLE OF THE DIFFERENT PARTICIPATING GROUPS AND KEY PEOPLE IN VUKHOMBA

There were three important groups of initiated people in the puberty rites - the elders, women, and the girls responsible for the initiation. Each group had a role to play and was expected to play it properly. They had well-defined duties or tasks to perform. There were also three important people in the puberty rites, namely, phorisa ra vukhomba, murileri, and mudzabi. The roles of the different groups and people are discussed below.

4.7.1. The role of the vukhomba elders

During the initiation the researcher observed that the vukhomba elders played a supervisory role. They were the supervisors of the women and girls and had chosen among themselves one person to be the chief supervisor (Phorisa ra vukhomba) of the whole initiation. The chief supervisor was also responsible for supervision of the vukhomba elders. They are the only ones who perform ngoma leyikulu that takes place on Thursday and Friday night. It was mentioned in one focus group discussion that the vukhomba elders were expected to dance (ku cinela), but the initiated women had volunteered to dance on their behalf, because most of vukhomba elders had chronic diseases e.g. diabetes and high blood pressure.

4.7.2. The role of the initiated women (vabvana)

In all the initiations observed, the initiated women, including murileri, were the main supervisors of the girls, including the mudzabi. In all focus group discussions with vabvana it was mentioned that their role was to dance and perform all the rituals that are supposed to be performed. It was indicated that in two of the focus group discussions initiated women also had a teaching role. One of the participants mentioned that they teach milawu related to the initiation. “We teach initiates milawu related to the initiation. We teach her how she should behave whilst she is still an initiate”.

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4.7.3. The role of initiated girls (vanhwanyana)

In all the initiations observed, the initiated girls were responsible for dancing, keeping the mudzabi and initiate company, assisting the mudzabi in teaching the dances and milawu, and accompanying the women to fetch the mudzabi and initiate from the river. They were also responsible for making the figurines that were shown to the initiate on Friday. Participants in the feedback workshops confirmed these roles for initiated girls. They also indicated that only a girl who has not completed one year after her own initiation and has never mentored an initiate is still considered an initiate and would not be allowed to participate in the Friday dances. She was expected to attend at least three initiations and participate in the activities performed by the initiate and mudzabi. By participating the mudzabi refines her own skills and learns more about the initiation, and at the end of this period she graduates to the level of the initiated girls. It was mentioned that it is not everyone who gets a chance to mentor, because families choose the people they trust to mentor their initiates. This also happens in vhusha, where the initiated girl is supposed to attend three initiations before she can graduate to mudabe (mudzabi) (Blacking 1959:1).

4.7.4. The role of the chief supervisor of vukhomba (phorisa ra vukhomba or malogwana)

In all the initiations observed, the chief supervisor was responsible for the supervision of the whole initiation i.e. the day and night activities. Women would check with her before taking a decision when something unusual had occurred. For example, in one of the initiations when the initiate’s biological mother refused to remove her headscarf, the women reported to the supervisor that they had decided to stage a walk-out in protest.

In the vhusha the supervisor is called Nematei, an elderly and important woman of the village. She is responsible for the smooth running of the initiation and the allocation of vukhomba mothers to the initiates (Blacking 1959:1). In the chisungu described by Richards (1956: 60-61), the chisungu supervisor, Nangoshye, is an important woman from the neighbourhood. She is responsible for teaching the initiates and making sure that the activities of the rite are done correctly.
Since the chief supervisor of *vukhomba* is an important person, it will be necessary to get her permission before implementing the intervention programme in each initiation. Their role in the intervention programme will be to supervise the facilitators of the intervention programme. Because each initiation has its own chief supervisor, an orientation programme will be developed and conducted with all *vukhomba* elders in the village.

4.7.5. The role of the *murileri*

The role of *murileri* can be described as acting as an eye of the family in the initiation of the girl. She takes the initiate’s mother’s role and is responsible for the safety of the initiate. She is often referred to as *mhani wa vukhomba*, meaning mother of *vukhomba*. In other words, *murileri* is a ‘godmother’ to the initiate. In the initiation process she was the first to dance before the initiates and was present in all the initiation activities. In all the initiations observed, she was also responsible for the preparation of snuff and beer for the initiation. Furthermore, in one initiation the *murileri* assisted the initiate’s mother and grandmother in her preparation for the celebration that followed after the initiation. It was explained in the feedback workshop that the *murileri*-initiate relationship is a lifelong one. Furthermore, it was indicated that in the olden days the *murileri* used to be the first to know that her ex-initiate had had a sexual relationship with her husband. One of the participants in the focus group discussion with the *vukhomba* elders indicated as follows:

> In the olden days when you got married your husband was supposed to put money under the mat (*ku lula nsati*) before any sexual contact. First thing when you woke up in the morning was to take the money and give it to your *murileri* and she would then ululate and dance (*a khana*).

Among the Vhavenda the *murileri* is referred to as *mme wa vhukomba* (mother of *vhukomba*) meaning fictitious mother of the initiate. The supervisor of the initiation, called *Nematei*, chooses the *mme wa vhukomba*. The *mme wa vhukomba* looks after her child throughout the initiation. She helps her to learn the dance steps and rules that must be memorised. As in *vukhomba*, she accompanies her wherever she goes during and after
each stage of vhusha. When the initiate completes her initiation and becomes a mudabe, the mother of vukhomba buys the initiate new clothes and prepares beer in her honour. The relationship continues after vhusha and the child keeps her vhukomba mother informed about her progress in life (Blacking 1959:1). In the chisungu of the Bemba the parents of the initiate also choose an initiated woman to become the mistress of the rite known as nacimbusa. The nacimbusa is also responsible for the initiation of the initiate. She leads the dances and songs, arranges for making the pottery, and makes sure that the initiate learns all about the initiation. The relationship between the initiate and nacimbusa is also lifelong (Richards 1956:57).

4.7.6. The role of the mudzabi (mentor)

In the initiations observed, two important roles of the mudzabi emerged, the caring and teaching role. All the vadjabi (plural) described their role as looking after the safety of the initiate, cooking for her, and teaching her milawu. In two of the initiations the vadjabi were even called vaswekeri (cooks), because they mentored more than three initiates and had finished the prescribed one-year probationary period. All the vadjabi indicated that mentoring was not easy, because it was like a second initiation to them. One mudzabi mentioned ku va mudzabi yo! Swa vava ... meaning that it is not easy to be a mentor.

During the puberty rites in erstwhile Tanganyika (Tanzania) anyone who had been initiated was entitled to participate in the initiation of other girls. It was usually considered to be the duty of the recently initiated persons to take a particular interest in these ceremonies and they were expected to attend any performance of them in their home district for several years after their own (Cory 1956:30). In vhusha an initiated girl becomes a mudabe (mentor) after participating in three initiations. In other words, an initiated girl cannot be given a mentoring task before she masters the activities in the initiation. As mudabe, she is responsible for the dancing and for teaching the initiate the laws of the initiation (Blacking 1959:1).
4.8. CONTRIBUTION OF VUKHOMBA TO THE PREVENTION IN HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS does not form part of the education in vukhomba. Some of the participants indicated that they were not sure about HIV/AIDS since they had only heard about it from the radio. They had not seen anyone who had the disease. Some also blamed the education system and teachers for the HIV/AIDS problem. They believed that the introduction of sexuality education has encouraged girls to become promiscuous. Furthermore, promiscuity among the girls is also blamed on television for showing people kissing and having sex. Some participants suggested that girls should be given more information about HIV/AIDS during initiation, while others felt that HIV/AIDS does not exist.

Although in vukhomba they sing and even develop and show the initiate a model of the penis, they avoid talking about male and female relationships. It is difficult to talk about the relationship between men and women, because the vukhomba discourages girls from having a sexual relationship with men. One participant indicated that vukhomba does prevent HIV/AIDS by teaching girls not to sleep with someone’s husband. One supervisor of vukhomba mentioned that HIV/AIDS and teenage pregnancy can be prevented if teachers stopped sleeping with schoolgirls and dumping them when they have made them pregnant.

Some of the vukhomba elders felt that virginity testing during initiation could prevent HIV/AIDS. Checking virginity during initiation might prevent girls from indulging in sex before initiation. However, after the initiation there is nothing that prevents them from becoming sexually active, because there is no virginity testing before marriage and the nxanga procedure explained in 4.6.3 is no longer used. Therefore virginity testing seems to be good for preventing first sex among the girls, but has no control afterwards. According to Ntshingila & Ndiyane (1998: 18-19), virginity testing in some areas of KwaZulu-Natal is done regularly and girls who are still virgins are given a certificate to show this. The advocates of virginity testing also believe in sex after marriage, though it is not clear whether these people also advocate HIV testing before marriage to make sure
that the virgin girl does not get married to an HIV-positive man. Another problem with
virginity testing is that it encourages gender stereotypes for example, that a woman
should preserve her virginity for her husband and that males are allowed to have sex
before marriage.

The advocates of virginity testing seem to assume that HIV/AIDS is transmitted through
penetrated vaginal sex only. They seem to ignore the fact that there are other ways of
contracting HIV/AIDS e.g. contaminated blood products and needles, anal sex and oral
sex. Taking all these facts into consideration, virginity testing alone does not seem to be
the solution for the HIV/AIDS problem that is facing the world. The youth, both male and
female, need correct information on HIV/AIDS and other STDs.

All participants in the feedback workshop wanted the topic on HIV/AIDS and STDs to be
included in the intervention programme developed for health education in vukhomba.

4.9. SUMMARY

Initiated and uninitiated women view vukhomba differently. Initiated women see it as an
important cultural practice, while uninitiated women see it as a dangerous practice. It is
evident that uninitiated women have a limited knowledge of the rite, leading to false
assumptions and perceptions about it and its practice. Initiated women view vukhomba as
a place of fun and freedom that teaches respect and ubuntu among the initiated youths. It
also brings together different age groups of women in other words it unites women.

Sexuality education in vukhomba is about maintaining virginity and maintaining morally
acceptable behaviour towards men. The rites do not fully prepare the girls to face all the
challenges of life in this era. It does not prevent teenage pregnancy, implying that safe
sex is not practised.
Despite all the stories that young girls have heard about the puberty rites, they still want to be initiated. There are two major factors that stand out as a source of attraction for these young girls, gifts and respect.
CHAPTER 5.

THE PUBERTY RITES FOR GIRLS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses activities and findings surrounding the puberty rites. Similarities and differences in the various initiations are also discussed. Furthermore, it examines the daily activities and events, their contribution to the health of women, and certain health risks related to the activities. The activities of the puberty rites observed could be divided into day and night events. The puberty rites for girls follow the following steps or activities: *ku tumbetiwa ka xikhombana, kunghenisaxikhombana, ku borisa xikhombana, ku pfule xingomana, ku cinela, swixwelo, geregere, vujelejele, and ku humesa khomba.* There are six major initiation activities, which are compulsory, namely, *ku ng henisa xikhombana, kupfule xingomana, swixwelo, geregere, vujelejele, and ku humesa xikhombana.* *Ku borisa xikhombana* and *ku cinela* are sometimes left out if the initiation period is short. In each of these stages, rituals are performed to mark the stage. Also in this chapter the *vukhomba* rite is compared with other ceremonies described in the literature. The information below is based on participant observation. The transcribed data collected during participant observation is available. It can be obtained from the researcher.

5.2. FINDINGS CONCERNING THE PUBERTY RITES INVESTIGATED.

5.2.1 Preparations for vukhomba

The preparations for vukhomba start immediately after the family has learnt about the girl’s first menses. It involves notifying the maternal family and relatives, setting the date for the initiation, collecting firewood, appointing a *mudzabi,* preparing snuff and the initiation hut, notifying the traditional authority and the community about the initiation. The maternal family is notified and a date is set. Both maternal and paternal families
notify their own relatives about the date of the initiation. The murileri is also informed about the date of the vukhomba. A few months before the initiation a mudzabi is proposed by the family and if she accepts their proposal the initiate’s family and murileri are notified about it.

Depending on the season three to six months before the initiation the initiate’s family start collecting firewood for the initiation. One of the initiate’s mother indicated that she and her daughter started preparing for this in December for a July initiation. Furthermore she indicated that in the olden days collecting firewood was the responsibility of the initiate to be.

“In the olden days the girl was suppose to collect the firewood for her initiation alone, nowadays we help them, because of the scarcity of firewood”.

A month before the initiation the parents buy some tobacco and allow it to dry well. A week before the initiation the murileri and the mother or grandmother of the initiate prepare the snuff that will be used during the initiation. The grandmother or murileri notify the traditional authority and community at the same time preparing the initiation hut. To notify the traditional authority an initiation fee is paid. The initiation fees differ according to the different tribal authorities. It ranges from R10.00 to R60.00. To notify the community a small branch of a tree is cut and sent to the neighbour to inform her about the date of the initiation. The neighbour takes the branch and does the same. The branch and message circulate in the whole village until all villagers are informed. The process of notifying the community is called ku fambisa xitluka.

On the evening of the first day of the initiation, the murileri was instructed by the vukhomba elders to make a fire in the centre of the initiation hut. In two of the initiations, the murileri was also instructed to make another fire outside the initiation hut. In these two initiations, the initiation activities happened around the fire outside the initiation hut.
5.2.2. The organisational structure of the *vukhomba*.

*Vukhomba* is an institution that consists of a group of people working together towards a common goal. It has a clearly defined hierarchical structure with the different people and groups having clearly defined roles and duties. These are discussed in Chapter 4. Communication is vertical (upwards and downwards) and horizontal (See figure 5.1). The characteristics and structure of the *vukhomba* as described above are similar to those of an organisation described by Booyens (1997:132). The *Chisungu* of the Bemba is also hierarchical in nature, with the *nacimbusa* (mistress of the ceremony) leading the rite, and the messenger known as *nakalamba* assisting the *nacimbusa*. The *nakalamba* is then followed by the initiated women and girls respectively and lastly the initiates.

![Diagram of the organisational structure of *vukhomba*]

*Figure 5.1. The organisational structure of *vukhomba*
Vukhomba is a dynamic process that has gone through change to accommodate the changing needs of the women and the initiates. The length of the initiation process has become shorter than that which initiated women and vukhomba elders went through. The reduction in length did not affect the steps and accompanying rituals. For example, ku tumbetiwa ka khomba is still done, but not the checking of virginity. Another example is taking of the initiates to the nkaya tree, although the bark of nkaya is not used anymore as xideka. It seems as if the important matters, according to the research participants, are those no longer included, especially the information given to the initiate.

The changes in vukhomba seem to be related to the demands of formal education. In the olden days, the initiation lasted six months. Then it became three months and later one month. And now it lasts just a week. It used to be done in winter and now it is done during the school holidays irrespective of the season. According to Cory (1956:19), the changes in puberty rites were caused by the changing spiritual, economic, and social conditions in the communities e.g. attendance of school. These caused deterioration in the puberty rites and a reduction in their duration.

According to Mönnig (1967:112), initiations are sacred institutions that form the cornerstones of the whole social and political organisation. Initiations are not individual affairs, but communal activities. Evidence for this can be seen in the way the vukhomba rules and regulations affect the whole community. For example, the community is prevented from playing their radios and having family disputes. Both initiated and uninitiated, males and females, in the community have accepted and observed these rules without question.

5.2.3. Day one

Day one of vukhomba is divided into daylight and evening activities. The daylight activity is called ku tumbetiwa ka xikhombana, that is hiding or isolating the initiates, and the evening activity is called ku ngenisa xikhombana or entry into the initiation.
5.2.3.1. *Ku tumbetiwa ka xikhobana* (Hiding /isolation of the initiates)

This is a whole day event that takes place on the first day of the puberty rites for girls. The initiates were withdrawn from their normal daily activities. They were kept inside the initiation hut and were not allowed to talk to outsiders. They spent the day sitting behind the door chatting and laughing among themselves and their *vadzabi* (plural of *mudzabi*). The *mudzabi* and *murleri* were responsible for the initiates’ needs during this period. It marked the beginning of the initiation and the end of *thugamama*.

