

Traditional male circumcision and adolescent reproductive health in Western Kenya



Photos by Vidalyne Omollo

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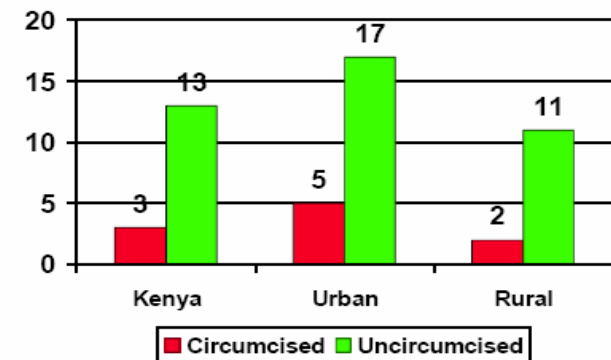


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Why be interested in male circumcision in Africa?

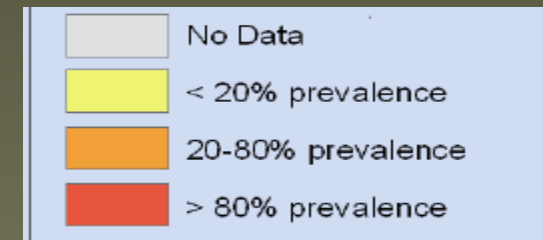
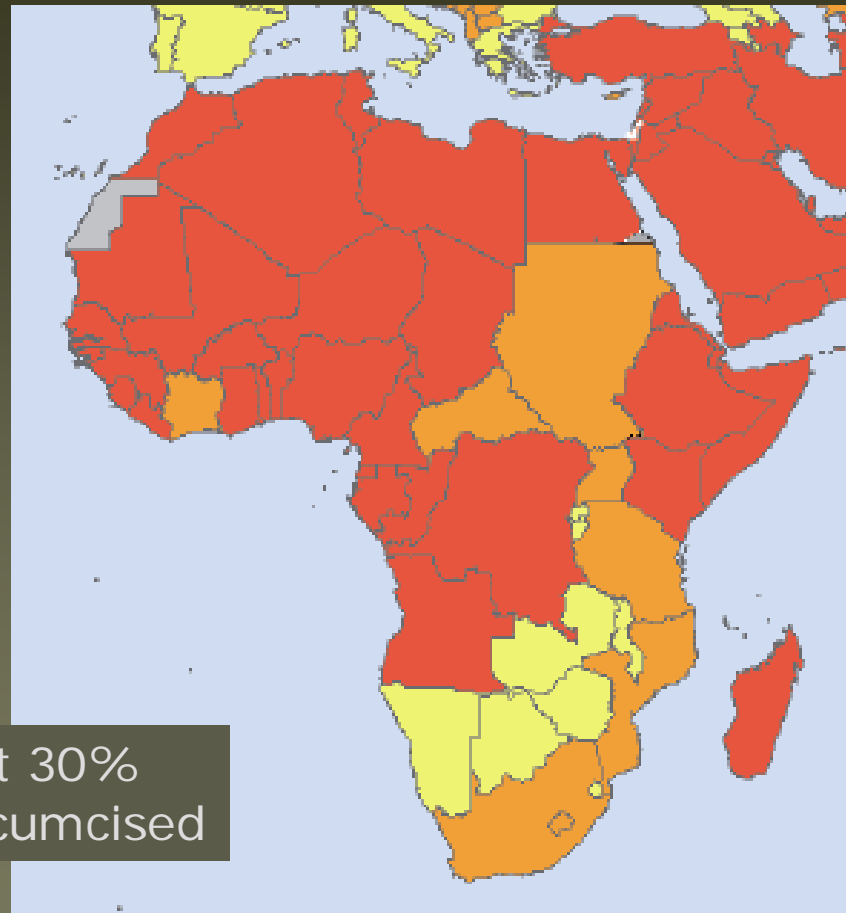
- ◆ HIV still very serious problem in Africa
 - 24.7 M Africans infected
 - In 2006, 1.1 M new infections
- ◆ Ecological studies since the 1980s have suggested that MC is protective of HIV
- ◆ Three RCTs in the past 3 years in Africa all indicate that MC is 55-65% protective of HIV
- ◆ Yet many African men have never been circumcised

Figure 6: Male circumcision and HIV prevalence in Kenya



Source: Kenya Government and ORC/MACRO 2004

Prevalence of male circumcision in Africa



Globally, about 30% of men are circumcised

Source: UNAIDS 2007

In Kenya, >80% of men are circumcised. But traditional MC can be risky...

