





ROLE OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH IN ADDRESSING THE BOY-CHILD CRISIS IN THE DIOCESE OF EMBU

Authors

Moses Murithi Nyaga⁽¹⁾; Dickson Nkonge Kagema⁽²⁾; Hellen Kagwiria Orina⁽³⁾ Main author  email:
mosesmnyaga@gmail.com; dnkonge@chuka.ac.ke; horina@chuka.ac.ke

(1.2.3) Chuka University, Kenya.

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Abstract

This study examines the role of the Anglican Church in addressing this crisis by analysing socio-cultural, economic, and spiritual challenges faced by boys and young men. The boy child crisis in Kenya, marked by declining educational achievements, increased crime, substance abuse, and socio-economic marginalisation, necessitates strategic interventions. A descriptive survey design was used to provide a comprehensive understanding. The population comprised 26,108 men, women, and youths across 50 churches in 7 archdeaconries, with a sample of 383 respondents selected using stratified proportionate random sampling, including 254 men and women, 73 youths, 21 priests, and 35 elders. Data were gathered through interviews, questionnaires, and focus group discussions. The findings showed support for pastors providing guidance and counselling in schools and clergy families' involvement in youth development. There was significant backing for boys' seminars and views of youth engagement in church activities. The study also revealed support for door-to-door missions to attract youths to ministry and church-led drug abuse campaigns and mentorship programs. The church was seen as a key supporter of male youth, creating a welcoming environment and integrating traditional and modern practices. The study concludes that the Anglican Church is well-positioned to address the boy child crisis through targeted interventions and recommends formalising pastoral roles in guidance and counselling, enhancing youth leadership, and strengthening outreach programs.

Key terms: Anglican Church, boy-child crisis, diocese of Embu, intervention measures, socio-cultural challenges.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The boy-child crisis in Kenya is characterised by declining educational achievements, increased crime, substance abuse, and socio-economic marginalisation (van Rensburg, 2013). This complex issue has significant implications for the holistic development of young boys and broader societal impacts. Addressing this crisis necessitates targeted interventions and support.

This study focuses on the unique socio-cultural, economic, and spiritual challenges faced by boys and young men in the Diocese of Embu. It examines the role of the Anglican Church in addressing these challenges and aims to propose comprehensive measures for intervention within the church's framework. The Anglican Church in the Diocese of Embu is in a unique position to positively influence the boy-child population. With its extensive network, deep community ties, and spiritual leadership, the church is well-positioned to support the holistic development of young boys. Its commitment to promoting spiritual, moral, and ethical values provides a strong foundation for guiding and nurturing boys amidst their challenges (Muchangi, 2024).

To effectively address the crisis, the church must implement holistic measures covering various aspects of the boy-child's well-being. This study anticipates uncovering significant insights into current perceptions, challenges, and needs of the boy-child demographic. These findings will help formulate evidence-based measures and interventions for the Anglican Church. By adopting a comprehensive approach, the church can leverage its influence, resources, and community networks to foster positive change. The study will propose targeted measures and recommendations based on research findings aimed at addressing the crisis's dimensions and providing a framework for guiding, supporting, and uplifting the boy-child demographic in the Diocese of Embu (Munene, 2024).

The proposed interventions include the active involvement of pastors in guidance and counselling at schools (Muchangi, 2024), fostering dialogue between parents and clergy on child development (Tighe, 2019), organising boys' seminars on youth development (Gomez-Baya, Reis, & Gaspar de Matos, 2019), involving youths in church leadership roles (Amankwa & Awuku-Gyampoh, 2022), and conducting door-to-door missions to attract youths (Barnes, 2020). Additional measures include participation in drug abuse campaigns and mentorship (Sipe, 2002), implementing strict programs for youth support (McLaughlin, 2000), and providing various forms of support such as educational resources, life skills training, and mental health discussions (Mishra, 2020). These diverse mechanisms reflect the church's commitment to holistic support and development.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The historical context of child-rearing within Christianity reveals that Church leaders in Europe initially promoted harsh discipline to combat a child's perceived evil nature (Hetherington & Park, 1986). The Renaissance period brought about new practices in parenthood, emphasising the father's role in presiding over religious ceremonies within the family while a religious specialist conducted communal activities (Mbiti, 1992). Mbiti (1992) highlights the evolving responsibilities of fathers in nurturing both the spiritual and social growth of children within Christian contexts.