In the olden days virginity testing used to mark the end of *ku tumbetiwa ka xikhobana* and the beginning of the initiation proper. It was mentioned by some participants that checking of virginity used to be done before the initiation started and if a girl was found to be deflowered there would be an unusual kind of ululating. This was explained in the feedback workshop. The *vukhomba* elders would open their mouths, curl the lips, making a circle, put a finger in their mouth, and move it around making a sound. The sound made by these movements was a hollow one and was interrupted with the moving finger.

The *chisungu* starts with the blessing of ancestral spirits on the morning of the first day of the initiation. The headman or chief does the blessing. Like in the *vukhomba*, the initiation takes place in a hut that has a fire in the middle of it. The lighting of fire in the hut where initiates stay during their initiation symbolises the beginning of a new life for the initiates. Fire as one of the most appropriate symbols of life is seen in the colour that resembles blood, the flaring action and alarming rapid growth as well as the coldness, which follows when it expires. “Since fire is so closely connected with life, the commencement of a new spate or quality of life is often introduced by extinguishing old fires and lighting new ones” (Kriel 1989:17). The fire in the initiation hut has to be kept burning throughout the initiation as it would be unlucky if it should go out. Fire also has a purification effect, this may relate to the purification of the initiates from their former state, *thugamama*. “If a fire burns well it is taken as a sign of acceptance by God” (Kriel 1989:19).
“Fire is considered as consuming the old and preparing a new being for rebirth in the image of God ... It relieves the adept of his prejudices and renders him suitable to manipulate with ease the most redoubtable element in the world” (Kriel 1989:21). The fire in the hut of the initiates prepares them for a new life, one where they will hold *vukhomba* as a very special rite in which they could participate.

The initiation activities on the first day start at 16:00 with dances by the old initiated women. The initiates are called *banacisungu*. Unlike in *vukhomba*, the hiding of the initiates lasts just an hour (Richards 1956:64). In *vukhomba* the ancestral blessing is a family issue, which is performed according to family customs and religion. They also get a traditional healer to use some medicine on the hut to ward off bad spirits and to prevent the initiate from being bewitched. Among Zion Christian Church (ZCC) members, the priest blesses the initiation hut with holy water. One of the initiate’s parents said: “You never know what will happen to your child when she is in the initiation you should make sure that she is safe”. However, she had never seen or heard that a girl has died in the initiation, but she would not like her daughter to be the first.

*Ku tumbetiwa ka xikhomba* does not pose any threat to the health of the initiate, except anxiety about the unknown events facing her. Although virginity checking could act as a deterrent to early sex or discourage girls from indulging in sex at an early age, the virginity checking process violates the right of the girl to privacy. Imposing punishment with the strange ululating suggests an assumption that the girl lost her virginity of her own free will. There are many girls who lose their virginity because their fathers or relatives or strangers sexually abuse them. These girls already feel guilty, and thus exposing them to virginity testing might further damage their self-confidence, self-respect, and self worth. This also applies to those who have willingly lost their virginity, as they might be feeling guilty that they have done something wrong. The ululating punishment could make them feel even guiltier and destroy their self-confidence, thus affecting their sexual health.
5.2.3.2. Ku ngenisa xikhombana (Entry into the initiation)

Ku ngenisa xikhombana was carried out on the first night of the initiation. In all three initiations ku ngenisa khomba followed the following process:

- **Ku yisa xikhombana ensinyeni** (taking the initiate to the tree/ performance of the tree ritual)
- **ku xanguriwa ka xikhombana** (undressing the initiate)

- **ku rilisa xikhombana** (making the initiate cry)

- **ku cinela** (dancing by the different groups),

- **swigandlu or swidabu** (story-telling)

- **ku cinela** (dancing by the different groups)

5.2.3.3. Ku yisa xikhombana ensinyeni (Taking the initiate to the tree/ performance of the tree ritual),

During all initiations ku yisa xikhombana ensinyeni took place in the evening and was the first ritual of the initiation. In fact the initiation starts at the tree and before the tree ritual an initiate can withdraw from the initiation. After the tree ritual the initiate cannot be seen by uninitiated people and men.

On the evening of the first day of the initiation, the *murileri* and *vukhomba* elders started to beat drums and blow a horn. Initiated women and girls assembled at the family home where the rite was to be held. (In two of the initiations the *murileri* was instructed by the elders to bring out the initiates, who were then shown a place to sit in a corner next to the hut. In the other initiation the initiated women and girls joined the initiates in the hut).
During all the initiations the *murileri* greeted and knelt in front of the *vukhomba* elders and said, “We are now ready to proceed to the tree”. The elders said they should go ahead under the supervision of some of the *vukhomba* elders who were instructed to join the group.

In two of the initiations the initiates were taken to a tree called *nkaya* (knob thorn i.e. *acacia nigrescens*) for the tree-climbing ritual. The reason for using *nkaya*, as was explained by one of the participants in the feedback workshop, was that in the olden days the traditional G-string (*xideka*) was made out of the bark of a knob thorn tree using the inside fibres of the bark. Also the shape of the thorns resembles the breasts of a young girl. No evidence for a medicinal use of *acacia nigrescens* could be found. In one of the initiations they used a *nkanyi* (*marula*) tree, because there were no *nkaya* trees nearby. There are no health risks related to this ritual.

During all the initiations the initiates looked frightened, and became more frightened, when the initiated girls passed intimidating remarks e.g. “We are going to eat her up”.

When going to the tree the group of initiated women and girls walked quietly carrying the horn, drums, and an axe into the dark. When they reached the tree the group surrounded the tree, forming a circle, and each initiate and her *mudzabi* were instructed to kneel down next to the tree.

One of the group members whistled very loudly and everybody, except the mentor and the initiate, shouted and said *Manuge* and this was repeated three times. They then all joined in and sang a song that says *Hi vana vali djadji li hulo Maxavela duno!* *Heyi-heyi Maxavela duno!* *Hi ri hi vana va li djadji li hulo maxavela duno!* The song is a combination of Xitsonga, Sepedi, and Tshivenda and it means, “We are the children of the big sun of Maxavela”. The meaning of *manuge* could not be established, but the researcher was simply told “*Mmanuge i nawu wo nghenisa khomba*” (It is a rule for the first ritual of initiation).
The *mudzabi* was instructed to climb the tree and one of the women took a small stick and touched her, pretending to be beating her, and at the same time reciting something inaudible. This is called *nawu wa le nsinyeni* and included the words *Xithuba-thubana xinga thüba va Nwa-Nhwarhi na va Nwa-Thobela. Thuba-nde,thuba-nde*. (A little lash, a little lash that has beaten the daughter of Nhwarhi and the daughter of Thobela). These words are also a combination of *Xitsonga*, *Tshivenda*, and *Sepedi*. Then the *mudzabi* climbed down and instructed the initiate to climb up the tree.

The same procedure was done with the initiate, except that when the initiate was still up the tree one of the elders came with an axe and made a cut (very lightly) just above the initiate’s head and below her legs. Thereafter the initiate and her *mudzabi* greeted or saluted by lying on their side. They were then given their clothes to dress.

As they were dressing, the group started singing a song called *Nwananga xi handzukile ho yil! Se xilava majaha ho yil! Se i vin’amun’amu ho yil!* The literal translation is “My daughter is torn! She now wants young men! She opens her legs everywhere”. The song means that the girl is sexually active and has lost her virginity. It was later explained that in the olden days they used to check virginity before going to the tree, and if the girl was a virgin a different song would be sung, indicating this. Since they stopped virginity checking, they just use the above song for all girls. This song does not contribute towards health as those who are still virgins could be encouraged to have sex. By becoming sexually active they can contract sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, if they practise unprotected sex. Early sexual relationships can also lead to cancer of the cervix.

The *mudzabi* and the initiates were each given a blanket to cover themselves, including their heads and faces, leaving only a space for them to see their way. The group started singing a song called *Va werile* (They have fallen into or they have crossed the border or they are now inside), while walking towards the initiation hut. The song says: *Ya wela! A he! i ya wela he-he! Ka va Mudjadji Nwa-Thobela A he i ya wela he!* (She has fallen into/ crossed over/ is now inside the home of *Mudjadji*, the daughter of *Thobela*, yes she has
fallen/crossed over/ is inside). Another song was *Hi ya vona mathagele ya khomba he Manyarhule Aah! He manyarhule!* (We are going to see how the initiate dances the *thaga* dance. Hey, fast walker!).

When they got to the gate they stopped for a while and then began a song called *Ri ya dyena khorweni bebula n’wana ri tuwe* (We are now about to get in through the gate, carry your child on your back and come with us). The *mudzabi* and the initiate were escorted back to the hut. The group remained outside and continued to sing and dance in a circle outside (it is called *varhirha*), ululating and blowing a horn. Each song had its own style of dancing. The group then sang a song that asks the elders to give them permission to stop dancing *A va hi rhuleni* (take the load off our heads). The drummer stopped beating the drum and the group stopped singing and sat down.

During all initiations the *murileri* greeted others by lying on her side, putting the palms of her hands together, and then resting her head on them. She then knelt down before the elders and informed them that the job that they were supposed to do at the tree had been done and that the girl could now be called *xikhombana* (an initiate). The elders then showed gratitude for the good job that had been done. In two of the initiations the *vukhomba* elders instructed *murileri* to bring the initiate out for the next ritual called *ku xanguriwa ka xikhombana* (undressing the initiate). The initiate and *mudzabi* came out crawling and covered with blankets from head to toes. In the other, *ku xanguriwa ka xikhombana* was done inside the initiation hut.

The dances by initiated women and girls were more of a physical exercise, which is good for their health. The crawling is not a direct threat to health, but if there are sharp objects on the floor, for example broken glass, the initiates can sustain injuries. The remarks that were passed on the way to the tree caused fear in the initiates. They felt ashamed of themselves and even guilty sometimes, thinking that they had done something wrong. Fear, shame, and guilt disempower the initiate.
In the *chisungu* of the Bemba, the initiates are also taken to the tree, but they are not made to climb it. The women make fish traps with leaves of the *mufungo* tree for the initiates and sing a song about setting fish traps. The initiates are made to jump over the fish traps. After this, branches are piled on the initiates’ backs and they are made to crawl with them. Then the branches are piled into a heap and the initiates are instructed to jump over it. At the end of these activities three elders greeted the crowd in the same manner as that used by initiates in the *vukhomba* (*Ku losa xidonki*) (Richards 1956:66).

5.2.3.4. *Ku xanguriwa ka xikhombana* (The undressing of the initiate).

In all the initiations the group started singing *A va nwi xanguleni*. This song title means undressing the initiates. The *murileri* danced to the fore, greeted everyone, and danced again. After dancing, she squatted next to the *mudzabi*. The *mudzabi* crawled forward and knelt in front of her with her head bowed and without looking at her face. The *murileri*, with her arms folded across her chest, and still squatting, danced twice (*ihaga*) and then removed the blanket of the *mudzabi*. Then she danced twice again and removed her dress. Next, she squatted, danced twice, and removed her petticoat. Then she squatted once more, danced twice, and removed her earrings. Yet again, she squatted, danced twice, and proceeded to remove her necklace. When she had finished, she took the *nceka* at its full length and tied it around the waist of the mentor, making a knot at the back, and then took the bottom part and tied it in the front. (*Nceka* is a one metre wide by one and half metres long piece of cloth that is worn over the traditional skirt. The plural of *nceka is miceka*). The *mudzabi* and *murileri* greeted each other and then the *murileri* went back to where she was sitting. In two of the initiations this was not done, because the mentors had passed the stage of being *vadzabi* and were now called *vaswekeri* (cooks). The *vadzabi* become *vaswekeri* when they have mentored several times during the year in which they have undergone their own initiation, and the status of the mentor is declared by the *vukhomba* elders.
The *mudzabi* next folded her arms across her chest, clenched her fists with the thumbs inside, and bowed her head. Then she moved forward, knelt in front of the initiate, and greeted her. She then asked the initiate to come forward and to kneel in front of her. The *mudzabi* danced (*thaga*) and removed the initiate’s clothes in the same way that her clothes were removed by the *murileri*. She removed all her clothes, except a string that had a brass ring on it called *nxanga*. The *mudzabi* now dressed the initiate in a *xideka* (the African G-string). *Xideka* looks like a modern G-string, but it is made out of old material or old cloth. It covers the pubic area, labia and vagina, of the initiate and at the back goes in between the buttocks. Thereafter the *mudzabi* covered the initiate with a blanket. This ritual seems to symbolise the leaving behind of the previous life and entering a new life. It is also in line with the lighting of the fire.

In the event of there being one *mudzabi* and two initiates, the *mudzabi* would start with the initiate who is considered the owner of the initiation. In the case of twins, the first twin would be undressed first. When there were two initiates, each having a *mudzabi*, the initiates would be undressed at the same time. After the undressing, the initiates and *mudzabi* greeted one another in a particular way called *ku losa ka xikhombana* and assumed the sitting position of the initiates called *ku rhomba ka xikhombana* (explained in 5.2.3.5 and 5.2.3.6 respectively). The *mudzabi*, or one of the initiated girls, demonstrates these actions to them.

The health risk in this is that the *mudzabi* has a chance of coming into contact with the initiate’s vaginal discharges or blood without protective gloves. Another health issue is the invasion of the initiate’s privacy in exposing her to a crowd. One participant in the focus group discussion said, “I hated to be undressed in front of a crowd and wearing the traditional G-string I was made to wear”. This causes stress and anxiety to the initiate. On the other hand, this could be a chance for her to inspect her body, appreciate it, and know herself better. It is important in sexuality for individuals to feel good about their body in order to improve their self-image.
In one feedback workshop, when the participants were asked about the reason for undressing the initiates, they just said that it was a rule. However, one of the participants mentioned that after reaching puberty she was ashamed of her body and avoided being seen naked, because she thought there was something wrong with her. *Vukhomba* helped her to realise that all women have what she has, and that they are not ashamed of showing off their bodies. In other words, her self-confidence was boosted.

5.2.3.5. *Ku losa ka xikhombana* (How the initiate and mudzabi greet or salute)

The greeting or salute was done before and after an initiated person stood to demonstrate something or perform dances. They also greeted or saluted before and after their own performances and dancing. Every time the initiates greeted the *vukhomba* elders they responded by ululating, blowing a horn, and shouting *cha-cha xikhombana cha-cha* (meaning well done, initiate).

Two types of greeting or salute were observed, one called *ku losa xidonki* and the other *ku losa hi nyonga*.

- *Ku losa xi donki* (greeting like a donkey). The *mudzabi* and initiates when they greet must lie on their left side, body curved forward (foetal position). Then they roll back onto their right side, and also onto their left side. Then they lift the right leg, make a bee sound, say *he wuul*, and return to the sitting position. This type of greeting was done in two of the initiations.

- *Ku losa hi nyonga* (greeting using the hips). The *mudzabi* and initiates lie on their side (either side), adopt the foetal position, put their hands together, and then lay their heads on their hands. Next they make an up and down movement with their hips and also a buzzing sound like a bee. This type of greeting was done in one of the initiations.
5.2.3.6. *Ku rhomba ka xikhombana* (The sitting position of the initiate)

In all the initiations the initiates and *mudzabi* were required to sit in the position described below:

The initiate and *mudzabi* sat with their thumbs clenched inside their fists. They folded their arms across their chests and kept their clenched fists under their breasts at all times. They sat on their left side, flexed their knees so that their heels touched their buttocks, and kept their legs together. They kept their heads bowed forward resting on a wall. When they were not performing any activity, the *mudzabi* covered the initiate with a blanket, greeted her, and then covered herself too and adopted the position described above. The elders responded by ululating, blowing the ceremonial horn, and shouting *cha-cha xikhombana cha-cha*.

At all times when they were sitting the *mudzabi* sat in front. This was done to allow the initiate to have a full view of what the *mudzabi* was doing so that she could do the same.

The way the initiates sit is uncomfortable and strenuous and causes numbness on the left side of the body. Sitting in this position for a long time can cause occlusion of blood vessels preventing venous drainage, which might lead to swelling of the limbs, engorgement of the veins, and problems of the lower limbs.

5.2.3.7. *Ku ganga ka xikhombana* (The choosing of a fictitious husband)

*Ku ganga ka xikhombana* happened in two of the initiations, but not in the same way. In one initiation the fictitious husband was chosen during initiation, while in the other the initiates had chosen their fictitious husbands long before the initiation.