- ◆ Injuries, pain, excessive bleeding*
 - 35% when done by ritual circumcisers
 - 17% when done by “private clinics”
- ◆ Death from hemorrhage or infection (rare)
- ◆ Encouragement of sexual activity
- ◆ Reinforcement of gender stereotypes

*Source: Bailey and Egesah, Report on Bungoma District, Kenya, 2006

Characteristics of Luhya traditional MC

- ◆ Nearly universal, generally done when boy is 12-16 years
- ◆ Occurs in August of even years (during school break)
- ◆ Costs to family range widely (\$10-\$200+)
- ◆ Has spiritual and masculinity connotations
- ◆ Boys receive money, gifts



Purposes of MC Education (MCE) intervention in Webuye, Kenya

- ◆ To increase circumcised boys' knowledge and attitudes about safe sexuality and gender equality
 - Counteract traditional messages received before and after circumcision
 - Use "Youth for Youth" peer educators
- ◆ To reduce among newly-circumcised boys:
 - Sexual activities, including forced sex
 - STD transmission
 - Gender stereotyping



Male Circumcision Education (MCE): Key steps

◆ July 2006

- Met with community leaders and school heads
- Selected 16 peer educators (PALS) to counsel the initiates
- Conducted strategic planning workshop with 28 stakeholders and PALS to **discuss messages**
- Designed 60-min. education package
 - **8-question exam** & discussion points
 - **7-item pocket cards for initiates** & discussion points
- Conducted PALS training workshop

◆ August 2006

- Traditional male circumcision ceremonies in Webuye
- PALS conduct **MCE activity** with boys
- Review meetings with PALS; collection of exam data



Peer educators (PALS) with head of Youth for Youth, Albert Obbuyi (R back)

Messages communicated to youth

1a- Before circumcision: the Sticks

- ◆ You are **not a real man** until you are circumcised.
- ◆ You will become a **social misfit** if you are not circumcised.
- ◆ You **won't get a wife** if you are not circumcised or too fearful.
- ◆ You **owe debt to society** until you are circumcised.
- ◆ You **should be brave** and overcome the pain, or risk death. Crying out your parents' names could risk their deaths.
- ◆ Before you are circumcised, you **resemble your mother** and wear her clothes.
- ◆ You should not get circumcised in a hospital, since that will mean you are **a coward**.



Messages communicated to youth

1b- Before circumcision: **the Carrots**



- ◆ Your family will **feel proud** of you after you are circumcised.
- ◆ Being circumcised traditionally gives a [spiritual] **payback** to the father.
- ◆ You will be **given gifts**, like money, cows, blankets, etc.*

* *Note: Luhya boys circumcised traditionally receive **\$10-40**, in an area where many live on \$1 per day*

En route....

the knife awaits!



Messages communicated to youth

2a- During or after circumcision: Value as a man



- ◆ You are now **valued**
- ◆ You are **free** to make decisions
- ◆ You now have a say in the community
- ◆ You are now a **new man**
- ◆ You have paid your debt
- ◆ You can now start **owning things**
- ◆ You are now **blessed**

Messages communicated to youth

2b- During or after circumcision: New gender roles



- ◆ You should **no longer sit** with your mother, especially in the kitchen
- ◆ You should **not perform household** tasks anymore
- ◆ You should **not carry goods** on your head
- ◆ You should **not share a house** with your mother.
- ◆ **No female should point** a finger at you or slap you on the cheek or even disturb you. You are beyond even your mother's discipline.
- ◆ You should **not sit down until you get** something of your choice (a girl, cow or a car).
- ◆ A **girl will agree** with whatever you say.