The Anglican Church's emphasis on apostolic succession reflects its traditional view of continuity from early Christian events to the present (Wanyoike, 2020). Historically, the Anglican Church welcomed all baptised members, including children, but later focused on ensuring children had adequate understanding before participating in sacraments like Holy Communion. The Book of Common Prayer (1662) and the Constitution of the Anglican Church (2002) underscore the importance of instruction in Christian doctrines and sacraments involving parents in the child's religious education. This historical perspective forms a basis for evaluating the church's role in child development, highlighting the importance of both family and church involvement in spiritual growth.

Kingori (2022) describes several programs within the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) that support parenthood and child development, such as the Mothers' Union (MU) and Kenya Anglican Men Association (KAMA). The Mothers' Union focuses on promoting stable marriages, family life, and parenting through seminars and conferences for women, while KAMA centres on men's spiritual growth and their roles as responsible fathers. However, these programs have limitations in addressing the specific needs of boys. For instance, the Mothers' Union primarily targets women, and KAMA focuses on men, but neither directly tackles the boy-child's issues, such as drug abuse, school dropouts, and social neglect. The Kenya Anglican Boy-Child Organization (KAYO) aims to guide young people in Christian principles, but its impact on addressing the boy-child crisis remains minimal due to insufficient practical implementation and lack of targeted strategies.

The study highlighted by Cook (2015) and Kingori (2022) further underscores the necessity of reevaluating traditional roles and developing specific strategies for the contemporary challenges faced by boys. While current programs like Sunday school help children know and love Jesus Christ, and parenting seminars aim to equip parents, there remains a critical gap in dedicated mentorship and advocacy for boys. The lack of structured mentorship and advocacy initiatives hinders the church's ability to cater specifically to boys' developmental needs. Effective mentorship requires organised efforts that go beyond general parenting support to provide boys with role models and guidance tailored to their unique challenges.

Wanyoike (2020) and Chang'ach (2012) emphasise the church's vital role in equipping parents and guardians to mentor their children. Programs like couples' fellowship and parenting seminars are essential but are insufficient to address the boy-child crisis comprehensively. The literature indicates that these programs lack critical analysis of their effectiveness in addressing boys' needs and fail to engage boys in meaningful activities that mitigate risks like drug abuse and school dropouts. Community involvement should focus on practical support and structured mentorship that is specifically tailored to the needs of boys.

The literature review highlights that while the Anglican Church has established programs to support children and families, significant gaps remain in addressing the unique challenges faced by boys. There is a need for practical support, targeted mentorship programs, enhanced advocacy, and increased community engagement. Addressing these gaps is crucial to prevent a generation of boys from being ill-equipped to navigate adulthood and contribute positively to their communities.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This research employed a cross-sectional descriptive design to examine the boy-child crisis in the Embu Diocese and the role of the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) in addressing it. The research was conducted in the Embu Diocese, located in Kenya's Eastern Province, targeting clergy, church elders, men, women, and the boy-child demographic. The target population was 26,108 members across 50 ACK churches, including 63 clergy, 165 elders, 5,994 boys, and 20,114 men and women. A sample size of 383 respondents was determined using probability and non-probability sampling techniques. Systematic sampling selected 67 parishes across seven archdeaconries, and stratified random sampling was employed to choose 254 men and women, 73 boys, 21 clergy, and 35 elders. Data collection involved questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Questionnaires with open and closed-ended questions were distributed to gather quantitative data on the crisis and the church's interventions. Interviews with clergy provided in-depth qualitative insights, while FGDs with boys offered perspectives on their experiences. Data were analysed using SPSS version 26.0, applying descriptive statistics for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data to identify key patterns. Ethical approval was obtained from Chuka University and NACOSTI, ensuring confidentiality and informed consent throughout the process.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The role the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Embu Should Take to Address the Boy-Child Crisis

The study determined the role of the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Embu in addressing the boy-child crisis. Presented are the results of the analysis.

