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Beyond Words: Advancing Solutions for Gender-Based Violence and Empowering Women and Girls**Evans Otieno***Catholic Medical Mission Board (CMMB), New York*

Statement of the problem: Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a widespread practice in the Kuria community of Kenya, where it is seen as a rite of passage for girls. Despite being outlawed by the Kenyan government, it remains deeply ingrained in the culture and is often perpetuated by harmful social norms and attitudes. FGM can have severe physical and psychological consequences for girls and women, including infections, complications during childbirth, and psychological trauma. To address this issue, CMMB, in partnership with a licensed psychologist, designed a program to provide mental health messages and support to girls at risk of FGM in the Kuria community.

Methodology & theoretical orientation: The program provided mental health messages and support to 500 girls in the Kuria community through interactive sessions facilitated by the licensed psychologist. The girls were educated about the negative psychological and emotional impacts of FGM, including anxiety, depression, and trauma. The psychologist provided individual and group counseling to help the girls cope with any psychological and emotional impacts of the practice. The program aimed to challenge the harmful social norms and attitudes that underpin the practice of FGM by promoting mental health as a human right and fostering community support for survivors.

Findings: The program is an innovative approach to reducing the prevalence of FGM in the Kuria community. By providing mental health messages and support to girls at risk of FGM, CMMB aims to contribute to the prevention of FGM and support survivors. The individual and group counseling sessions facilitated by the licensed psychologist are a crucial component of the program, providing girls with the tools to cope with the psychological and emotional impacts of the practice.

Mental health awareness can be a powerful strategy to reduce the prevalence of FGM. By educating girls and their communities about the negative impacts of the practice and promoting mental health as a human right, we can challenge harmful social norms and attitudes and foster support for survivors. Programs like the one implemented by CMMB in partnership with a licensed psychologist can provide girls with the tools to break the cycle of FGM and empower them to lead healthier, more fulfilling lives. The success of this program in the Kuria community highlights the importance of mental health awareness in addressing gender-based violence and promoting gender equality.

Conclusion: Women with alcohol dependence and PTSD with a history of IPV want help however the health and social services do not always recognize their calls for help or their symptoms of distress. Recommendations are made for treatment centers to become trauma-informed that would help this recognition.

Biography

Evans' dedication to serving his community led him to Catholic Medical Mission Board where he currently works as a Program Officer coordinating Global Fund HIV Program in Migori and Siaya Counties. He has been with the organization since April 2013, starting as a field officer in Migori County before moving up the ranks to his current role. And done MBA in Strategic Management from Kisii University and is currently pursuing a Master of Arts in Monitoring and Evaluation from Maseno University.