Messages communicated to youth

2c- After circumcision: Ready for sex

- ◆ The “open door [vagina] is yours”
- ◆ You now have to prove that you are a normal man
- ◆ Your penis is sharp; use it!
- ◆ You should look for girls with pointed breasts (“12:00 sharp”)
- ◆ Now you have a “pen” (spear, penis) for the “book” (shield, vagina)
- ◆ You should now “live how the community lives” and may have as much sex as other men
- ◆ You may have sex with a married woman, if not at her home



Messages communicated to youth

2d- After circumcision: What youths say to each other

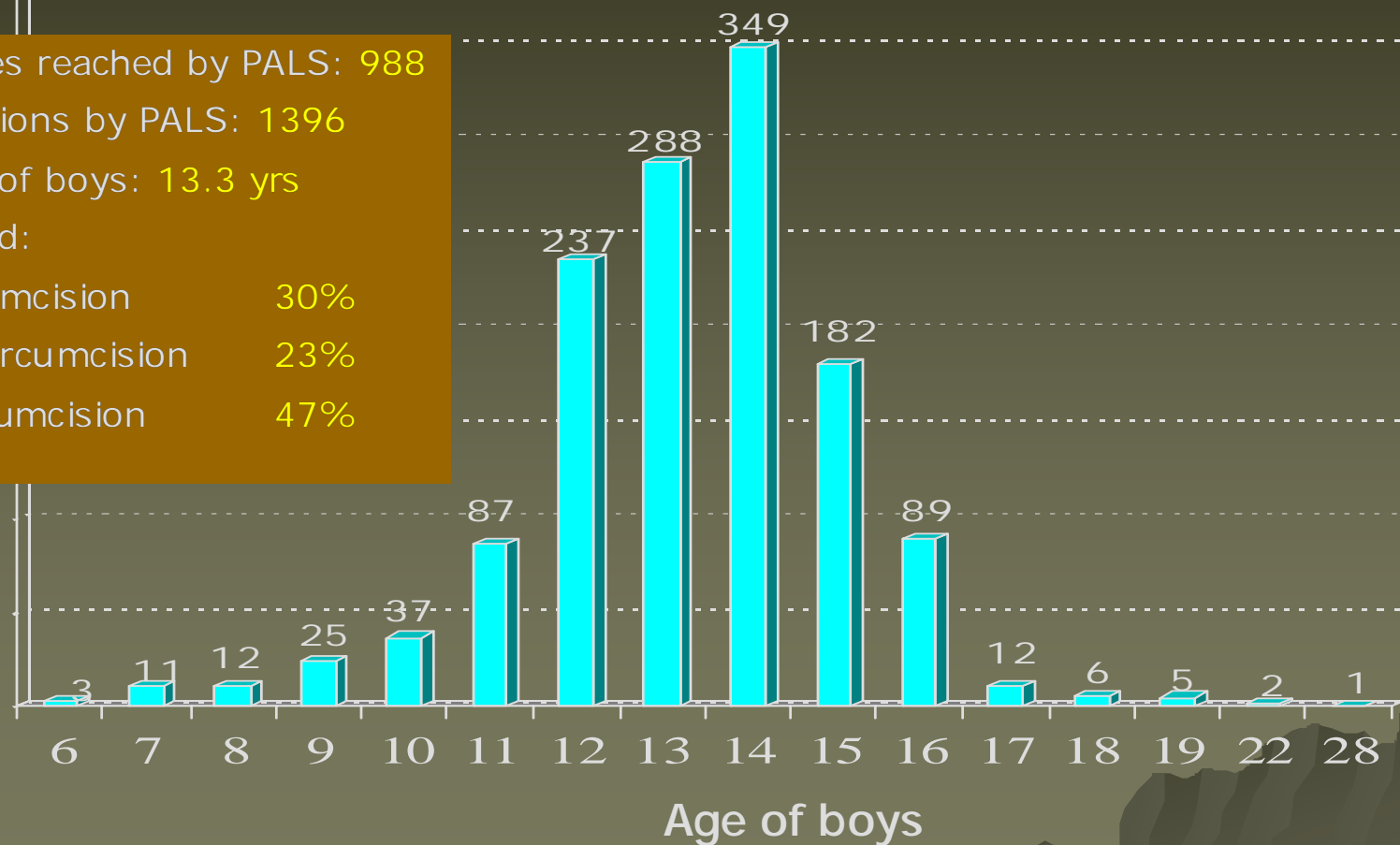
- ◆ “I scored all the marks” (I was brave and didn’t cry)
- ◆ We are now an age-set and can be hunting for girls together
- ◆ Now we can resist mockery from girls who say “you are still a child” and refuse sex with us
- ◆ Sex will now be sweet, so let’s get a girlfriend
- ◆ We can run away from household tasks
- ◆ We can become leaders in the community when we are older