- The initiate, initiated girls, and initiated women left the group and proceeded to the gate. The initiate was asked to choose a fictitious husband who must be a child, and this child would be her *vukhomba* husband. In this case the girl chose her aunt’s son,
who was only five years old. When the group came back, the murileri informed the elders about the chosen child. There was ululating and blowing of a horn. The initiate was given a burning brand and was instructed to go and burn the hut of her fictitious mother-in-law. When the initiate started running in the direction of her fictitious mother-in-law’s home, she was called back. When the initiate was doing all this, the vukhomba elders were ululating, blowing the horn, and laughing at her. One of the girls even cried, “When you get there it will be daybreak and people will think you are a witch, because you are just wearing a G-string”.

- In the second initiation the initiates chose their fictitious husbands long before the initiation. This is done before the relatives are even informed of the intention to have vukhomba. A person is then sent to all the relatives to inform them of the intention to hold an initiation and this person will also inform them about the chosen fictitious husband. In this initiation two initiates chose their sister’s sons and the third initiate chose her uncle’s son. In one of the feedback workshops, one of the participants remarked:

  The problem with choosing a fictitious husband is that the mother of the fictitious husband must buy some presents for the initiate. It is important that she should know in time in order to prepare herself.

The majority of initiates in chisungu are already engaged when they are initiated. In the chisungu observed by Richards (1956:68), the mother of the bridegroom brought a pot of beer to nangoshye on the third day of the initiation.

5.2.3.8. Ku rilisiwa ka xikhombana (Making the initiate cry)

In all the initiations the elders started singing a song called Rila khomba and the initiates, vadzabi, and all the girls initiated that year came forward and knelt around the fire facing the elders and the light. The words of the songs were as follows: Rila khomba rila khomba! Loko u nga rili va ta dlaya mbuyo! Rila rila wena! Loko u nga rili va ta dlaya
mhanee! Rila rila nwana mhanee! Loko u nga rili va ta dlaya xiphuntoo! (Cry initiate cry! If you do not cry they will kill you! Please, my mother child, cry! If you do not cry they will kill you, stupid!).

The initiates knelt with their arms folded, their hands under their breasts, while looking up so that the elders could see when their tears appeared. They remained in that position until the tears flowed. At this point the elders ululated, blew the horn, cried cha-cha xikhombana cha-cha, and the girls were then instructed to greet them and go back to sit down.

In one of the initiations an initiate cried bitterly, pointing at her knees. Apparently she was tired of kneeling and she seemed not to be used to kneeling down. They all laughed at her and called her a plastic kid who does not know how to kneel down on a rough surface. One of the elders shouted at her, “Crying as if you have just lost your mother is not allowed in this place. We just want to see your stupid tears. If you continue like this we will make your mother pay a fine”. In another initiation, one of the initiates could not bring herself to cry and her elder sister beat her and also pulled at her breasts to make her do so.

Kneeling down is uncomfortable and causes pain if one is not used to it. The beating and pulling of the breasts of the initiate were traumatic physically and emotionally. The burning sensation that results from the smoke that the initiates endure is a health problem. “Women cry, men do not”. The presence of a crying session in the initiation of girls reinforces this gender stereotyping. Crying when hurt and uncomfortable is relieving and soothing, but to cry for nothing is ridiculous. It makes the initiate feel stupid and angry. The reason for the crying session could not be established, the answer given to a question about it being i nawu wa kona, meaning that it is how it is done. On the other hand, the crying session could be intended to teach initiates that it is important when you feel uncomfortable that you should cry and that crying is acceptable.
The crying ritual was also observed in the *ambatsu* rites of the Valenge. This ritual is performed immediately after the initiate has given herself a new name. The initiate is instructed by the *nyambutsi* to cry, and if she fails to do so, is scratched and slapped and dragged away by her mother. Failure to cry in the *ambatsu* rite is also considered as a disgrace. The family might be required to pay for this offence (Earthy & Haddon 1933:115-116).

In the *chisungu* of the Bemba the crying ritual is done differently. They have a session where they tease the girls to make them cry. The *nangoshye* tries to scare the initiates by wearing a big basket covered with a white cloth. The initiates are expected to get scared and cry. Initiates who fail to cry are smacked and begged by their own relatives to cry. Failure to cry is considered to be stubbornness and a lack of respect for authority (Richards 1956:67).

5.2.3.9. *Risimu ra le mbilwini (Singing one's own or favourite song)*

In all initiations the *mudzabi* and the initiate were instructed to sing a song of their own composition or their favourite song. The *mudzabi* and initiate then greeted. The *mudzabi* then removed her blanket and that of the initiate. Then the *mudzabi* stood up and started singing her song and danced. The initiated girls, initiated women, and the *vukhomba* elders joined in the singing, the horn was blown and they ululated. The *mudzabi* and initiate greeted each other. Then the initiate also did the same, singing her own song and dancing and with the group joining in the singing.

This teaches the initiate to be creative and also gives her a chance to show off her skills. It is rewarding to the initiate and can strengthen her self-confidence.
5.2.3.10. *Ku cinela* (Dancing by the group)

After the *mudzabi* and initiate’s own song, the group started singing. The *murileri* came to the front, removed her headscarf, greeted the gathering, and started dancing. Thereafter the *mudzabi* and the initiate came forward and danced, and all the girls who had not yet completed a year since their initiation joined them. After their dance more songs were sung. People from the floor danced solo, in pairs, or groups well into the night.

In *chisungu* women also dance solo or in pairs. Every time somebody got up to dance, the *vudzabi* and the initiates greeted one another, and then the person(s) who wanted to dance greeted in the same style that *murileri* used in 5.2.1.3 and started dancing. When she/they had finished, the dancer/s greeted again, and the initiate and the *mudzabi* also greeted one another. The initiates experienced pain for three days after they had danced, because of stiff muscles caused by the strenuous exercise. If these dances were performed everyday, women’s health would benefit.

The dances, although strenuous and complicated, are good exercises for the pelvic floor muscles, legs, arms, and abdominal muscles. The problem is that since the initiates are not used to these dances they develop stiff muscles, making it difficult to dance the following day. These dances are only done during the initiation. Afterwards the women and girls do not do them.

5.2.3.11. *Swigandlu/ Swidabu* (Story-telling)

After the dancing, the elders said that it was time for *swigandlu*. All the girls initiated during the year stood up, one at a time, to tell stories and jokes, and people laughed and enjoyed themselves. Before and after the story-telling, there were greetings and then the initiate and *mudzabi* greeted each other. When they had finished, the *mudzabi* stood up and started telling her story and when she had finished the initiate did the same. After the story-telling, dancing continued until late in the night. The stories were mainly about life within the initiate’s family and amusing situations. When telling the story, they were
required to mime the behaviour of the people they were talking about. If the story included animals or objects they were required to imitate their sounds.

In two of the initiations the initiate and mudzabi were instructed to go back to the hut by singing a song called Sindza rivalelo. The mudzabi and initiate danced back to the hut in the following way: They had to make a snake-like movement, moving from side to side. Dancing by initiated girls continued outside and when they had finished they sang A va hi rhuleni and left. In one of the initiations when the dancing was done the women and girls left the initiation hut. The song Sindza rivalelo means smear or apply cow-dung to the rafters on the roof of the hut. Ku sindza under normal circumstances means to smear or apply cow dung to the floor. In vukhomba the song serves as an instruction to the mudzabi and initiate to come outside when they are in the initiation hut and to go back into the initiation hut when they are outside. Once the elders start singing, the initiate and mudzabi position themselves and start moving.

Story-telling gives the participants a picture of the initiate’s family, her daily life experiences, and relationships within the family. Since the initiate mimes her family members and what they do, family problems, for example abuse, can be highlighted and help can be sought.

Ku nghenisana khomba, discussed above, is similar to the entry into the hut in chisungu of the Bemba. The chisungu starts with the blessing of ancestral spirits in the morning of the first day of the initiation. The headman or chief does the blessing. The initiation takes place in an initiation hut that has a fire in the middle of it. The initiates are covered in blankets as described in vukhomba. Unlike in vukhomba, however, the enclosing of the initiate, i.e. ku tumbetiwa ka xikhombana, is just an hour long (Richards 1956:64).

According to the vukhomba elders, ku yisa xikhombana ensinyeni and ku xangula are rituals that mark the beginning of the initiation that changes girls from the status of being human to the status of swigono, and men and uninitiated women and children cannot see them. This is in line with the meaning of lighting a fire as discussed by Kriel (1989: 17-
21). The concept of *swigono* in this context refers to sub-human, or “dead” people who are believed to be alive, but were taken by a witch or wizard and are living with him or her at her or his home and are kept behind the door of his or her hut. The *swigono* are not supposed to be seen by outsiders. Also the initiates lose their names and are referred to as *swikhombana*.

In all the *vukhomba* the researcher attended, after the ritual at the tree the *murileri* greeted the elders and informed them that the ritual at the tree had been performed and that the girl could now be called *xikhombana*. The initiate is, for the period of initiation, cut off from contact with her mother and family and has a *murileri* (*mhani wa vukhomba*) who acts as her mother during the initiation. This is similar to what has been suggested by Cohen (1964: 108-110) that initiation ceremonies involve separation and isolation from the family. Furthermore, they involve removal of an individual from one social position to another. The individual is removed from an inferior position to a senior one. During this time there is psychological vulnerability among the initiates. According to Cohen (1964:110), physical pain and isolation from parents and family demonstrate to the initiate that her family is no longer her sole protector, refuge and security.

During *vukhomba*, the initiate gets a new family, that is the *murileri* (mother of *vukhomba*) and *mudzabi*, who keeps her company and protects her at all times until the end of the initiation. Among the Vhavenda the relationship is life-long.

In all the focus group discussions with initiated girls and in interviews with initiates it was indicated that the first rituals were frightening, because they thought they were going to be circumcised. Another interesting issue was that the initiated girls deliberately induced this fear in the initiates. It was indicated in the feedback workshop that this practice was just a game they play with the initiates.
5.2.4. Day two.

5.2.4.1. *Ku borisa xikhombana or ku furhisa xikhombana*

*Ku borisa xikhombana* was a day and night activity. It was done in two of the initiations observed. In both initiations no initiation activities took place. The initiate on this day was not allowed to have a bath and even to wash her hands before eating. She was not allowed to touch water except for drinking. It was not done in the initiation that started on the Monday, because the elders felt the initiation would be too short.

In the interviews that the researcher had with initiates, they expressed discomfort with the situation. Although *ku borisa xikhombana* was not indicated by the initiated girls as one of the things they disliked, it came out strongly in the feedback workshop as such. Furthermore, they indicated that it was very unhygienic, especially when the initiate is having her menses. It was further indicated that the majority of initiates are usually having their menses during initiation.

The second day of *chisungu* among the Bemba, as with *vukhomba*, does not have initiation activities. In *chisungu* the initiates were sent out to visit relatives, while in *vukhomba* the initiates remain in the initiation hut; unlike in *vukhomba* however, the *chisungu* initiation activities are resumed in the evening of the second day (Richards 1956:67). In this study the initiation activity resumed on the third day.

During *vukhomba* the initiates and *mudzabi* slept on a grass mat with the *kudu* horn used as a pillow. According to Cory (1956:26), among the tribes of erstwhile Tanganyika the initiates sleep on a bare floor and eat badly cooked food and are not allowed to bath except as a ritual. They also have a fire in the middle of the initiation hut and this fire should be kept burning until the end of the rite.
The unhygienic situation on this day can cause health problems for the initiate and mudzabi. By eating food with dirty hands dangerous micro-organisms can be ingested, resulting in food poisoning or other diseases. The reason for having this session is not known. The unhygienic situation could perhaps be created to make the initiate realise the importance of cleanliness or it might be another way of making her feel uncomfortable. Since there are no activities on this day, the time could be used for a sexuality education intervention programme. See chapter 6.

5.2.5. Day three:

The third day of initiation included three major activities: xikhombana xi ya enambyeni (sending the initiate to the river), Ku tsavule xikhombana (fetching the initiate from the river), and ku pfula xingomana (opening the drum). The initiate was sent to the river and had a bath for the first time since the initiation began. The initiated women and girls then fetched the initiate and her mudzabi. In the evening there was ku pfuriwa xingomana.

5.2.5.1. Xikhombana xi ya enambyeni

In two of the initiations the mudzabi and the initiates went down to the river before sunrise carrying a burning brand and a twenty-five (25) litre container of water. In the olden days the initiates were suppose to get into the river and sit in the water. Due to the presence of crocodiles and bilharzia in the rivers this is no longer done. At the river the mudzabi and initiate collected firewood and made a fire. The vadzabi left the initiates at the river and went to the initiation hut. During the absence of the vadzabi the initiate had a chance to sleep. In one of the initiations the initiate’s grandmother came to the river to keep an eye on her granddaughter. The mudzabi came back to teach the initiates what would be expected when the group comes to fetch them. In the third initiation the girls were not sent to the river, because this village had a nasty experience in which an initiate was raped at the river. The initiates did not go to the river, but used a large portable tin container for their bath. The mudzabi filled the tin bath with cold water and instructed the
initiates to get in and stay there for the whole morning, and when she was satisfied she then instructed them to get out and empty the bath.

It was mentioned in the feedback workshops with initiated girls that the water they use for bathing is not cold, as it is supposed to be. The mudzabi puts the twenty-five litre plastic container in a strategic place where it gets enough warmth for the water inside. Again when the initiate is still waiting at the river the mudzabi continues with the water warming process and as soon as she hears the initiated women and girls coming down to the river she removes the container and puts it away.

5.2.5.2. Ku tsavula xikhombana

This was done in the initiations where the initiates were sent to the river. At about 11h00 a group of women went down to the river blowing the horn and beating the drums. When they reached the river the mudzabi and initiates greeted them. The initiated women started beating the drums again and danced in a circle (varhirhu) for a while. The women sat down and started singing. The mudzabi was the first one to dance and the initiates were instructed to watch her. The mudzabi finished her dancing and greeted them. The initiates struggled to follow the steps and were instructed in how to greet properly. They were also told that they would learn as the days went by. The mudzabi danced with her hands on her back, then bent forward with her legs outstretched and picked up a bangle from the floor with her tongue. The initiates attempted to do the same, but failed. The vadzabi then bent backwards and picked up the bangle with her tongue and again the initiates tried and failed. The vadzabi danced ku thaga and the initiates followed and once more it was very difficult for them. After dancing the vadzabi and the initiates greeted one another. Ku thaga is any dance that is done squatting. It is a very fast dance that combines movements of one’s hands, legs and hips. It has many variations that are difficult to explain.
After dancing, it was time for the initiate to have a bath. Water from the twenty-five litre plastic container was gently poured over the initiate’s head and she washed herself without a face cloth. In one of the initiations the initiate was given two miceka to wear and the blanket she had been wearing was carried off by one of the women. In the other initiation the initiates came back wearing their blankets. The initiates were kept in the middle of the group. The group proceeded towards their home singing, beating the drums, and blowing the horn. At home the vadzabi and the initiates went into the hut and the women remained dancing (varhirha) for the elders who had been waiting for them. After dancing, they sang a song that asked the elders to tell them to stop dancing, A va hi rhuleni. The initiated women sat down and said to the vukhomba elders, “We are back from the river”, and the elders thanked them. The murileri then brought food to the women and they ate from the pots. This food is called xikoko and is supposed to be eaten from the pot. After eating the group dispersed.

In both initiations the initiates were sent to the river daily and were joined later by the vadzabi. This was done until the elders instructed the initiate to stop going to the river. *Ku tsavula xikhombana* was the responsibility of the initiated women and initiated girls and was accompanied by their singing and dancing and then with dancing by the mudzabi and xikhombana.

All initiates indicated that they disliked *ku tsavuriwa ka xikhombana*, because of the complicated dances they had to perform during this activity. In *chisungu* from the third to the sixth day, the women have to make pottery emblems and no initiation activities take place on these days (Richards 1956:69).

