

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Timing and role of Initiation Rites in Preparing Young People for Adolescence and Responsible Sexual and Reproductive Behaviour in Malawi

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## Abstract

This paper examines timing of puberty and mechanisms through which society prepares adolescents to understand and deal with it in Malawi. Data from a national representative survey of adolescents and in-depth interviews also conducted with adolescents are used. SPSS was used to analyse survey data while N6 was used to analyse qualitative data. Results show that the onset of menarche in girls and various pubertal body changes in boys can be a cause of joy, excitement, or distress depending on how adolescents understand what this means to them at this critical stage when they start defining and comprehending their sexuality. Much more emphasis is put on educating girls about reproductive implications of menarche than on what is expected of boys as sexual beings, which may contribute to boys' greater indulgence in risky sexual behaviors than girls. The significance of initiation ceremonies in some communities provides an important platform through which programs can reach many adolescents and intervene, particularly in addressing the widely held notion among initiates that attending these ceremonies symbolizes that one is not a child anymore and can have sex.

**Keywords:** adolescents, initiation ceremonies, HIV/AIDS, Malawi

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