MCE activity: No. of interactions with boys

(Aug 2006, Webuye Division, Bungoma District, Kenya)

- No. of initiates reached by PALS: 988
- Total interactions by PALS: 1396
- Average age of boys: 13.3 yrs
- When reached:
 - Pre-circumcision 30%
 - During circumcision 23%
 - Post circumcision 47%



MCE Component 1: Priority questions for boys (T/F), followed by discussion



PAL at primary school with MC candidates (pre-circumcision)

1. You cannot tell if someone is infected with the AIDS virus by looking at him or her. (T)
2. Every time a person has sex even the first time, they can create a pregnancy or can be infected by a disease. (T)
3. **Using condoms properly can prevent AIDS and STIs.** (T)
4. If a boy gets an erection, he must have sex or he will feel a lot of pain. (F)
5. If you spend money on a girl, you have a right to play sex with her. (F)
6. **It is okay to force a girl into sex if she wears sexy clothing like tight trousers.** (F)
7. Condoms have small holes that permit the AIDS virus to pass. (F)
8. After circumcision, a boy should **NOT** perform household duties anymore. (F)

MCE Component 2: “Pocket Messages” for youths (wallet-sized card) and discussion

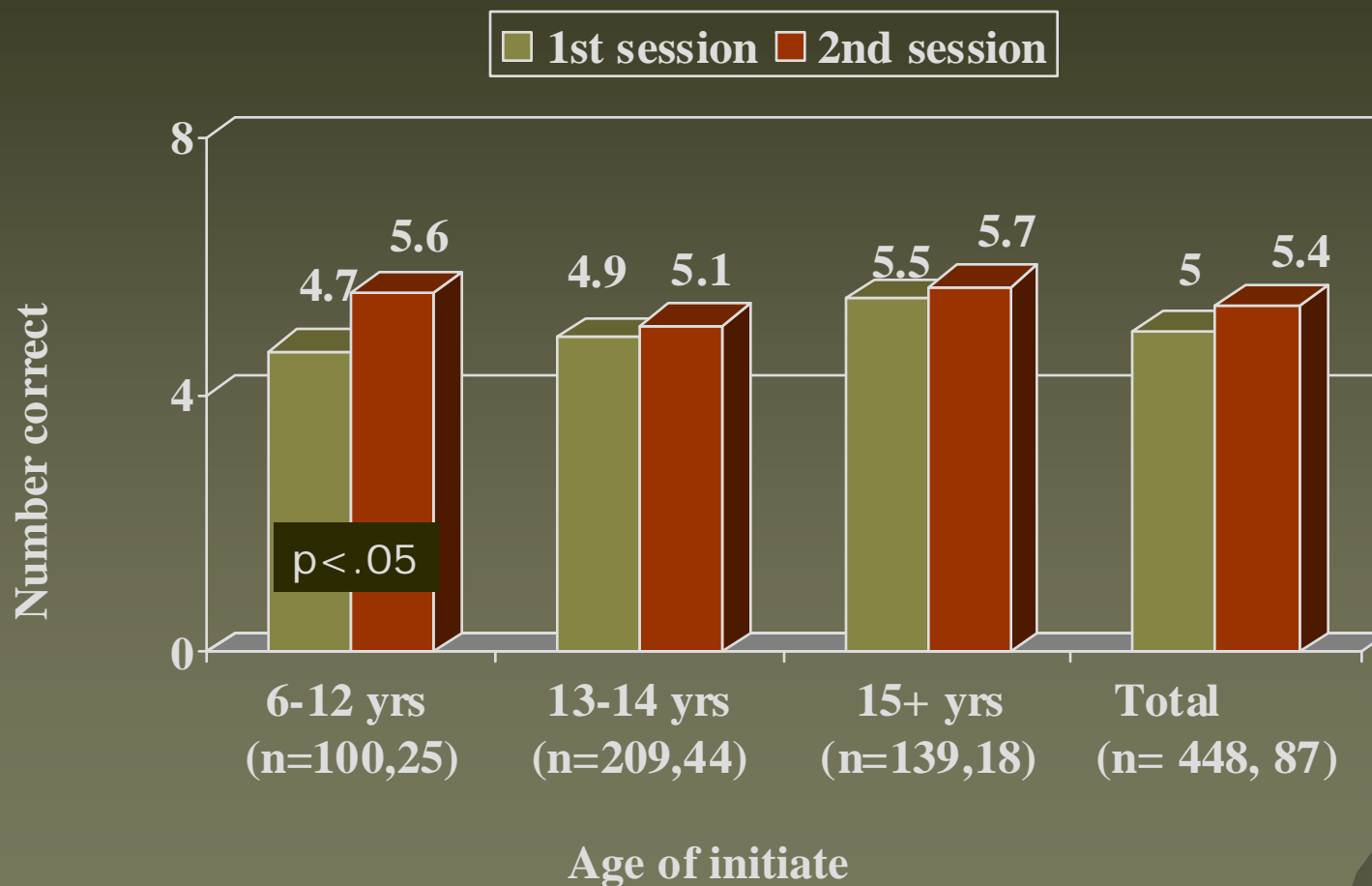
1. Boys and girls can be **good friends** without having a sexual relationship.
2. **When a girl says no, she means no.** You cannot assume that she really means yes.
3. Just because your **body is maturing**, it does not mean your mind and heart are ready for sex.
4. For many youths, deciding, “**I am not ready for sex**” is a **smart** choice because there are many negative consequences.
5. Every time a person has sex -- **even the first time** -- they risk creating a pregnancy or becoming infected with a sexually-transmitted infection (STI) or Human Immuno-deficiency Virus (HIV).
6. **Abstinence and condoms** both protect you from STIs. Abstinence is best, but if you are having sex, using a condom protects you from STIs.
7. **Common symptoms of STIs** are: painful urination, itching in the genital area, pain during sex, sores or unusual genital bumps, unusual discharge from the penis.

Y4Y - Peer Provision Youth Health Services can be obtained at Bokoli Health Centre on Wednesday 2.00-4.00 pm and Saturday 9.00-12.00 am and 2.00-4.00 pm