The health risks here are the complicated dances. There is a danger of the initiates breaking their necks when picking up the bangles. Another danger, which was indicated in one of the initiations, is rape. When the initiate is at the river she might be attacked and raped, as she is without supervision.
5.2.5.3. *Ku pfuriwa xingomana*

In two of the initiations under discussion two fires were made outside the hut of the initiate, one for the elders and the other for the women and girls. In the evening the *murileri*, *vukhomba* elders, and initiated women started singing, dancing and blowing the horn to inform initiated girls that it was time. Initiated women and initiated girls assembled outside the *vukhomba* hut where they sang and danced. The initiates and *vadzabi* were then instructed to come out by singing a song called *Sindza rivalelo*. Once they were outside the hut, they greeted. The dancing on this night was elaborate and continued until late into the night. In one of the initiations these activities happened in the initiation hut. In this initiation they had only one fire and the dances took place around it.

In all three initiations *ku pfuriwa ka xingomana* started with *ku cinela*, then *ku rilisa xikhombana, risimu ra le mbilwini, swigandlu, ku cinela, ku cinisa swikhombana*, and *ku cinela*.

- Dancing by the *murileri* preceded dancing by the initiates.

- Before and after dancing as individuals or groups, the initiated girls and women greeted one another in the same manner as the *murileri* and the initiates. The *vadzabi* and all the initiated women and initiated girls younger than the person or persons who were dancing also greeted one another.

- The greeting by the initiates and *vadzabi* were more elaborate and complicated than the greeting of the others.

All feedback workshops indicated that the participants enjoyed participating in the dances. There are no health risks and participants mentioned that the dances and exercises were good for their health.
5.2.6. Day four to day six

The duration of the initiations observed varied. The following discussion is based on the one-week duration of vukhomba. The activities on these days were similar to the activities of the third day, except that a shorter version was performed.

In one of the initiations the activities were stopped in protest at the unacceptable behaviour of the initiate’s mother. The vukhomba elders stopped the initiate going to the river and instructed her to practise all the dances that were done at the river in the initiation hut. The mudzabi and some of her initiated friends who were not attending school also taught her milawu (special initiation praises and poems).

There were two types of milawu, those that are recited while sitting and those recited while standing. The milawu recited while sitting were Phu! dzwidzwi ndzi hune hi vurhonga (Oh it is still dark outside. I left home at dawn) and phu! Xilungu (Oh! No! It is a European or white people’s thing ). Those that are recited while standing were Marhabani mabaliya, Skaranda, Thu manje ndzi suke ndzi famba and He Makwasa.

5.2.7. The last Thursday of the initiation

On the last Thursday of the initiation, there were two important activities that happened. During the day the vukhomba elders visited the initiate and in the evening there was swixuxelo. It is referred to as the last Thursday of the initiation, because, literally, this is a ritual that happens on the last Thursday of the initiation, be it a one-week, two-week, one-month or six-month initiation ritual.

5.2.7.1. Ku laya xikhombana (The visit by the vukhomba elders)

Under normal circumstances, day seven of the initiation is a Thursday, because the initiation starts on a Friday and ends on a Saturday. The visit by vukhomba elders is mainly to evaluate if the initiates have learnt what they were supposed to. In the feedback
workshops the visit was described as a xitambelo or examination for the initiate and mudzabi. It is also an evaluation for mudzabi because if her initiate fails to perform certain dances and to recite milawu it means the mudzabi did not teach her properly. The initiates did not go to the river. In all the initiation events the initiates remained in the hut practising the dances and milawu. In the afternoon the vukhomba elders came and were given snuff, which was divided amongst the group. They then proceeded to the vukhomba hut and the varileri joined the vukhomba elders.

In all initiations the vadzabi and initiates greeted the elders in the usual manner. They returned that greeting by ululating and blowing the horn and in unison cried chacha xikhombana! The elders informed the initiates that they were coming to watch them dance and to give them milawu ya vutomi (the facts of life) and lessons about vukhomba (milawu). The elders started singing the usual songs and the initiate and mudzabi started dancing.

After dancing and singing for some time they started to sing a song called A va nwi layeni (Please tell her the truth about life). In the song, the lead singers called out the names of each initiate's family members and informed her about how to relate to them.

- The initiates must look after them, and give them food and water

- They then called out the name of her mudzabi and murileri and informed her that she must respect them

- The initiate was then informed that the murileri was her vukhomba mother and that she must respect her and confide in her if she has problems

- The mudzabi was her teacher and she must respect and honour her for giving up her nice life outside to devote her time to her
• Any elder, whether normal or insane or crippled, must be respected and must be given food and water when hungry and must be helped when they need it

• All the girls initiated before her must be respected and must not be called by name i.e. when she calls them she must use the word sesi (sister) before their name. She must respect and be obedient to her parents and must never argue with them

• She must “stay away from boys” and must not be seen standing all over the place with them. She must respect herself and take good care of her body and menses

• She must take care of herself and make sure that nobody detects when she has her menses. Menses are not supposed to be seen by men.

• She must not have sex with a man when she is menstruating, because the man will die

• She must not discuss what is done in the vukhomba with uninitiated people, because she will become insane

• She must not discuss her experience in the initiation, even with her mother

• She must know all the poems and praises (milawu) she was taught so that when she visits other areas she can be allowed into their initiations

Many aspects of sexual health are addressed in this song. It addresses human relations and family life as described by SIDA (1994: 7-8). Furthermore it stresses personal hygiene related to menses, respect, obedience, gender roles, and the acceptable morals of the society. However, sexual health given in the vukhomba does not give the initiate the facts about menstruation, sex, and pregnancy.
When they finished this song they then sang a song that praised them as great women of the village. After this they immediately changed to another song (the change sounded like a transition), the drums started beating, and dancing commenced. As they were dancing the murileri brought out five litres of African beer (Mumqombothi) in a bucket for the elders to taste. This was beer prepared for the last day of the initiation. The murileri greeted the gathering, took a mug and poured out a little, drank it (ku susa vuloyi), greeted again and left.

5.2.7.2. Swixuxelo

In all the initiations observed, swixuxelo started later than the activities of the other nights and were longer in duration. The steps followed were similar to those in ku pfuriwa ka xingomana, except that in swixuxelo ngoma leyikulu a ritual was performed which is explained below. In two of the initiations observed, the ngoma leyikulu was performed twice, in the initiation hut and just outside it, while in the other one it was performed once in the initiation hut only. In one of the initiations, after the activities, the women, girls and elders were given tihove (cooked samp with cowpea and peanuts) to eat.

In one of the initiations the mudzabi and the initiate also sang a song called Nwamarivalani, meaning the one that forgets. The mudzabi and initiate were the lead singers and the group joined in, beating the drums and blowing the horn. In this song, they praised themselves for being able to endure and withstand all the trials of vukhomba. How they:

- have missed their family members

- disliked sleeping on the floor without a pillow and using the horn as their pillow

- had to sleep with the fire burning, and failing to sleep because their eyes were sore from the smoke
were going to rest once they were released

As they were singing and dancing, mudzabi started stripping (removing her clothes one item at a time) until she was naked. She then instructed the initiate to remove her G-string and they danced and praised themselves. Unlike on the first day, the initiate removed the G-string quickly and danced freely. When they were doing all this the vukhomba elders were ululating and saying Cha-cha khomba cha-cha (It is over. Well done). After the dance they greeted and put on their clothes. This is called Ku cha-cha ka khomba (Praises that show that it is over). Note the change in what they say. After ululating they said cha-cha khomba cha-cha not cha-cha xikhombana. This could be a sign that the initiate has now gained their respect and has now joined the initiated society. According to the participants in the feedback workshop, the toughest time for the initiate and mudzabi is the visit by the vukhomba elders. “Once you have passed that hurdle you know the initiation is over”. However, none of the participants had ever heard or seen an initiation extended because the initiate had not passed the elders’ evaluation. They thought that this could be a reason for the respect and for calling her khomba.

During ngoma leyikulu, the initiates and vadzabi (plural of mudzabi) were instructed to go back to the hut singing the usual song Sindza rivalelo. They danced back to the hut in the usual snake-like dance. When they were back in the hut some of the initiated girls joined them. They told the initiates and vadzabi to cover themselves, including their faces and eyes, and to lie down facing the wall.

In all the initiations the vukhomba elders carefully (trying not to make a noise) brought into the hut a big portable tin bath, a bucket of water, and some jars. The group moved into the initiation hut and tried to find a space to stand. In one initiation some of the initiated girls tried to scare the initiate and said, “Today we will see how she dies” and another one said, “They are now going to cut her”. Yet another shouted, “We are now going to put the horn into her vagina”. Although they were covered with a blanket the initiates looked scared and were sobbing quietly. The initiated girls laughed and
continued with their frightening comments. It is not clear whether these remarks could be fuelling the belief that a horn is indeed inserted into an initiate's vagina.

The elders turned the bath upside down, switched off the lights, and requested the initiate and the *mudzabi* to uncover themselves and to come closer. They were guided to where the bath was. The *mudzabi* and the initiate then knelt beside the bath and put their fingers on the fold of the rim of the bath. They knelt in such a way that their eyes could not see what was happening on the surface. Three elders now approached holding bamboo canes, one next to the *mudzabi*, another next to the initiate, and one opposite them. Three other ladies held jars of fluid, one for each cane. When the elders were ready, they started singing a song called *Vivula ngoma* (make a loud roaring noise *ngoma*). The elders then lifted their hands up and down the cane, resulting in a loud roaring noise as the canes struck the tin bath. The elders holding the jars poured fluid (called *mafurha*, meaning oil or fat) over the canes to make more sound. Sometimes the women also poured cold water over the heads and back of the *mudzabi* and the initiates causing them to shiver. At the end the initiates were soaking wet. This ritual is called *ku thava ngoma leyikulu*, meaning the revealing or unveiling or showing the initiate the main or most important secret of the initiation. Revealing, unveiling, or showing does not fully capture the meaning of this phrase. To try and capture the full meaning, the phrase can be divided into parts: *Ku thava* means to slaughter or to pierce or stab. *Ngoma* means a drum or a secret or something not open to the public. Thus in this context it means a secret. *Ngoma leyikulu* means the most important or biggest secret. Therefore *ku thava ngoma leyikulu* means revealing or unveiling or showing the initiate the most important secret of *vukhomba*. What is also important in this phrase is the way it is said. It is usually said with vigour, enthusiasm, and respect.

When they had finished, the elders hid the canes, because the initiate is not supposed to see them. They must remain a mystery until she participates in another initiation as a *mudzabi*. They then started singing a song called *Thivani gomo* (cover the forehead). The initiate and *mudzabi* moved their hands up and down and sideways in the water, trying to make the wet floor dry. When the elders were satisfied, the group moved just outside the
hut and repeated the procedure. Meanwhile, some women were ululating, blowing the horn, and shouting cha-cha khomba cha-cha. Thereafter the initiate and mudzabi went back to the hut and the group dispersed.

In the feedback workshop the reason for pouring water over the initiates was explained Mativa mwina mhani ekerekni loko u fanele u va Mukriste wa khuvuriwa. Na le vukhombeni swi tano xikhombana xa khuvuriwa. Se loko hi vachela mati manuku hi kona ku khuvula ka kona. You see in church when you want to be a Christian you have to be baptised with water and in the initiation we also do the same. The comparison that is made here is in line with the goal of initiation as described by Lincoln (1981:97) who states that initiations transform the initiate utterly, making her totally different from what she/he was before. When a Christian is baptised she/he is transformed and seen as totally different from what she/he was before baptismal. Furthermore, Lincoln suggests that what is called ordeals are ways of testing and making the initiate stronger and should be seen as an educational experience. Teaching the initiate more about the world than her previous life allowed her to learn.

In the chisungu of the Bemba on this day, the initiates are taken to the bush for the first woodland rite. The initiates are made to hop on one leg with the assistance of an older woman. Mimes related to gardening were also performed where the initiated women and initiated girls mimed different animals, and each mime was related to gardening activities. From here the women went to honour the musuku tree, which is a symbol of womanhood among the Bemba. The girls were then instructed to climb up the tree. The women held out some domestic emblems, and the initiates, hanging from the branches were made to pick up the emblems with their mouth. Another ritual performed in the chisungu of the Bemba includes a mock bridegroom, hidden emblems, a test of maturity, and a ritual of lighting the girls’ fire (Richards 1956: 70-73). These rituals bear no resemblance to any performed in the vukhomba.
5.2.8. The last Friday of the initiation

The last Friday of the vukhomba is divided into two parts, the geregere in the afternoon and the vujelejele in the evening.

5.2.8.1. Geregere

Geregere is an afternoon ritual that is performed on the last Friday of the initiation. It was only done in two of the observed initiations. The photographs in figure 5.2(a) and 5.2(b) were taken during the geregere. Permission was obtained from all the participants who appear on the photographs, to publish them in the thesis. During the morning, in these initiations, the initiates went down to the river. The vadzabi and initiated girls started preparing for the evening. Late in the afternoon, the vadzabi and some of the initiated girls joined the initiates at the river. The initiates were given their usual shower or bath. In one of the initiations, after the shower the mudzabi applied whitish soil to the initiate’s body. The mudzabi and the initiated girls only applied it to their faces. Then at around 16h30 the women assembled at the initiation hut. Some of them were wearing very short colourful traditional skirts called dovana and nicknamed Xipfula dokete. See figure 5.3.
Figure 5.2 (a). *Vukhomba* elders, *vadzabi* and initiates during *geregere*
Figure 5.2. (b): Initiate and initiated girls dancing during the geregere

Figure 5.3. Initiated women and initiated girls wearing dovana
The groups proceeded down to the river singing and blowing the ceremonial horn. On the way, they were joined by more women and initiated girls. As they approached the venue for geregere, the initiates and their company emerged from the river carrying sticks and walking like old people. The initiates were covered with blankets and stayed in the middle of the group. When they arrived at the venue they all lay down and greeted the gathering.

The songs that were meant for geregere were sung and the geregere dance performed by initiated women and initiated girls. The songs sung were He geregere (for a vukhomba ritual performed on the last Friday afternoon), He Mageva (Calling Mageva), Nwa-Masingi xa vahya, Khefu-khefu (a type of a dance, involving a lifting of the traditional skirt up and down), A hiye Nhleengweni (Let us go to Nhleengweni an area in Mozambique), and Wa yi vona ya rhemelela? (Do you see it? It cuts). Figure 5.2 (b) displays this dancing.

Most of these songs contained words that are not normally used (obscene). However, the songs were about family relationships and warnings about bad people in society who should be avoided. One song was about a woman, Nwa-Masingi, who faked illness because she was lazy. When everybody was going about their chores she would pretend to be very sick and as soon as the work had been done and food was ready, she would be bright and healthy-looking and eat more than the others. There were also a number of songs that described, in a ridiculous way, the male genital organs. This could be either a way of indicating their understanding of the male organs or simply a desire to ridicule them.

In one initiation, when they reached the geregere venue, part of the group formed a circle around the group with the initiate to prevent intruders from watching what was happening. Uninitiated people and men are not supposed to watch the ritual. The women were complaining that in the past five years since their headman had died, children and uninitiated girls had come to watch their geregere ritual and this made them leave out a lot of the dances they were suppose to do. Some of the bystanders came as close as fifty
meters from the group. They were laughing and calling the initiate names. One of the elders who accompanied the group tried to chase them away, but they just ran to the other side to get a better view. Some even climbed trees to have a full view of what was happening. It was a disturbing situation for the women. Because of all these problems the initiates were given two *miceka* to wear when they were dancing.

In this initiation when they were singing the last song, each initiate was instructed to take a stick and beat her relatives very hard. As soon as she took the stick her relatives started running off in different directions and she chased them and beat them. She beat her aunts and grandmothers. In the other initiation, one of the dancers approached the *vukhomba* elders and they all started running, and she caught up with one who received a lash from her.

In the other initiation there were no disturbances. The dancers were dancing on the one side of the river while the *vukhomba* elders and the initiates were sitting on the other side. When they had finished dancing the initiated women and initiated girls were given food to eat and then proceeded home singing and blowing the horn. On the way home the initiates were kept in the middle of the group to prevent bystanders from seeing them. When they reached home the initiates and their company proceeded straight into the hut, and the others remained outside, singing, blowing the horn, and dancing *varhirha*. They then sang the usual song requesting permission to stop dancing and were allowed to do so by the elders. A report was given to the elders, who ululated and cried *cha-cha khomba cha-cha*. The women also asked the elders if the *vujelejele* snuff was available and were informed that it was. The group then dispersed.