Table 1: Role the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Embu Should Take to Address the Boy-Child Crisis

Roles	RESPONSES				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	n=274				
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
Pastors Should Carry Out Guidance and Counseling at Schools	161(58.8)	113(41.2)	F(0)	F(0)	F(0)
Parents and Clergy Should Have Talks on Child Development	147(53.6)	127(46.4)	F(0)	F(0)	F(0)
Organising Boys Seminars on Boy-Child Development	149(54.4)	114(41.6)	F(0)	11(4.0)	F(0)
The Church Should Involve Boy-Child in Church Leadership to	80(29.2%)	179(65.3%)	F(0)	F(0)	15(5.5%)

Encourage Responsibility					
Churches Should Undertake Common Rites of Passage for Common Values and Good Morals	63(23.0)	143(52.2)	45(16.4)	23(8.4)	F(0)
Church Should Undertake Door to Door Mission to Attract Boy-child to Ministry	127(46.4)	130(47.4)	17(6.2)	F(0)	F(0)
Churches Should Participate in Drug Abuse Campaigns and Mentorship	169(61.7)	98(35.8)	F(0)	F(0)	7(2.6)
Church Should have Strict and Tight Programs Aimed at Helping the Boy-Child	8(2.9%)	143(52.2%)	13(4.7%)	73(26.6)%	37(13.5)%
Church should inculcate Positive Moral Values despite the Broken Society among the Boy-child People	106(38.7)	159(58.0)	9(3.3)	F(0)	F(0)
Church Merge Traditions and Modern Christianity among the Boy-child to Alleviate	70(25.5)	204(74.5)	F(0)	F(0)	F(0)
Church Give Unconditional Love Everyone in Need	140(51.1)	126(46.0)	8(2.9)	F(0)	F(0)

The data above explores public opinion on how the Anglican Church can address the challenges faced by boys, often referred to as the boy-child crisis. The survey asked participants their level of agreement with various measures the church could take. The research suggested several measures the Anglican Church could take to address the boy-child crisis. These include pastors providing guidance and counselling at schools, parents and clergy having talks on child development, organising boys' seminars focused on their development and the church's involvement in drug abuse campaigns and mentorship programs. Additionally, a strong majority support the church inculcating positive moral values despite societal challenges and merging traditional and modern Christianity to better connect with boys.

Pastors Should Carry Out Guidance and Counseling at Schools

The study revealed strong support for the involvement of pastors in guidance and counselling at schools, with 41.2(%) of respondents agreeing and 58.8(%) strongly agreeing. These findings indicate a broad endorsement within the Church community for pastors to extend their pastoral duties into educational settings. This support aligns with the evolving role of pastors as community leaders who address the holistic needs of individuals. The results reflect the sentiment that pastors are well-equipped to provide counselling and support beyond the church, resonating with Nickols' (2019) emphasis on the multifaceted role of pastors in diverse settings.

Parents and Clergy Should Have Talks on Child Development

Participants showed substantial agreement on the need for discussions between parents and clergy on child development, with 46.4(%) agreeing and 53.6(%) strongly agreeing. The high level of agreement suggests recognition of the importance of integrating faith-based perspectives into child development discussions. This aligns with Tighe's (2019) findings on the significant role of clergy parents in shaping their children's faith, emphasising the proactive engagement in nurturing children's development within faith communities.

Organising Boys' Seminars on Boy-Child Development

There was strong support for organising boys' seminars focused on boy-child development, with 41.6(%) agreeing and 54.4(%) strongly agreeing, while only 4.0(%) disagreed. The high agreement rates highlight a consensus on the importance of targeted seminars for boys, addressing their specific developmental needs. This support aligns with Gomez-Baya et al.'s (2019) findings, emphasising the necessity of gender-specific interventions to foster positive development and engagement among boys.

The Church Should Involve Boy-Child in Church Leadership to Encourage Responsibility

A significant majority of respondents supported involving boys in Church leadership, with 65.3(%) agreeing and 29.2(%) strongly agreeing. The positive perception towards engaging boys in Church leadership roles underscores the belief in the potential benefits of such involvement for fostering responsibility. This aligns with Amankwa and Awuku-Gyampoh's (2022) insights on the critical role of involving boys in Church activities to nurture leadership qualities and instil values of duty and commitment.