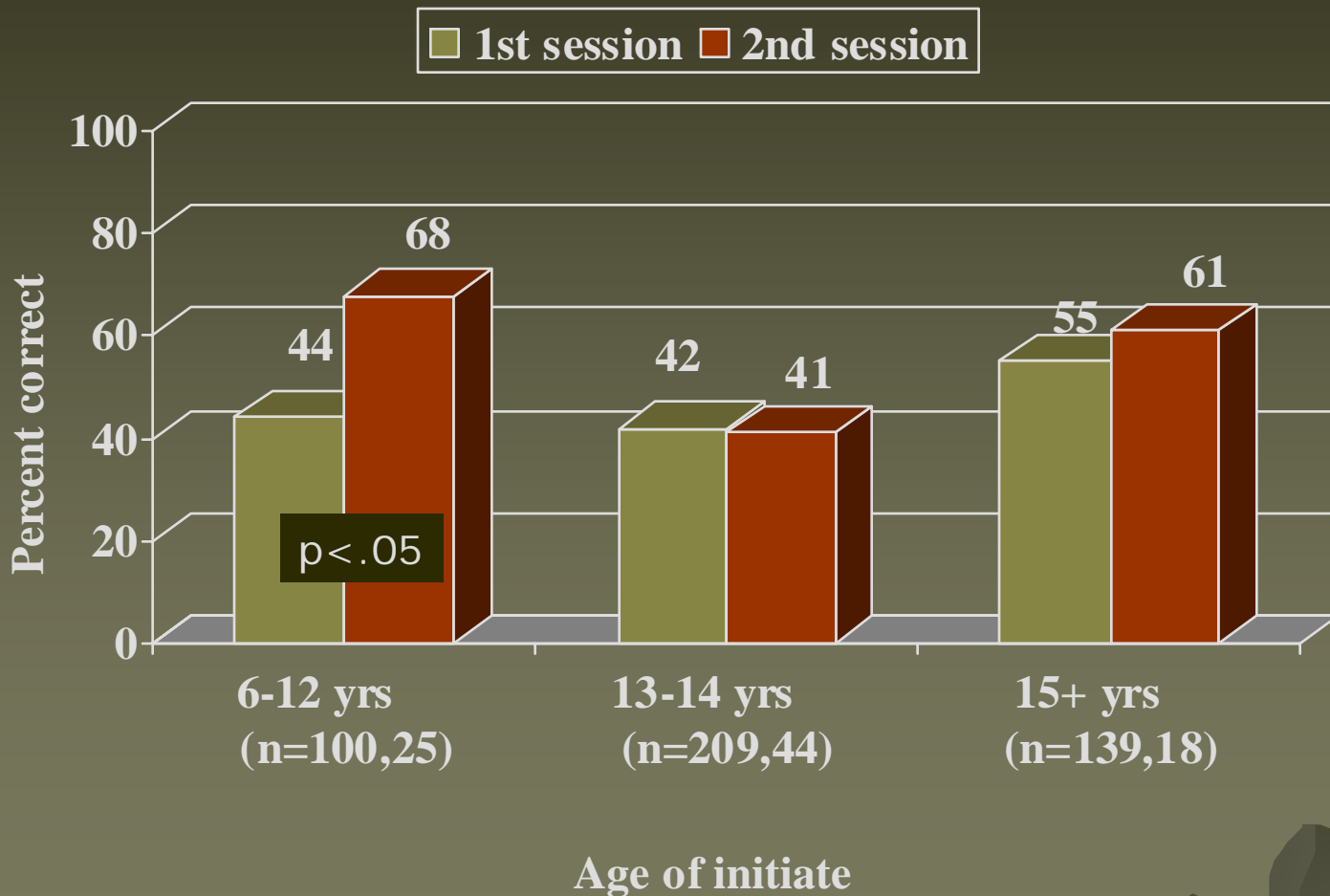


PAL at primary school with MC candidates (pre-circumcision)