5.2.8.2. *Vujelejele* (The last ritual of the initiation).

In all three initiations *vujelejele* started around 21:00 at the initiation hut. There were many people, local *vukhomba* elders, initiated women, and initiated girls, including *vukhomba* elders, and initiated women and initiated girls from other villages, who were mainly relatives from the maternal side. In all the initiations *vujelejele* took place in the
open. There were two fires, one for the elders and the other for the initiated women and initiated girls. They danced in the usual way, except that at a certain stage the elders requested the visitors to dance too. The initiates and the vadzabi came out of the hut, again in the usual way, except that in one of the initiations the initiate came out wearing two miceka. The activities were similar to those of Thursday night.

Just before 12 midnight the initiates and the vadzabi were requested to go back to the hut in the usual way. The elders prepared themselves for the ngoma leyikulu, which were done at 12 o’clock midnight (Ku ilhava ngoma leyikulu). This was done in the same way as on Thursday except that the second part was done at the gate. After ngoma leyikulu the initiates and the vadzabi went back to where they had been sitting. Singing, dancing, and blowing of the horn continued outside the hut.

In the initiation where the initiate was wearing two miceka, the grandmother of the child whom the initiate had chosen to be her fictitious husband undressed the initiate (ku xangala khomba) in the manner explained above, except that she did not remove the G-string. She was then dressed in new clothes and made to sit comfortably on a new nceka. She was then given sweets and a cool drink and allowed to sit normally and eat the nice things given to her. It was difficult for the girl to enjoy the food, because everyone was watching her. After eating she greeted the gathering in the usual way. See figure 5.4.
Figure 5.4. The initiate during vujelelele, wearing her new clothes and eating food from her fictitious mother-in-law.

In this initiation the women started singing Rila khomba, and the initiate and the mudzabi cried in the usual way. Thereafter they started with story-telling and mimicking their family members and relatives and members of the community. As the initiate was mimicking her grandmother, her grandmother stopped her, whereupon the initiate greeted her and remained in that position. Her grandmother complained that the initiate had been
mimicking her for the past two weeks and that it was now time that she should mimic her own mother. The group supported the grandmother and persuaded the girl to say something about her mother. But, she just stayed kneeling and looking down. Everybody was now shouting and insisting that when she stood up she must mimic her mother. However, the initiate did not stand up and her grandmother (maternal) shouted at her and asked her if she was afraid of her mother, while assuring her that her mother would not know what she said about her. But the initiate would not stand up. One of the elders asked her if she was just disobeying the elders or if her mother was a monster. The initiate kept quiet and remained in the same position. She was even threatened with the comment that since she was refusing to do what she was told to do, they would make her father pay for her disobedience with a cow. The mudzabi tried to talk to her but still she would not move, instead the initiate just greeted, burst into tears, and cried bitterly.

It was explained later that she was not on good terms with her mother and that she was staying with her aunt (the grandmother of her fictitious husband). During the feedback workshop the researcher was informed that the grandmother of the initiate was forced to leave her home by her daughter-in-law and had now joined her granddaughter at her daughter’s home. The story-telling in this case exposed uncomfortable family relationships and might even have exposed family abuse, though there seemed to be no mechanism for dealing with these types of problems.

5.2.8.3. Ku thava tingoma or ku cina tingoma (Dancing tingoma)

In two of the initiations, after ngoma leyikulu the initiated girls and initiated women immediately proceeded to dance tingoma. In one of the initiations this started at about 02h00. The group proceeded to the entrance where three fires were made in the street. Two of the fires were next to each other and the other was about fifty metres away. The initiated girls and initiated women went to the fire that was about fifty metres away while the visitors and the elders went to the other two. The initiated girls and the mudzabi prepared themselves for dancing tingoma. In two of the initiations the initiated girls were wearing white T-shirts, a white towel over the head, and panties (pushed between the
buttocks). Some were wearing modern G-strings and their faces were painted white. In the other initiation some of the initiated women and girls were almost naked. They were only wearing their panties and had applied baby powder all over their body. When they were ready, they informed the vukhomba elders. The elders called the initiates to join the group. The initiates came covered in blankets and were told to sit comfortably and watch carefully.

The elders and initiated women started singing, blowing the horn, and beating the drums for the initiated girls. The initiated girls and women danced differently for each song and had a different demonstration for each of them. See figure 5.5 (a) and figure 5.5 (b). The demonstrations were mainly about the people, objects, and activities associated with ordinary everyday life in the community. They included, for example, pottery, a passenger train, doves, maize grinding, fetching water, people fighting, drunkards, an abnormally big and frightening model of a penis, and so on. The initiates were each given the clay dummy penis to touch. But, they seemed to be scared to touch it. The initiated girls who had brought the model insisted that the initiates should take it and the vukhomba elders shouted at them saying, “You are scared now while we are here, but when the initiation is over you will be sleeping with them” (meaning men). One of the elders then shouted, “Are you still telling these initiates about when they leave the initiation? How do you know? Maybe they have already started sleeping with men. Maybe they are just fooling us and have been touching it everyday”. The initiated girls told the initiates that if they allowed men to use it on them they would die.
Figure 5.5 (a). Initiated women and initiated girls dancing during vujelejele.
Figure 5.5 (b). Initiated girls dancing during vujelejele.

Twenty-four songs were performed and it took the group until dawn to complete them. The songs were as follows: *Wa yi vona ya rhemelela* (Do you see it? Look at it! It cuts); *Hina ha kombela vakulukumba! Mho kombela ku hundza kasi michava yinil* (Please, elders, we are asking permission to pass! Why do you ask? Are you afraid?); *Va hi sorile* (They are looking down upon us); *Sesi Muthavini* (My sister Muthavini); *Kili koko - kili koko* (The cock crows signalling it is time to wake up); *A hi dyangi tihove* (We did not eat tihove); *Vogo nsinya vogoleta* (Vogo is a tree); *A va dakhangi va ti endlisa* (They are not drunk, they are just pretending to be), *Nvana loko a kutsandza* (When a child is out of control, there is absolutely nothing that you can do. You have tried your best and you have failed); *Hi vana va yona leyikulu* (We are the children of the big one), *Ho nanayila* (We are walking like snails); *Langutani tingoma* (Look at tingoma), *Siverevere* (Gossip), *Ndzi tsakisa hi yona* (I like it and enjoy it), meaning the penis or sex, *Mhani Mphephu manani* (My mother Mphephu), *Va ka Ndengeza va rima gedeni* (The Ndengeza clan cultivate at the gate and are demonstrating how a hand hoe is used); *Hi vana va makendze*
(We are the children of the testicles), *Giuu-guu tuva* (*Giuu-guu* is the sound of a dove singing. We love each other. When a dove sings it is calling its lover), *Sayina Malongwana* (Put your signature here, *Malongwana*. We have come to the end of it). *Malogwana* is the chief supervisor of *vukhomba*; *Wa yi vona pedumavala?* (Do you see the *pedu* with its spots?) No one seemed to know what a *pedu* is. When singing this song two initiated girls came forward dancing wearing the *pedumavala* on their heads. **See figure 5.6 (a).** They danced towards the initiate and put the *pedumavala* down in front of the initiate. **See figure 5.6 (b).** The other songs that were sung were *Nyoka* (A snake), *Xitimela* (A train), **See figure 5.7** *Miselesele ya vukhomba* (*Miselesele* of the puberty rites for girls). *Miselesele* refers to a grass skirt that the initiated women and girls used to wear in the olden days when they were dancing *geregere*. Finally, there was *Hahani wa tona?* (Where is her aunt?). Each song was accompanied by a different dance and the actions reflected domestic duties, the mimicking of different people in the community, and showing the prepared figurines to the initiates. Further actions that demonstrated the behaviour of men working in mines, driving cars, being kicked by their white master (*baas*), and beating their wives were demonstrated in the morning *tingoma.*
Figure 5.6. (a) Initiated girls with one of the figurines called *pedumavala* on their heads.

Figure 5.6. (b) Initiate shown the *pedumavala* by the initiated girls.
Figure 5.7. The train.

The songs were mainly about good manners and relationships with family members, a lover, and community members. It was also interesting to hear in the songs how they enjoyed sex. Another interesting point about the songs was that they did not say that the girls were children of a man, but the children of the penis and testes. It seemed like deliberate avoidance of the word man, though the researcher could not establish the reason for this. When asked about it they said it was just a song. It was sometimes difficult for the researcher to determine whether the informants did not want to share the information or whether they did not know.

When the initiated girls and initiated women had completed their performance, they cleaned themselves, put on their clothes, and destroyed all their art, because it was not supposed to be seen by uninitiated people. The girls joined the group around the fire. During the time that the group was in the street no uninitiated girls and women, men or cars passed by, except for women who were coming to join the group. In one of the
initiations it started drizzling for a short while and the elders said to the initiates, “We have been telling you to keep your hands closed. See now it is raining. It is your fault and we will leave you alone here when the rain becomes heavy”.

In one of the initiations the mudzabi greeted the gathering, stood up, and moved around singing her own praise song and acknowledging what she had been doing during the past two weeks. She related the way she had suffered and said that she was happy that it had ended. Then she shouted, Cha-cha mina nwana wa Magezi na Mudjadji meaning it is now over for me, the child of Magezi and Mudjadji. The initiates also did the same and greeted the group in the usual way.

Tingoma also address relationships, daily family life, work, and the roles that different people play in society. They role play the work that women do and how they cope with family problems.

The showing or modelling of figurines in chisungu is done over several days. The relevant participants start modelling them from day eight to day seventeen. They model a snake, fool, shelter, lion, and pottery. Then on the 17th day the bridegroom visits the initiation hut to perform a bow and arrow ritual and to bring some presents for the initiates. As in vujelejele, the dances in chisungu are mainly about domestic duties, agricultural duties and relationships in the community. There are similarities and differences in the figurines, however. Unlike in vukhomba the final stage of the initiation in chisungu is a celebration of the initiate’s marriage. In vukhomba the mother of the fictitious husband brings new clothes for the initiate and helps her put them on during the last Friday of the initiation. There is no ritual that is performed by a man in vukhomba (Richards 1956: 110-113).
5.2.8.4. Ku fefisa khomba

In all the initiations the initiates’ maternal relatives carried the mudzabi and held her in a sitting position above their heads. She was given a burning brand and moved it in circles above her head. When the mudzabi had finished the initiates followed and did the same, before greeting everyone.

5.2.8.5. Ku khanela khomba

In all the initiations the initiated women started singing a song and the naked mothers of the initiates emerged from their houses to come and dance. In each initiation the mother or mothers of the initiates ran in different directions, jumping, ululating, and clapping their hands and shouting cha-cha khomba, cha-cha mwananga (It is over now. Well done my child). Their relatives joined them and danced with them, but not naked. After dancing they ran back to their houses. It was later explained that the naked dance by the mother is only done for the first daughter and that the subsequent daughters will not have the privilege of seeing this.

In all the initiations at sunrise the girls started singing a song called hi lava tshitamba khovheni, that is telling the family that they wanted to have breakfast. They were given loaves of bread, sugar and tea to take home and these were shared equally among the initiated girls and initiated women. The initiates were then sent to the river for the last time and the group dispersed. The initiates were later bathed and dressed in new clothes by their aunts. At home the initiation huts were cleaned. The initiates’ blankets were washed by their maternal aunts and given to their maternal grandmothers. The G-strings were removed and handed to the initiates’ mothers by their maternal grandmothers. It was later explained that the G-string should only be touched by a person the initiate’s mother trusts, because some people might take it and bewitch the initiate, making her barren.
Vujelejele is a whole night ritual conducted on the last night of the initiation up to daybreak. The majority of the initiated girls in the focus group discussions indicated that the vujelejele as the most important ritual in the initiation and that they enjoyed it as initiates.

5.2.9. Saturday feast

The Saturday feast is mainly a celebration by the family to mark the end of their daughter’s initiation. According to the vukhomba elders, the initiation ends on Saturday morning when the last tingoma are performed. The family members carry out the activities that take place thereafter. The responsibility of the initiated women and initiated girls is ku humesa khomba.

5.2.9.1. Ku humesa khomba

This took place on the Saturday afternoon. The initiates were given a bath and helped into new clothes at the river by their aunts. In two of the initiations this was done by the initiates paternal aunts and in the other by the maternal aunts. It is important to mention that the initiate’s aunt who give her a bath and carries her should be initiated. In other words an uninitiated aunt is not allowed to carry out these tasks.

The initiated women and initiated girls (colourfully dressed) assembled at the gate of the initiation hut and proceeded to the river to fetch the initiates and their aunts. Each initiate was then carried on the back of one of her aunts to the gate of her home. See figure 5.8. At the gate the initiates and vadzabi knelt down or lay down on a mat and waited for ushering by initiated women. See figure 5.9. The initiates, vadzabi and initiated girls are ushered in a particular way as shown in figure 5.10. From the gate the initiates and vadzabi were escorted to the centre of the homestead where they lay down on a mat. A certain pattern of giving presents was followed, starting with the muriteri and followed by the initiate’s mother, paternal aunts, and the public. See figure 5.11.
Figure 5.8: The initiate’s aunt carrying the initiate on her back
Figure 5.9: Initiates kneeling down at the gate and waiting to be ushered in.
Figure 5.10. The ushering of initiates
Figure 5.11: The present-giving ceremony.

The bathing of the initiates in chisungu takes place on the 18th day and on the 19th day when the brides are taken out and introduced to the community. The 23rd day is considered the last day of the rite and is the day for the congratulation rite (Richards 1956: 110-113). In this study, the 8th day is considered the last day of vukhomba. As in chisungu, the last day is celebrated by the whole community. The bathing of the initiate in vukhomba happens every day, except on the second day of the initiation. On the last day the initiate is given a bath by her paternal aunts and introduced to the community.

Water seems to play an important role during these puberty rites. During vukhomba initiates are bathed, water is used during ngoma leyikulu and is also poured over the initiate and mudzabi and on the last day the initiate is given a full bath by her aunts. In the African culture water is seen as:
• bringing forth life – water is the life force of the earth

• a place of renewal – entrance into new kind of life

• a dissolving and cleansing liquid – washes away sin, death and darkness.

• medication – considered as absorbing the evil spirits that affects an individual.

• conveys qualities from a donor to a recipient.

• a coolant – initiates have to sit in a bath for many hours. This could be to cool their blood to assist in abstinence (Kriel 1989: 3-9).

When studying the above qualities of water it is evident that throughout the vukhomba these qualities are kept in mind. It was used in one of the initiation huts to prevent evil spirits from attacking the initiate during the vukhomba. The initiates are entering a new phase in their womanhood by being cleaned of the thugamama to become the nhwanyana. They are cleaned from the evil of being xuwruru to the status of an initiated person. The initiated women convey their qualities/knowledge to the initiates and teach them to abstain from sexual relationships before marriage.

5.2.10. Sunday feast (Nyimbo-nyimbo)

The Sunday celebration is mainly a celebration by the maternal grandparents to mark the end of their granddaughter’s initiation. This celebration is called Nyimbo-nyimbo. See figure 5.12. Nyimbo-nyimbo refers to the giving of gifts by the maternal relatives, grandparents, aunts, uncles and other relatives. The maternal relatives danced and gave gifts to the initiates. Unlike on Saturday, the initiates were not covered during nyimbo-nyimbo. However, they kept their heads bowed down and avoided looking around. In two of the initiations, the nyimbo-nyimbo was in the form of a vukhomba stokfel. The
mothers of the initiates were members and other stokfel members brought some gifts for the initiates.

Figure 5.12: The crowd at the Sunday celebration

The vukhomba stokfels were explained during the feedback workshops. There are different types of vukhomba stokfels depending on the group. There are more female vukhomba stokfels than male ones, though all of them are meant for the vukhomba initiate. These stokfels are designed to give financial support when a member has a child in the initiation. These stokfels work in the same way as the monthly financial stokfels and burial societies that communities have. Some are a combination of all three (monthly financial stokfel, burial society, and vukhomba stokfel) and some are a combination of any two. A group is formed and agrees on the amount that should be given to a member and the type of presents to be bought. The stokfels have constitutions and rules that are observed by all members. If they are contributing money every month, they also have a bank account where they deposit their contribution. The male vukhomba stokfels are

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usually organised by migrant labourers in Johannesburg. They give each other an agreed amount of money to help their member with the preparations for the Saturday feast.