Churches Should Undertake Common Rites of Passage for Common Values and Good Morals

Findings showed that 52.2(%) agreed and 23.0(%) strongly agreed on the church undertaking common rites of passage, while 8.4(%) disagreed and 16.4(%) were undecided. The mixed responses reflect varied attitudes towards Church involvement in traditional rites of passage. While many see it as beneficial for instilling common values, others remain uncertain or disagree, emphasising the importance of a balanced approach that honours cultural traditions while promoting moral development. Mugambi (2023) discusses similar engagements, emphasising the church's role in bridging cultural and religious practices.

Church Should Undertake Door-to-Door Missions to Attract Boys to Ministry

There was strong support for door-to-door missions to engage boys in ministry, with 47.4(%) agreeing and 46.4(%) strongly agreeing. The positive response indicates the perceived effectiveness of door-to-door

missions in attracting boys to ministry activities. Barnes (2020) supports this proactive approach, highlighting its potential to foster a sense of belonging and purpose among young boys, thereby addressing the challenges of disengagement from ministry.

Churches Should Participate in Drug Abuse Campaigns and Mentorship

A majority of respondents endorsed Church participation in drug abuse campaigns and mentorship, with 35.8(%) agreeing and 61.7(%) strongly agreeing. The strong endorsement suggests a recognition of the church's role in addressing substance abuse and providing mentorship. Sipe (2002) emphasises the importance of community-based interventions, and these findings highlight the church's potential impact on adolescent health and well-being through collaborative efforts.

Church Should Have Strict and Tight Programs Aimed at Helping the Boy-Child

Opinions were mixed regarding strict and tight Church programs for boys, with 52.2(%) agreeing and 2.9(%) strongly agreeing, while 26.6(%) disagreed and 13.5(%) strongly disagreed. The diverse responses indicate differing views on the effectiveness of strict programs. While some see them as beneficial for discipline, others view them as restrictive. McLaughlin's (2000) exploration of supportive environments for boys suggests that effective programs should balance structure with support and empowerment.

Church Should Inculcate Positive Moral Values despite the Broken Society among Boys

A significant majority of respondents agreed 58.0(%) or strongly agreed 38.7(%) that the church should inculcate positive moral values among boys. These findings highlight the church's perceived role in promoting moral values, even in challenging societal contexts. Wachege and Rügendo (2017) emphasise the importance of religious teachings in fostering moral development, supporting the idea that the church serves as a moral anchor for young boys.

Church Should Merge Traditions and Modern Christianity among Boys to Alleviate Crisis

There was widespread support for merging traditions with modern Christianity, with 74.5(%) agreeing and 25.5(%) strongly agreeing. The high level of agreement suggests that integrating traditional values with contemporary Christian practices is seen as beneficial for addressing modern challenges. This aligns with Gibbs and Bolger's (2005) perspective on creating relevant and meaningful Christian communities that resonate with younger generations.

Church Should Give Unconditional Love to Everyone in Need

An overwhelming majority agreed 46.0(%) or strongly agreed 51.1(%) that the church should provide unconditional love to everyone in need. The strong endorsement reflects the belief in the church's role in offering compassion and support. Barker (2006) emphasises the centrality of unconditional love in Christianity, and these findings highlight the church's capacity to provide emotional and spiritual support, aligning with broader theological and practical implications.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The study's findings demonstrate strong support for various roles that the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Embu could undertake to address the boy-child crisis. The results reveal a consensus

among participants on the effectiveness of pastors providing guidance and counselling in schools, organising seminars focused on boy-child development, and involving boys in church leadership to foster responsibility. Additionally, there is significant support for the church's involvement in drug abuse campaigns, merging traditional and modern Christian practices, and inculcating positive moral values. However, opinions are more divided regarding strict programs aimed at boys, suggesting the need for a balanced approach that incorporates both structure and support.

Recommendations: The Anglican Church in the Diocese of Embu should actively involve pastors in providing guidance and counselling in schools. By doing so, the church can address the emotional, spiritual, and developmental needs of boys, contributing to their holistic growth and well-being. This initiative would ensure that boys receive the necessary support and mentorship within educational settings, promoting a more positive and balanced development. Additionally, the church should integrate traditional cultural values with modern Christian practices to create more relevant and engaging programs for boys. Merging these elements can help bridge generational gaps and address contemporary challenges, ensuring that the church remains meaningful and impactful for younger generations. This balanced approach would make the church's teachings and activities more relatable and effective in addressing the unique needs of boys today.

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