



Theatrical Intervention and Attitudinal Change

A Qualitative Study of Social Drama and Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting among Elders in The Gambia's Upper River Region

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Author notes

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ABSTRACT

{ "background": "Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) remains a deeply entrenched practice in many communities, sustained by social norms and intergenerational beliefs. In The Gambia, despite legal prohibition, prevalence remains high, particularly in rural areas like the Upper River Region, where elders are key custodians of tradition.", "purpose and objectives": "This study aimed to investigate the effect of a targeted, drama-based social theatre intervention on the attitudes of community elders towards FGM/C, exploring the processes through which theatrical performance may facilitate critical reflection and potential attitudinal shift.", "methodology": "A qualitative, longitudinal design was employed. Data were collected via in-depth, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with a purposive sample of 42 elders (male and female) before, immediately after, and six months following their participation in a series of specially commissioned social drama performances. Thematic analysis was conducted on the transcribed data.", "findings": "Analysis revealed a significant, nuanced shift in attitudes among a substantial majority of participants. A core theme was the drama's effectiveness in fostering empathy and stimulating intergenerational dialogue, particularly through the dramatisation of health complications and girls' distress. One concrete result was that over two-thirds of participants subsequently initiated family discussions questioning the practice's necessity.", "conclusion": "The findings demonstrate that participatory social theatre can be a potent catalyst for critical engagement with FGM/C among elder traditional gatekeepers, creating discursive openings for norm questioning within a culturally resonant framework.", "recommendations": "Policymakers and NGOs should integrate sustained, locally-produced social drama into comprehensive abandonment programmes, ensuring elder involvement from the outset. Further research should examine the longitudinal impact on behavioural intention and

community-wide norm change.", "key words": "female genital mutilation/cutting, social theatre, attitudinal change, elders, The Gambia, qualitative research", "contribution statement": "This study provides novel empirical evidence on the mechanisms by which indigenous performance arts can disrupt deeply held normative beliefs, offering a replicable

Keywords: *Social theatre, attitudinal change, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), qualitative research, The Gambia, elders, participatory methods*

Article Highlights

- Social drama stimulated critical reflection on FGM/C among 42 elders in The Gambia's Upper River Region.
- Over two-thirds of participants initiated family discussions questioning the practice after the intervention.
- Theatre created culturally resonant discursive openings for norm questioning.
- Findings demonstrate participatory performance as a catalyst for attitudinal shift.

Methodological Note

Longitudinal qualitative design employing interviews and focus groups before, after, and six months following social drama performances.

Examines the mechanisms through which indigenous performance arts can disrupt normative beliefs.

ABSTRACT-ONLY PUBLICATION

This is an abstract-only publication. The complete research paper with full methodology, results, discussion, and references is available upon request.

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