The Saturday and Sunday celebrations indicate the importance of the initiate to her family. The new clothes are an indication that her family members want her to look attractive and acceptable to society.

5.3. SUMMARY

Although vukhomba is said to be one week long, in fact it is ten days long with eight days being the actual days of initiation and the last two days set aside for the celebration. There were no major differences in the vukhomba process of initiation, except for the ku ganga ka xikombana, ku pfariwa ka xingomana, and the absence of geregere in one initiation. The other differences were a result of circumstances outside vukhomba. For example, starting the initiation on Monday due to a death in the family leading to the omission of ku borisa xikombana.

Vukhomba has rules and regulations that the family, community and vukhomba participants should observe, and failure to observe them is punishable by the vukhomba elders. For example, family disputes during initiation are prohibited in the whole community.

The activities and rituals in vukhomba are difficult and taxing for all the initiates, though they are also educational and entertaining. It is sometimes almost impossible to get explanations for certain activities, making it difficult for the initiates to understand their meaning and what they might gain from them.

Vukhomba teaches the initiate human and family relationships, respect, and the morals of the society. Furthermore, it boosts the self-confidence and self-esteem of the initiate. The feast is a way of acknowledging the girl’s existence and thus also boosts her confidence.
But sexual education in *vukhomba* needs improvement to meet the needs of the girls in the modern era.

Fire and water both play an important role during *vukhomba*. This is in line with the symbolism and extension of powers into new realms, which form the basis of thought in the community under study.
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

6.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, a review was carried out on whether the objectives of the study have been met and research questions answered. These are discussed under the following headings, using the objectives of the study as a guideline:

- The strengths and weaknesses of sexuality education and sexual health information discussed during vukhomba

- Gender and health issues related to vukhomba

- Reasons why girls attend vukhomba

- Aspects to be covered in an intervention programme to deal with gender and health issues identified during the research

- Ways in which vukhomba can be used to improve the health status of women

6.2. THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF SEXUALITY EDUCATION AND SEXUAL HEALTH INFORMATION DISCUSSED DURING VUKHOMBA.

The objective here was to analyse and describe the content of the sexuality education given in vukhomba with a view to identify its strengths and weaknesses.
In the study it was revealed that sexuality education in vukhomba is limited to covering personal hygiene, maintaining virginity, self-control, and social morals. Although enjoyment of sex is not explicitly mentioned, it is implied in many of the songs. An example is Ndzi tsakisa hi yona (I like and enjoy it, meaning the penis). The teaching in vukhomba is done through singing, poems, demonstrations and managa (figurines) that are shown to the initiate during vijelejele. These are an effective learning method used in health promotion. Another strength of the sexuality education in vukhomba is that it is done in a non-threatening environment and the correct names of the reproductive organs can be used. Self-control in sexuality is one of the basic elements of sexual health.

The sexual information given during vukhomba has the following weaknesses:

- Some of the initiated girls experienced the sexuality information learnt at the vukhomba as inadequate. They wanted to learn more about the female body, how it functions, and how to prevent pregnancy. According to Darroch, Landry and Singh (2000:1) teaching young people about their physical and sexual development delays the first sexual relationship and increases the use of contraceptives by those who are sexually active.

- Although abstinence is encouraged in vukhomba, there is no evidence that indicates a difference in teenage pregnancy rate between the initiated and uninitiated teenage girls. This could be, because the physiology of pregnancy is not explained to the initiates.

- Information given is unclear and not easy to understand. For example, the initiate was told not to play with boys, which means that the girl should not have sex with boys. It might be easy for a girl to misunderstand this statement.

- Inadequate information on how to prevent teenage pregnancy is given. This is evident from the number of teenage mothers among initiated girls participating in the vukhomba. According to Fine (1988:44) sex education without contraceptives in
American schools did not reduce teenage pregnancy. He claims “Sex education and access to contraceptives and abortion can help to reduce the rate of unintended pregnancy among teens (Fine 1988:44).

The study also revealed that virginity testing used to be performed and was discontinued, because of witchcraft allegations against the vukhomba elders who were performing it. Since virginity is not checked before initiation, the sexuality education in vukhomba might be coming rather too late, because the initiate might already be sexually active. For example, there were initiates who were found to be pregnant during the initiation. Furthermore, sex education in schools seems to be unacceptable to the community, which feels its rightful home is in the initiation rites. The rites, however, do not fully prepare the girl to face all the challenges of life. Vukhomba could be used for sexuality education provided the opportunities that prevail are utilised more effectively. These opportunities include:

- Reinforcement of what is learnt

- A non-threatening environment as all participants are women

- Creativity among the participants. This can be seen in the songs and figurines used for teaching and teaching aids respectively.

There is evidence that many girls do not have access to information about menstruation until they have menses themselves. This ignorance exposes the girl to embarrassment and misery. There is a difference of opinion among the vukhomba elders on giving knowledge about menstruation before the girl herself menstruates. This is due to the fact that some vukhomba elders view crying after the girl has discovered that she is menstruating as a normal natural response.
6.3. GENDER AND HEALTH ISSUES RELATED TO VUKHOMBA.

The objective here was to identify gender and health issues in the activities and rituals of vukhomba and to find out if the puberty rites address gender and health issues in daily activities.

Puberty rites do not challenge the gender inequalities in the society. They reinforce women’s roles and stereotypes. However, during puberty rites, women temporarily acquire recognition and status in the community, but once the ceremonies are over they unfortunately go back to the low status prescribed for them by the society. It is important to mention at this stage that the power that the women have during vukhomba is collective power; in their individual capacity they might still be powerless and vulnerable.

Puberty rites for girls seem to be important in uniting initiated women in the community. They empower women to claim their position in society. Rites strengthen loyalties between the members of the group and allow the initiate to move from one group (uninitiated) to another (initiated) (Richards 1956: 18). The question is how to ensure that women retain their power after the rite. Since in the olden days the puberty rites were six months long it might mean that women had power for six months i.e. during those days there was shared governance: for six months women ruled and for another six months men ruled. Although women were in charge during this period the only way of enforcing their power was to institute taboos that forced men to comply. They also had mechanisms for punishing those who contravened the taboos. The puberty rites do not address women’s rights and sexual rights.

The second day of the initiation poses a threat to the health of the initiate e.g. eating food without washing her hands. The undressing of the initiate by the mudzabi is also a health hazard, as the mudzabi does not wear gloves when removing the underwear of the initiate, which could be soiled with blood. Another health problem is the smoke that the initiates are exposed to day and night. This could result in chest and eye problems.
There is limited knowledge about HIV, AIDS, and other STDs among the initiated girls, initiated women, and vukhomba elders. Incorporating education on HIV/AIDS and STDs in the puberty rites would be of value to the community. There is also a need to have knowledge about their bodies, women’s rights, sexual rights, diseases affecting women and the prevention of Sexually Transmitted Diseases. Giving this information will not only benefit the initiates, but all the vukhomba participants.

Information also revealed that there are problems related to vukhomba as perceived by the initiated women, girls, and vukhomba elders and some suggested solutions. The problems raised could be classified into two categories.

- Health related vukhomba problems
- Non-health related vukhomba problems

6.3.1. Health related vukhomba problems

There is evidence of teenage pregnancy among the initiated girls and lack of knowledge about the female body. The vukhomba elders blame mothers for teenage pregnancy, because they do not teach their children good behaviour. The solution suggested was to check for virginity to discourage girls from starting sexual activity before vukhomba and to stress abstinence in the initiation. Although some initiated women and girls suggested contraception to prevent teenage pregnancies, the vukhomba elders totally rejected this idea. *Lexi hi mi kombelaka ku vhela mi xi rivala hi leswa nkunguhato. Sweswo a hi nga zeli hi swikhumba* (We are prepared to consider all the others except teaching girls about contraceptives). *Nkunguhato wu endla ku vanhwayana va nga chavi ku djika-djika na vavanuna. Evukhombeni hi va dyondzisa ku ri va chava vavanuna.* (Contraceptives make the girls start fooling around. In vukhomba we are saying they must not sleep with boys, but when you give them contraceptives you are saying to them go and sleep with boys).
The exclusion of contraceptives in sexuality education is not unique to the *vukhomba* programme. Some areas of the United States of America also experience similar problems. Sex education teachers are told not to include contraceptives in their sex education programmes. In addition, some teachers prefer stressing abstinence in their sex education programmes to teaching about contraceptives (The Alan Guttmacher Institute 2000: 1). Abstinence in the prevention of HIV/AIDS is viewed as the most effective way an individual can use to ensure that she/he does not get infected with HIV. However, the problem with abstinence is that it does not cater for those who are already sexually active and those who would like to start sexual activity. Encouraging abstinence, safer sex and contraceptives would cater for all initiates.

The unhygienic situation during *ku borisa xikhombana* was also raised as a health problem by initiated girls. The suggested solution was that the initiates be allowed to wash their hands before eating. The inadequate personal hygiene during *vukhomba*, involved in making the initiate have a bath without a face cloth and soap and not using sanitary pads when having menses, was also raised. The initiated girls and women suggested the use of sanitary pads during menstruation in *vukhomba*. *Vukhomba* elders promised to look into the matter.

6.3.2. Non-health related *vukhomba* problems.

- The interference by men and uninitiated girls during *geregere*.

The interference during *geregere* could be an indication of how women and women’s issues are valued in the community. It is a sign of lack of respect for women and their sacred ritual. In this case the interference during *geregere* could be classified as a gender issue that needs to be addressed. The *vukhomba* elders have indicated that they have already taken the matter to their traditional leader.
• The replacement of xideka by a modern G-string.

The initiated girls suggested a change from the traditional G-string to modern G-string panties. The initiated women and vukhomba elders promised to look into this. Swilo swa neinca. Ha va twisisa vanhwanyana. Hi ta swi languta. (We understand the girls’ concern. We will look into it. We know that things change with time).

6.4. REASONS WHY GIRLS ATTEND VUKHOMBA

The objective here was to establish why girls subject themselves to vukhomba. They attend vukhomba for various reasons.

• Girls attend vukhomba because it is a respected cultural event. It is viewed by initiated women as a cultural practice that upholds the Manchagana/Vatsonga culture. Whilst initiated girls view it as a form of entertainment. Culture and peer pressure also encourage girls to attend the initiation. Although culture and peer pressure contribute to girls’ agreeing to attend vukhomba, there is no evidence to suggest that physical force is involved.

• To some the initiation is just a vehicle for material gain e.g. getting new clothes, furniture, blankets and linen. Although the uninitiated girls had information that suggests that female genital mutilation occurs in vukhomba, they still chose to subject themselves to it for material gain.

• Curiosity also plays a major role in persuading girls to attend the puberty rites. They want to find out what is happening in the vukhomba by subjecting themselves to the situation.

• Since vukhomba is viewed as a milestone, many girls attend in order to grow and gain the respect of society. They do not want to be called children forever, but to move to the respected position of being an adult in society.
According to Richards (1956: 18) puberty rites is an indication that the girl has reached full physical development and has reached sexual and social maturity. After initiation the initiated girl is expected to assume full adult activities and responsibilities. “Experiencing the initiation rite is passing the border. Therefore a woman who does not experience initiation will stay on one side of the border, and is considered as an outsider, a cipelelo. She is kept outside the women’s world. …It is a way to be regarded as mature and to be respected by the community” (Raising 1995: 101).

As a cultural event, however, vukhomba seems to be gradually losing its meaning, because the majority of the girls were initiated for material gain and the young uninitiated girls want to be initiated for material gain. The vukhomba elders and initiated women also raised some concern about girls getting initiated for material gain, because the real reason for it, respect and honour, gets lost.

What is interesting about this is that, although people are dissatisfied about the reasons for initiation, they continue sending their children and even having Christian vukhomba to cater for those who do not like to go to the traditional vukhomba. There seems to be no move from the vukhomba elders and initiated women and girls to take action to correct this situation.

Vukhomba, like chisungu among the Bemba, is a cultural celebration to acknowledge that the girl has reached sexual maturity (Richards 1956: 18). Reaching sexual maturity implies that the girl has also reached social maturity and is now fit to assume adult activities in society. Furthermore vukhomba reflects the community’s attitudes to sex, fertility and marriage in girls. Puberty rites are a form of celebration.

Some girls attend vukhomba for acceptance by their initiated peers, curiosity and entertainment during school holidays. Vukhomba has the ability to bring together women of different age groups and social standing to work together towards achieving the same goal, which is to initiate girls. The activities and events in the initiation centre mainly on dances and entertaining the participants. By performing rituals that are exclusively for
women, and using language that is not generally used in the community, this gives them a feeling of greatness and power. Although men, including traditional leaders consider the language offensive, they have no way of addressing the issue, as vukhomba is culturally not within their jurisdiction. Vukhomba also brings peace in the community for the initiated and uninitiated by imposing rules that prevent violence during the initiation of girls.

Furthermore it was meant for teaching initiates the traditions and morals of the society, women’s jobs, and sexuality education. No female circumcision or virginity testing takes place in vukhomba. The whole community, initiated and uninitiated celebrates the culmination of the initiation rites through the Saturday and Sunday celebrations.

Girls attend vukhomba because it is viewed by the initiated as a developmental stage. According to the initiated women, girls and vukhomba elders, an uninitiated girl misses one stage of development, which is nhwanyana. See figure 6.1. However, the thugamama is able to develop into wansati in the same manner as an initiated woman i.e. through a sexual relationship with a man.
Figure 6.1. The human developmental stages as viewed by initiated women.
Vukhomba does not promote sex before marriage, but since after vukhomba a girl can get married it might suggest that vukhomba does in a way prepare the initiates for marriage. The presence of the fictitious husband also suggests that the initiates were expected to get married immediately after their initiation.

Some girls attend the initiation because vukhomba is a place where learning about the tradition and morals of the society takes place. Vukhomba has a learning process that has a clearly defined beginning and end. Learning in vukhomba is individualised, because each initiate has a mudzabi and murileri who are responsible for her learning. The vukhomba elders evaluate the learning at some stage, which gives it credibility. Since the dances the girls learn are complicated, mentoring helps them to master the skills learnt.

In the olden days vukhomba used to teach the initiates women’s jobs e.g. ku sindza and working in the fields. This is no longer done. There was a feeling among the initiated women that vukhomba has changed. But, although it has changed, the process remains the same. What has changed is the duration of the initiation.

The content of the learning in the initiation includes:

- relationships within the family
- personal hygiene
- milawu.

Although vukhomba teaches about personal hygiene, it was not evident during the initiation. For example, on the second day and night the initiate was not allowed to have a bath or to wash her hands before meals.
It is unfortunate that at the present moment *vukhomba* is used more for material gain rather than as a cultural educational occasion. This could be the result of looking at education as something that occurs only in a formal schooling environment and seeing anything that occurs outside that environment as not educational. It is the responsibility of initiated women to preserve *vukhomba*.

Material gain and respect seem to be the major reasons for initiation. It is found to be unacceptable to the *vukhomba* elders and women to use *vukhomba* for material gain. However, they seemed to be powerless to do anything about it. A worrying factor is that although girls heard terrible stories about *vukhomba* they still subjected themselves to the initiation. In other words they were prepared to subject themselves to female circumcision for material gain.

It was evident that uninitiated women have limited knowledge about the *vukhomba*, leading to false assumptions about and perceptions of the rite. There is a general view among the uninitiated females that female circumcision is practised in the initiation. But there is no evidence of female circumcision in the initiation and even the *vukhomba* elders have not experienced it. The origin of these myths is not known and the reasons for their existence are not known.