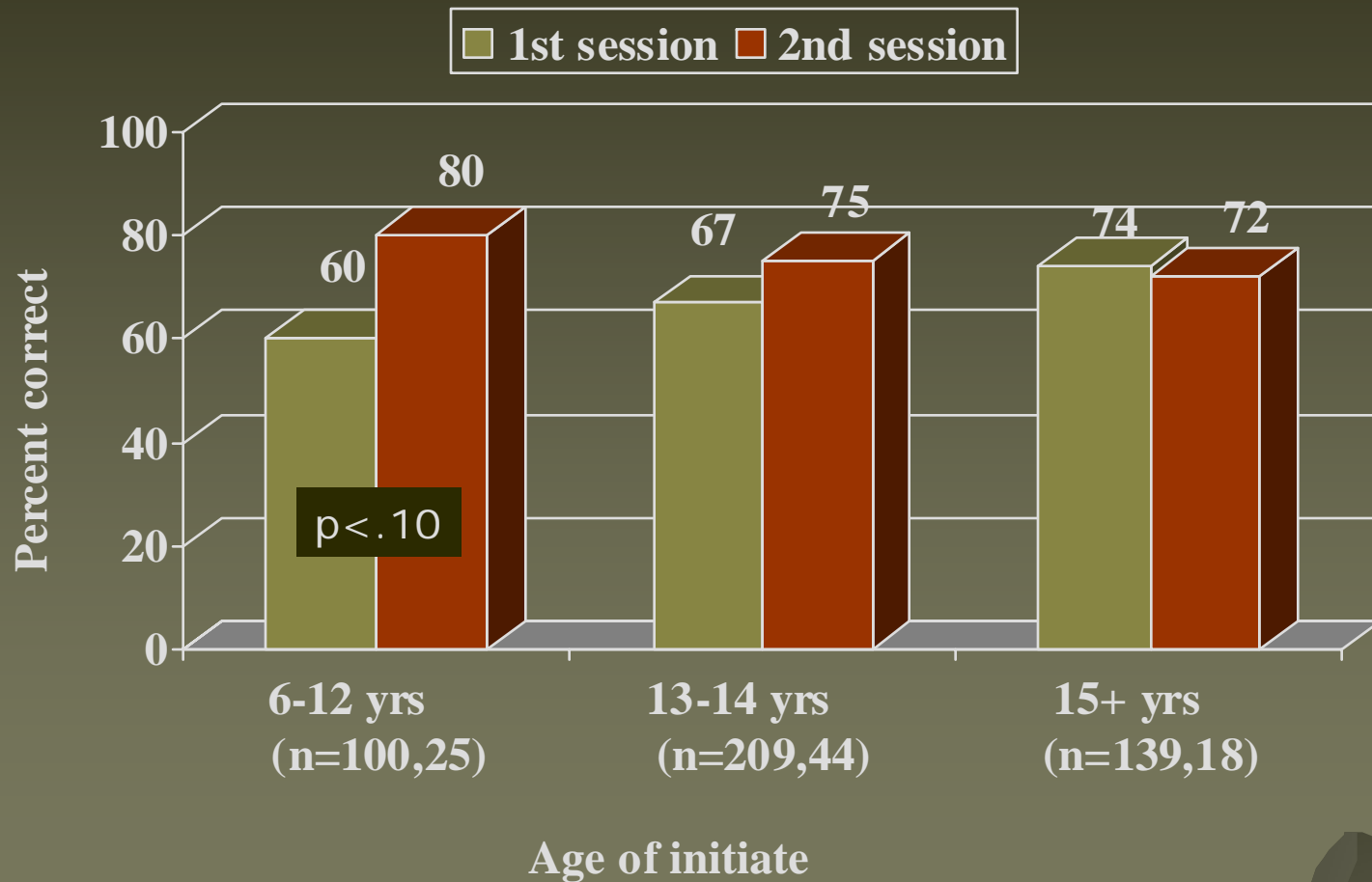
MCE results: Total score on 8 questions



MCE Ex. 1: Using condoms properly prevents AIDS and STIs



MCE Ex. 2: Know that it's not OK to force a girl to have sex if she dresses sexily



Challenges of MCE

- ◆ Circumcision sometimes began at 1:00 AM, but PALS couldn't arrive until 6:00 AM when most initiates had left
- ◆ Difficult for PALS to reach all places where circumcisions took place
- ◆ PALS sometimes recorded exam results poorly or not at all; had to discard about half
- ◆ With revisits: PALS not trained in how to reinforce safe sex messages



Post-circumcision boys

Conclusions



- ◆ During Luhya traditional MC, messages and gifts to boys encourage sexual activity and rigid gender roles
- ◆ MCE seems most promising with younger boys (aged 6-12 yrs)
- ◆ Impact of MCE on initiates' subsequent behaviors is unknown
- ◆ Despite challenges, MCE reached nearly 1000 boys for nominal cost (<\$1/each)