The initiated women seem to be responsible for the misinformation about *vukhomba*. It seems as if this practice started long ago and that initiated women are not doing anything to correct it. No evidence could be found that positively linked female circumcision to *vukhomba* in people's living memory. These myths and misinformation could be part of keeping the rite secret. On the other hand, it could be that the initiated females realise that the uninitiated are entitled to their opinion and leave them to say what they want about *vukhomba*. *Vukhomba* is not the dangerous practice portrayed by the media.
The perceptions that are held about *vukhomba* are also working against what the rite plans to achieve to prevent sex before marriage. An example is the belief that the men have that once the girl is initiated she is in a position to have sex, because in the initiation a horn was inserted into her vagina and she managed to carry it around. Another problem is that the uninitiated people do not believe that these things do not happen in the *vukhomba*. The secrecy around *vukhomba* also adds another dimension that makes it difficult for the uninitiated to believe that these things do not happen and that the initiated girl is a girl like any other.

6.5. ASPECTS TO BE COVERED IN AN INTERVENTION PROGRAMME TO DEAL WITH GENDER AND HEALTH ISSUES IDENTIFIED DURING THE RESEARCH

After reviewing the findings of the research, the following intervention programme, to improve the health status of women, was compiled. The information mentioned in Table 6.1. could be included during the ceremony to make it more meaningful for health.

The draft intervention programme was presented during September 2000 to the *vukhomba* elders, initiated women, and initiated girls in the form of a health education talk to allow them to get a feel of what would be discussed. It was presented in Xitsonga and visual aids were used to clarify some aspects. Since the objective of this presentation was to assist the *vukhomba* participants in making an informed decision on what should be included in the intervention programme the presentation was not formally evaluated. However, the participants’ ability to choose the topics they wanted in the proposed intervention programme serves as an indication that they have understood the contents. Table 6.1. indicates the topics presented and the participants responses or choices.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Initiated women</th>
<th>Initiated girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anatomy and physiology of the female reproductive system</td>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>Approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anatomy and physiology male reproductive system</td>
<td>Not approved</td>
<td>Not approved</td>
<td>Approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The developmental stages of a woman</td>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>Approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menstruation</td>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>Approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting pregnant</td>
<td>Not approved, but received a lot of interest</td>
<td>Not Approved also received a lot of interest</td>
<td>Approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contraception</td>
<td>Not Approved</td>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>Approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal hygiene</td>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>Approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STDs</td>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>Approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>Approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breast examination &amp; Ca breasts</td>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>Approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ca cervix &amp; pap smear</td>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>Approved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the *vukhomba* participants approved eight of the eleven topics presented for inclusion in the intervention programme. Both *vukhomba* elders and initiated women disapproved the inclusion of the male reproductive organs and the topic on pregnancy. The *vukhomba* elders also disapprove the topic on contraceptives. The information presented on the male reproductive organs seemed to be working against their reason for showing the clay penis in to the initiation, which is to scare the initiates. Although all participants showed a lot of interest in all aspects related to the pregnancy topic, *vukhomba* elders and initiated women disapproved it for two reasons. Firstly, in their view initiates are too young to learn about this topic. Secondly, it would be disrespectful to discuss this topic in the presence of young people. For example, a participant in one of the discussion said,

“You know, I will still be in a position to get children when my first daughter goes to the *vukhomba*. After getting this information how will she look at me when I am pregnant. She will know what is going on inside me.”

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Another one indicated that she does not want young girls (initiated and initiates) to read her like a book. In her view the information on pregnancy is like exposing herself to the public for scrutiny. She seemed to be holding the view that information about pregnancy should be limited to female adults.

All the topics that were not approved by the vukhomba elders were left out of the final intervention programme. However, it is hoped that some of them could be handled if questions arise.

6.5.1. The intervention programme

Although the intervention programme is mainly based on the topics suggested by the vukhomba elders, the work of the Allen Guttmacher Institute (2000: 5) and Tinker et al (2000:27) was taken into consideration when the intervention programme was developed. The programme addresses the identified gender and health issues, the developmental stages of a woman, and conditions and diseases affecting women, such as Sexually Transmitted Diseases, HIV and AIDS. This intervention programme will also be given to initiated women who oversee the vukhomba and to guide them on how it can be included in the ceremony.

According to the Allen Guttmacher Institute (2000:5) sexuality educational programmes should aim at:

- encouraging teenagers to postpone intercourse

- supporting sexually experienced youths who wish to refrain from sexual activities

- preparing youths to adequately prevent teenage pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases

- improving access to information and youth health services
- providing adequate education and information about sexual behaviour

- providing support for research into new contraceptives and methods and youth health

According to Tinker et al (2000:27) essential intervention for women’s health should address:

- Prevention and management of unwanted pregnancy

- Services related to pregnancy

- Prevention and management of STDs and gynaecological cancers

- Promotion of positive health practices

- Elimination of harmful practices

Taking all this information into consideration, the general aims of the intervention programme were developed.

6.5.1.1. General aims of the intervention programme

- To share information that will enable girls and women to develop a responsible, satisfying and safe sex life.

- To share information that will assist girls and women in forming attitudes, beliefs and values about sexuality development (e.g. why girls menstruate), reproductive health, interpersonal relationships and body image (know your body)
• To prevent teenage pregnancy, STDs, HIV and AIDS

6.5.1.2. Objectives

At the end of the course the participant will be able to:

• Explain the anatomy and physiology of a woman

• Share with others information regarding menstruation

• Take precautionary measures to prevent pregnancy

• Take responsibility for own sexuality and practice safe sex

• Share information about STDs, HIV and AIDS

6.5.1.3. Learning methods

The course is based on popular or emancipator education. It will be presented as a workshop and the inductive learning approach or LePSA method of teaching will be used. The inductive learning approach is a non-formal, inductive and non-directive method sometimes called the psychosocial method. It is an adaptation of the method developed by the Brazilian adult educator Paulo Freire. The psycho-social method of teaching is nicknamed LePSA ((Learner-centred, Problem-posing, Self-discovery and Action-oriented). This method is generally used in South Africa for awareness raising and to challenge the inequalities in the South African society (University of Western Cape 1992: 32).
This popular educational approach was adopted in South Africa because, firstly, it is about collective learning and takes a political stand on the side of marginalised people. Using this method the facilitator can create situations in which people with different cultural or educational backgrounds can make sense of the world together. This happens from sharing their experiences, and once they have new understandings they can decide what actions they will take to challenge whatever is causing their problems. Thus, it begins with people's experiences, moving to analysis of the experiences, then encouraging collective action on the problem and reflection and evaluation of its own process (Boud, Cohen & Waller 1993: 26-30).

Secondly it takes place within a democratic framework and examines unequal power relations in the society. It is based on what the learners are concerned about, involving high levels of participation, and includes people's emotions, actions, intellects and creativity. It uses varied activities and encourages everyone to learn and everyone to teach (Boud, Cohen & Waller 1993: 26-30).

In each session a starter will be used to begin a discussion. The starters will be a role-play, case study, poem, game or milawu. Each session will be problem-posing and the participants will try and solve the problem. At the end of each session each participant will evaluate the session and identify what has been learned or unlearned from it. This will assist in identifying gaps in each session and issues, which might be making some of the participants uncomfortable. This information will assist the facilitator when making plans for the next session. All lessons will be presented in Xitsonga.
6.5.1.4. Content

- The female body
- The developmental stages of a woman
- Menstruation
- Personal hygiene
- STDs and HIV/AIDS
- Breast examination
- Cancers affecting women
- Gender and health
- Women’s rights

The planned intervention programme as approved by the vukhomba elders, initiated women and initiated girls, is discussed below. Gender and health and women’s rights will not be taught as a topic, but will be incorporated in all the topics listed in table 6.2. It is important to mention at this stage that although the vukhomba elders have some reservations they are keen for the programme to be introduced.
Table 6.2. The intervention programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiation day</th>
<th>Topic to be covered</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>The anatomy and physiology of the female reproductive system</td>
<td>Initiates, vadzabi, initiated girls, initiated women, vukhomba elders</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Human developmental stages</td>
<td>Initiates, vadzabi, initiated girls, initiated women, vukhomba elders</td>
<td>Evening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>Menstruation and personal hygiene</td>
<td>Initiates, vadzabi, initiated girls, initiated women, vukhomba elders</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 4</td>
<td>STDS and HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Initiates, vadzabi, initiated girls, initiated women, vukhomba elders</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 5</td>
<td>Breast examination, cancer of the breasts and cervix</td>
<td>Initiates, vadzabi, initiated girls, initiated women, vukhomba elders</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher will facilitate the initial intervention programme. After the presentation of the first programme, the participants will meet with the researcher to evaluate the programme and make decisions on the way forward. The meeting will also discuss how the programme can be integrated into the proceedings of vukhomba. If the programme is found to be acceptable, facilitators for each village will be trained to run this programme. A facilitation guide will be developed and an information booklet in Xitsonga will be compiled to make it accessible to the whole community. Given the fact that there are about 1307 teenage girls in the in the three villages this year, it is envisaged that the programme would have reached about 6535 teenage girls in five years time. Since vukhomba is also practised in other districts, the programme will be extended to those areas.
6.6. WAYS IN WHICH THE VUKHOMBA CAN BE USED TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH STATUS OF WOMEN.

- Since *vukhomba* brings initiated women and initiated girls together it can act as a health promotion and health education place for different age groups.

- The initiated girls can be used for peer group teaching not only in the initiation, but also in the community and at school.

- The initiated women will be trained to facilitate a workshop for women. The initiated women will also run workshops for initiated and uninitiated women in the community.

- *Vukhomba* can also be used for disseminating new health information e.g. disease outbreak and immunisation campaigns.

- The intervention programme should be an integral part of *vukhomba*.

6.7. SUMMARY

Initiated and uninitiated women view *vukhomba* differently. *Vukhomba* is a cultural event that upholds Vatsonga/Manchangana culture and provides entertainment for women and girls. Uninitiated women have limited understanding of the initiation leading to false assumptions about the puberty rites, which portray it as dangerous. There are two major things that stand out as a source of attraction for the girls, material gain and respect.

The rites do not fully prepare the initiate to face all the challenges of life, especially sexual health. The *vukhomba* promotes the notion of abstinence but *vukhomba* elders are not ready to accept the use of contraceptives as a way of reducing teenage pregnancy. They prefer checking virginity to prevent girls from engaging in sex at an early age. The
proposed intervention programme has excluded the topics that the *vukhomba* elders were uncomfortable with. The programme will be evaluated at the end of each training session.

Although the study was aimed at improving *vukhomba*, it has become clear that the proposed intervention programme should be applied more widely. This would mean involving leaders, males, churches and schools, taking into consideration the existing norms and values.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter conclusions were drawn according to a theoretical framework which is based on the following three approaches to women's health discussed in chapter 1: a human rights approach, a gender analysis approach, and a comprehensive and holistic approach. An intervention programme that was developed with the community is recommended for providing adequate education and information about sexuality, the prevention of disease, and the prevention of teenage pregnancy.

7.2. CONCLUSIONS ACCORDING TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH.

The following conclusions were drawn based on the data collected and a literature review:

- *Vukhomba* does not address human rights, though taboos are used to prevent violence against women. It does not make the initiates aware of their reproductive rights, for example the right to make decisions concerning reproduction free from discrimination, coercion and violence. The intervention programme addresses their right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health and their right to information that makes this possible.

- The undressing of the initiate in front of *vukhomba* participants violates her right to privacy.
The lack of sexual health information among the initiated girls is also an indication of the inadequacies of sexuality education in the rural areas. This violates the girl’s right to access information. *Vukhomba* could be used to disseminate health information.

To ensure that the rights of the community will be respected when introducing the programme, they were involved in developing the intervention programme. Furthermore, the topics covered in the intervention programme were topics that the initiated girls, women, and *vukhomba* elders agreed on.

*Vukhomba* is a dynamic process that changes with time. It accommodates the needs of girls today e.g. their need for education of this kind during school holidays and for reducing its duration. The right to education is observed and respected in *vukhomba*.

### 7.3. CONCLUSIONS ACCORDING TO THE GENDER ANALYSIS APPROACH

A gender analysis approach was used in this study to identify gender related factors in *vukhomba*. For example, factors that encourage discrimination against women, women involvement in decision making on issues that concern them and the roles that women play in society.

- The initiation of girls is done in the evening when women have completed performing their multiple roles. In other words *vukhomba* takes into consideration women’s multiple roles, though it does not challenge the status quo.

- The sexuality education information given to girls during the *vukhomba* discourages sex before marriage through virginity testing just before initiation and *milawu*. However, virginity is encouraged in *vukhomba* for male satisfaction, therefore making it a gender issue, because males are not encouraged to be virgins.
• The male reproductive organs seem to play an important role during *vukhomba*, but there is complete silence on the female reproductive organs. For example, the initiates are shown a model of the penis and songs sung during *vukhomba*. However, the songs and male organ figurines seem to be discouraging initiates from sexual relationships with men (e.g. *wa yi vona ya rhemelela*) and this seems to be inadequate for changing sexual behaviours and the attitudes of initiates towards sexual relationships. The complete silence about the female reproductive organs indicates that they respect themselves by singing songs that will ridicule female organs.

• The fact that most girls become sexually active before initiation seems not to be taken into consideration. Sexuality education at an earlier age would solve this problem.

• There is inadequate knowledge on HIV/AIDS, STDs and contraceptives and a lack of awareness of the measures that can be used to prevent HIV/AIDS, STDs and pregnancy.

• The initiated girls prefer learning about sexual health in *vukhomba* rather than at school, because the *vukhomba* environment seems to be more conducive for learning about it than the school environment.

• The information given to the initiates by the *vukhomba* elders on the last Thursday of the initiation reinforces the gender roles prescribed for women. For example, the initiate is reminded of her relationship with different family members. She is also told to cook for them and kneel down when she gives them food. Obedience and subordination are emphasised, which is what society expects of women. They should be obedient to older women and men.

• Inadequate sexuality education subjects girls to receiving wrong information related to menstruation and makes them react negatively towards menses. There is a need to provide adequate education and information about sexual behaviours and their consequences.
• During the initiation women seem to be in control of the village and determine what should be done and what should not be done. However, this is short-lived, since as soon as the initiation is over they go back to their normal position in society.

• Women’s health issues are not addressed and women have very limited knowledge of the way their body functions and diseases that affect them.

• The initiates are taught about personal hygiene during menstruation and to avoid sexual relationships when they are having their menses to protect the man - “the man might die” not themselves.

• The songs that ridicule men’s reproductive organs could be a way of dealing with male oppression. This is similar to the strategy that the oppressed people of South Africa used to deal with their oppression. They used ridiculous and obscene words in their songs to refer to their oppressors. According to Richards (1956: 20) during puberty rites women who are under normal circumstances expected to be submissive and humble to men are allowed to be quite outrageous or arrogant towards men in the ceremony, shouting obscenities or even attacking them.

7.4. CONCLUSIONS ACCORDING TO THE COMPREHENSIVE AND HOLISTIC APPROACH

The comprehensive and holistic approach was used in this study to find out if there are health consequences related to vukhomba. Furthermore it assisted the researcher in viewing the factors that affect the women’s health status in a comprehensive and holistic manner rather than in a fragmented manner.

• There is no evidence that in vukhomba there is female genital mutilation or the insertion of a foreign object (horn) into the initiate’s vagina. Furthermore, no evidence was found suggesting that stretching of the labia minora takes place in vukhomba.
• *Vukhomba* does not prepare the initiate for child-bearing. Furthermore, it does not consider the needs of women throughout their lives. This is different from the finding of Richards (1956: 18) where the initiation ceremony was said to focus on nubility, fertility and motherhood.

• The intervention programme aims at strengthening the sexuality education in *vukhomba* and the confidence of the initiates. It includes the female body, human development, women’s health issues, STDs, HIV and AIDS. The *vukhomba* elders excluded contraception and the male body from the intervention programme, although they make models of the penis during *vukhomba*.

• The researcher will implement the intervention programme in each village to gain support for the programme. Thereafter, the programme will be evaluated and adjustments made. Furthermore, a programme for training facilitators of the programme will be instituted. This could enable those who are in charge of *vukhomba* to implement the programme during *vukhomba*.

7.5. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

• The Northern Province Department of Health and Welfare at all levels should ensure that co-operation between the *vukhomba* elders and health services is established. This will ensure that the cultural rite can be used to promote women’s health.

• The Department of Culture and Technology should recognise puberty rites as one of the important heritages of South Africa. The community still see *vukhomba* as an important rite for girls and this should be seen as a cultural heritage.

• Puberty rites should be used for teaching and for the prevention of diseases. For example HIV/AIDS, cancers and STDs. Although girls do attend school, they find it more acceptable to get this information within a group of girls.
• The programme should be in line with the programme given in the schools and therefore discussions will be held with the relevant department.

7.6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

• Further research should be done on puberty rites in different communities to find out if there are health risk practices that might threaten the life of the initiates.

• Research studies should be conducted to study the impact of the intervention programme in the puberty rites and schools.

• Research to determine the knowledge of initiated versus uninitiated girls on sexuality, sexuality education and diseases.

7.7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research has been limited to one type of puberty rites and one population group. The study was conducted in one region of the Northern Province. Taking into consideration that different areas and population groups have different cultural practices, the results may not be representative enough and for generalisations based on them to be applied to other puberty rites in South Africa. The fact the *vukhomba* is a secret rite could have influenced respondents to withhold some information considered highly confidential by them. The distance between the areas and financial limitation restricted the researcher to studying one puberty rite per village, whereas studying more ceremonies might have yielded better results. Another factor is that since the *vukhomba* participants were aware of the research they might have altered some of the activities and behaviours, because of the presence of the researcher.
7.8. SUMMARY

Puberty rites are cultural practices that have been in existence for many years among many cultural groups. Vukhomba among Vatsonga/Manchangana is a respected cultural event, the end of which is celebrated by the whole community, young and old, educated and non-educated, initiated and non-initiated. It is a cultural practice that upholds the African culture and a form of entertainment by the initiated women and girls. Many girls attend vukhomba, because of culture, peer pressure, curiosity and material gain. There is no evidence of female circumcision and stretching of the labia in the vukhomba.

Vukhomba is a cultural event that is available every three months for health promotion. It can be used to empower women and improve their health. There is a need for sexual health information to reach all girls in the country. It is also important not to label cultural practices as evil before finding out what they are really all about. Puberty rites are cultural institutions that have been working for many years towards bringing women together.

Puberty rites give women a sense of belonging and respect in their community. It gives them temporary group power in the community during initiation, however, as individuals they remain powerless and still open for abuse. Vukhomba acts as a deterrent for public women abuse, because men are afraid of the group power women have during vukhomba. However, if women abuse is done in private and is not reported the perpetrator might go unpunished.

The sexuality education in vukhomba covers the most important prevention of HIV, which is abstinence, but does not teach initiates about HIV/AIDS. Although the puberty rites have a sexuality education component, the content of the sexuality education needs to be in line with the current issues facing communities and young people for example HIV/AIDS. Further research is needed for studying the different puberty rites and the impact of the intervention programme on the knowledge of the youth regarding sexual health.
An intervention programme has been developed and will be incorporated in the initiation rites and initiated girls will be used to facilitate learning in the vukhomba and also in schools. To implement this programme the following quotation from Kriel (1989:200, 211) should be kept in mind.

No understanding of the position of contemporary Africa is possible without a thorough realisation of the firmness of the hold of the traditional cultural identity ... Ancient traditions, whatever may be said against them and whatever the futility of constructing a future on them, did indeed afford deep emotional security ... honest thinking on these lines is one of the most valuable contributions that can be made to the future wellbeing of Africa (Kriel 1989:200, 211).
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ANNEXURE A

LETTER TO REQUEST PERMISSION TO

CONDUCT THE STUDY
The Chairman  
CONTRALESA  
Northern Region  

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY IN THE NORTHERN REGION

Dear sir

It is my pleasure to inform you that I am conducting a research study on the puberty rites for girls (Vukhomba) in the Northern region of the Northern Province. I therefore wish to request permission to include the Mashobye village, Mukhomi village, Mhinga village and Valdezia village in this study. (See attached research proposal).

Thanking you in anticipation

Thelma Maluleke  
Researcher
The Chairman
Gidjana Traditional Authority
Private Bag 603
BONISANI

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY AT MASHOBYE

Dear sir

It is my pleasure to inform you that I am conducting a research study on the puberty rites for girls (Vukhomba) in the northern region of the Northern Province. I therefore wish to request permission to include the Mashobye village in this study. (See attached research proposal).

Thanking you in anticipation

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Thelmah Maluleke
Researcher
ANNEXURE B.

UNIVERSITY OF VENDEA RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE APPROVAL LETTER.
Ms TX Maluleke  
School of Health Sciences  
University of Venda  
01 June 1998

Re: Registration of Project and Application for Research Grant

At its meeting on the 18 May 1998, the Research and Publications Committee approved your application to register the project entitled "The Puberty Rites Ceremony for Girls (Vukhombwa) in the Northern Region of the Northern Province: Implications for Women's Health".

The Committee approved the application for research funding on condition that the following matters were first addressed:

- you specify the level of the assistants;
- the amount of R1200 (presents for initiates) must come from the subsistence (R4200);
- travelling details need to be clarified i.e specific destinations must be submitted and the following clarified: (5 visits each x 80 km x 2 x R1,00) should be 800 km @ R1.00 = R800 and not R3 200.

The amount requested R9980 was therefore not approved and should exclude R1200 for the gifts (to come from subsistence allocation) and travelling expenses R800 only (unless you justify the R3200 as stated in the application form).

Amount applied for  
Gifts for initiates  
Travelling R3200 - R800  
Total

R9980  
R1200  
R 800  
R7080

Your project registration number is 98/NGN/R1

[Signature]

Prof JM Nchabeleng  
Dean - Research and Development
ANNEXURE C.

WRITTEN PERMISSION TO PUBLISH
To whom it may concern,

This is to certify that Mrs. Maluleke 571217 0862 08.5 has been given permission to conduct a study on puberty rites for girls (Vukhomba) at Mushebe Vl.

She is also given permission to use the information collected for academic publication purposes.

Your esteemed consideration on this matter will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

SAC

CHIEF

COUNCILLOR
ANNEXURE D.

RESEARCH METHODS/TECHNIQUES
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD) WITH VUKHOMBA ELDER

Introduction:

- Introduce yourself
- Explain the purpose and objective of the research
- Explain who has access to the information and how confidentiality will be maintained
- Explain the respondents rights to terminate the interview at anytime
- Get permission to use a tape recorder and explain who will listen to the tape and what will happen to it once the research is completed

Explain to the respondents about the consent. Those who could read give them a chance to read it and sign if she/he agrees to participate.

Questions:
1. Would you like to tell us the procedure that a girl should follow when she sees her first menses?
2. What happens once it is known that the girl has started menstruating?
3. What is your task as elders in the initiation?
4. Is vukhomba still relevant in this era? They all agreed that it is still relevant.
5. In your view, what does vukhomba teach to the girls?
6. Is the behaviour of an uninitiated girl different from that of the initiated?
7. There is a general view that says vukhomba is teaching girls to use obscene language. What is your view about it?
8. There is a view that vukhomba is teaching girls to be submissive to men and that it disempowers them. What is your view about this?
9. How can the puberty rite contribute in prevention of AIDS and teenage pregnancy?
10. Is vukhomba still relevant in this era?
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH INITIATED WOMEN (VABVANA)

Introduction:

- Introduce yourself
- Explain the purpose and objective of the research
- Explain who has access to the information and how confidentiality will be maintained
- Explain the respondents rights to terminate the interview at anytime
- Get permission to use a tape recorder and explain who will listen to the tape and what will happen to it once the research is completed
- Explain to the respondents about the consent. Those who could read give them a chance to read it and sign if she/he agrees to participate.

Questions:

1. What is your role in the initiation of girls?
2. Would you like to explain what you teach the initiate?
3. What brought up this change in the initiation?
4. There is a view that vukhomba is encouraging girls to be promiscuous and fall in love with older men. What is your opinion about it?
5. In your view is vukhomba teaching the girls all the things they need to know about life?
6. In your view, are the girls aware of sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS?
7. Would you like to tell us what you teach the initiate?
8. In your view, is vukhomba still relevant in this era?
9. In your view is vukhomba teaching the initiates all the things they need to know about life?
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH INITIATED GIRLS

Introduction:

- Introduce yourself
- Explain the purpose and objective of the research
- Explain who has access to the information and how confidentiality will be maintained
- Explain the respondents rights to terminate the interview at anytime
- Get permission to use a tape recorder and explain who will listen to the tape and what will happen to it once the research is completed

**Explain to the respondents about the consent. Those who could read give them a chance to read it and sign if she/he agrees to participate.**

Questions:

1. Would you like to explain your reasons for being initiated?
2. Would you like to share your view about *vukhomba* before you were initiated yourself?
4. Are all the girls in your village initiated?
5. In your view, what does *vukhomba* mean to you? What does it teach to the girl?
6. What is it that you liked about the initiation?
7. What is it that you dislike in the initiation?
8. In your view what does the puberty rites teach to the initiates?
9. In your view, what does *vukhomba* mean to you? What does it teach to the girl?
10. What is it that you liked about the initiation?
11. What is it that you dislike in the initiation?
12. In your view, what does the puberty rite teach to the initiates?
13. What changes did you experience at home, school and community after your initiation?
14. There is a view that *vukhomba* is teaching girls about sex and how to behave towards men. 15. What is your view about this?
16. How do you use what you have learnt in the initiation?
17. If you were in a position to effect changes in the *vukhomba*, what would you change?
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW WITH MURILERI

Introduction:

- Introduce yourself
- Explain the purpose and objective of the research
- Explain who has access to the information and how confidentiality will be maintained
- Explain the respondents rights to terminate the interview at anytime
- Get permission to use a tape recorder and explain who will listen to the tape and what will happen to it once the research is completed
- Explain to the respondents about the consent. Those who could read give them a chance to read it and sign if she/he agrees to participate.

Questions:

1. What does it mean to be a murileri?
2. How do you feel about being murileri for this initiate?
3. What information did give to the initiate when she informed you about her menses?
4. What is your role in the initiation of this initiate?
SEM I-STRUCTURE D INTERVIEW WITH PARENTS

Introduction:

• Introduce yourself
• Explain the purpose and objective of the research
• Explain who has access to the information and how confidentiality will be maintained
• Explain the respondents rights to terminate the interview at anytime
• Get permission to use a tape recorder and explain who will listen to the tape and what will happen to it once the research is completed
• Explain to the respondents about the consent. Those who could read give them a chance to read it and sign if she/he agrees to participate.

Questions:

1. What is the reason for taking your daughter to vukhomba?
2. What preparations did you make for the initiation?
3. What is your role as parents in the initiation of your daughter?
4. What do you expect your child to learn at the vukhomba?
5. What is expected of you during and after the initiation?
6. Is the relationship between you and your daughter going to change after the initiation?
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW WITH MUDZABI

Introduction:

- Introduce yourself
- Explain the purpose and objective of the research
- Explain who has access to the information and how confidentiality will be maintained
- Explain the respondents rights to terminate the interview at anytime
- Get permission to use a tape recorder and explain who will listen to the tape and what will happen to it once the research is completed
- Explain to the respondents about the consent. Those who could read give them a chance to read it and sign if she/he agrees to participate.

Questions:

1. What does it mean to be a mudzabi?
2. Why were you chosen to be a mudzabi for this initiate?
3. What is your role as mudzabi?
4. What is the meaning of vukhomba?
5. What are the benefits for the initiate?
6. What are the benefits for you as mudzabi?
7. What is expected of you and the initiate after the initiation?
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW WITH THE INITIATE

Introduction:

- Introduce yourself
- Explain the purpose and objective of the research
- Explain who has access to the information and how confidentiality will be maintained
- Explain the respondents rights to terminate the interview at anytime
- Get permission to use a tape recorder and explain who will listen to the tape and what will happen to it once the research is completed
- Explain to the respondents about the consent. Those who could read give them a chance to read it and sign if she/he agrees to participate.

Questions:

1. What is the reason for being initiated?
2. What was your view about vukhomba before you were initiated?
3. What is your view about vukhomba after the initiation?
4. What good and bad things did you identify in the initiation?
5. If you had powers to make changes in the initiation what would you change?
6. How would you describe the relationship between you and your mudzabi during and after the initiation?
7. Is there a change in the way your family and community treats you after the initiation?
KEY INFORMANTS INTERVIEW: CHIEF SUPERVISOR OF VUKHOMBA

Introduction

- Introduce yourself
- Explain the purpose and objective of the research
- Explain who has access to the information and how confidentiality will be maintained
- Explain the respondents' rights to terminate the interview at anytime
- Get permission to use a tape recorder and explain who will listen to the tape and what will happen to it once the research is completed
- Explain to the respondents about the consent. Those who could read give them a chance to read it and sign if she/he agrees to participate.

Questions:

1. Would you like to tell us the procedure that a girl should follow when she sees her first menses?
2. What happens once it is known that the girl has started menstruating?
3. What is your task as a vukhomba supervisor?
4. Is vukhomba still relevant in this era?
5. In your view, what does vukhomba teach to the girls?
6. There is a general view that says vukhomba is teaching girls to use obscene language. What is your view about it?
7. There is a view that vukhomba is teaching girls to be submissive to men and that it disempowers them. What is your view about this?
8. How can the vukhomba contribute in the prevention of HIV/AIDS and teenage pregnancy?
KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW: TRADITIONAL LEADER

Introduction

- Introduce yourself
- Explain the purpose and objective of the research
- Explain who has access to the information and how confidentiality will be maintained
- Explain the respondents rights to terminate the interview at anytime
- Get permission to use a tape recorder and explain who will listen to the tape and what will happen to it once the research is completed
- Explain to the respondents about the consent. Those who could read give them a chance to read it and sign if she/he agrees to participate.

Questions:

1. What is the importance of the puberty rites for girls?
2. What happens to girls who do not want to be initiated?
3. Is vukhomba still relevant in this era?
4. There is a general view that vukhomba encourages initiated girls to be submissive to men. What is your opinion about that?
5. There is a view that vukhomba encourages initiated girls to misbehave, fall in love with older men and get pregnant. What is your view about that?
6. What are the benefits of vukhomba to the tribal authority?
KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW: TEACHER

Introduction

- Introduce yourself
- Explain the purpose and objective of the research
- Explain who has access to the information and how confidentiality will be maintained
- Explain the respondents rights to terminate the interview at anytime
- Get permission to use a tape recorder and explain who will listen to the tape and what will happen to it once the research is completed
- Explain to the respondents about the consent. Those who could read give them a chance to read it and sign if she/he agrees to participate.

Questions:

1. What is the importance of *vukhomba*?
2. What behavioural changes have you observed in initiated girls?
3. What impact does the initiation have on the educational performance of the initiated girl?
4. Is *vukhomba* still relevant in this era?
KEY INFORMANTS INTERVIEW: CHURCH ELDERS

Introduction

- Introduce yourself
- Explain the purpose and objective of the research
- Explain who has access to the information and how confidentiality will be maintained
- Explain the respondents rights to terminate the interview at anytime
- Get permission to use a tape recorder and explain who will listen to the tape and what will happen to it once the research is completed
- Explain to the respondents about the consent. Those who could read give them a chance to read it and sign if she/he agrees to participate.

Questions:

1. What is the importance of vukhomba?
2. What is the relationship between vukhomba and Christianity?
3. What impact does the initiation have on the youth in church?
4. Is vukhomba still relevant in this era?
ANNEXURE E.

AGREEMENT LETTER: INDEPENDENT CODERS AND TRANSLATOR
Dear colleague

I will like to extend my gratitude to you for assisting me with the data analysis of my thesis. Kindly use the attached guidelines for the analysis.

As indicated in our discussion you are therefore requested to sign the agreement form below:

I **Makhosazana Xaba** have agreed to assist Thelmah Maluleke in the analysis of her research data. I am aware that vukhomba is a secret rite and that the vukhomba information that is in my possession shall not be quoted or discussed with any other person except the researcher. I therefore promise to treat all data in my possession in the strictest confidence.

_________________________  _______________________
Makhosazana Xaba  Date

Thank you

______________________________
Thelmah Maluleke
Confidentiality agreement

I, .................................. has agreed to assist Thelma Maluleke in the translation of her research data. I am aware that vukhomba is a secret rite and that the vukhomba information that is in my possession shall not be quoted or discussed with any other person except the researcher. I therefore promise to treat all data in my possession in the strictest confidence.

__________________________  ________________________
Irene Shirilele                Date