

Of girls and men:  
Maasai girlhood in Kenya and  
Tanzania

Dr Ernestina Coast  
London School of Economics

# Maasai

"Everyone "knows" the Maasai"

(Spear, 1993:1)

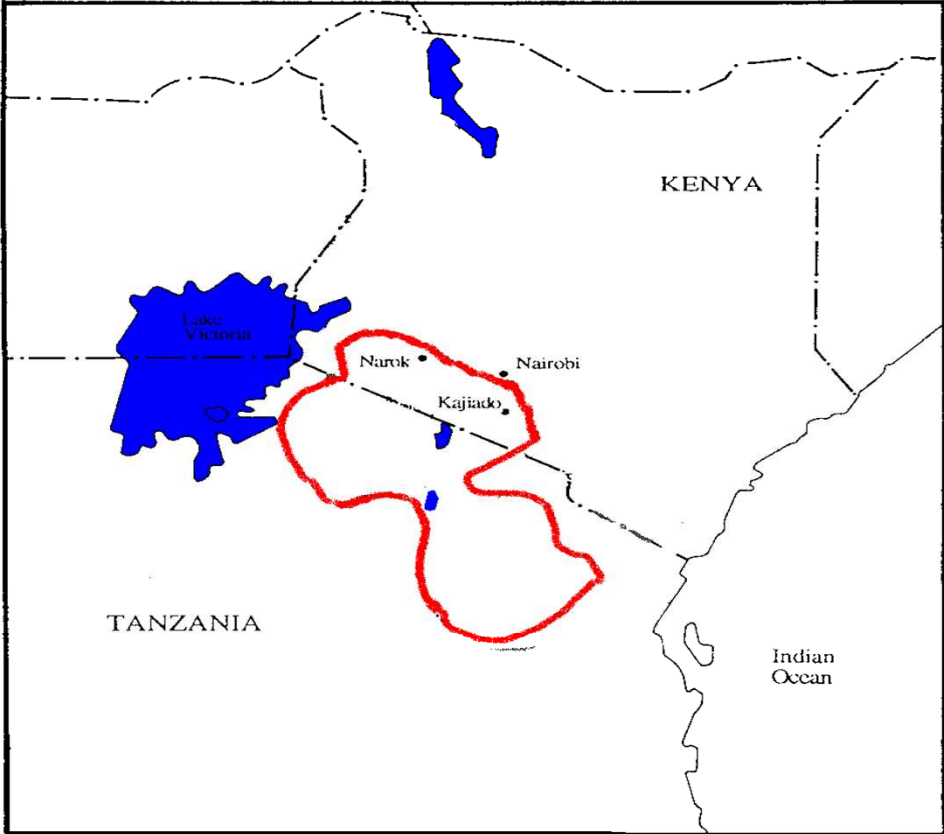
Heterogeneity

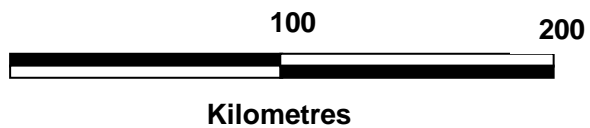
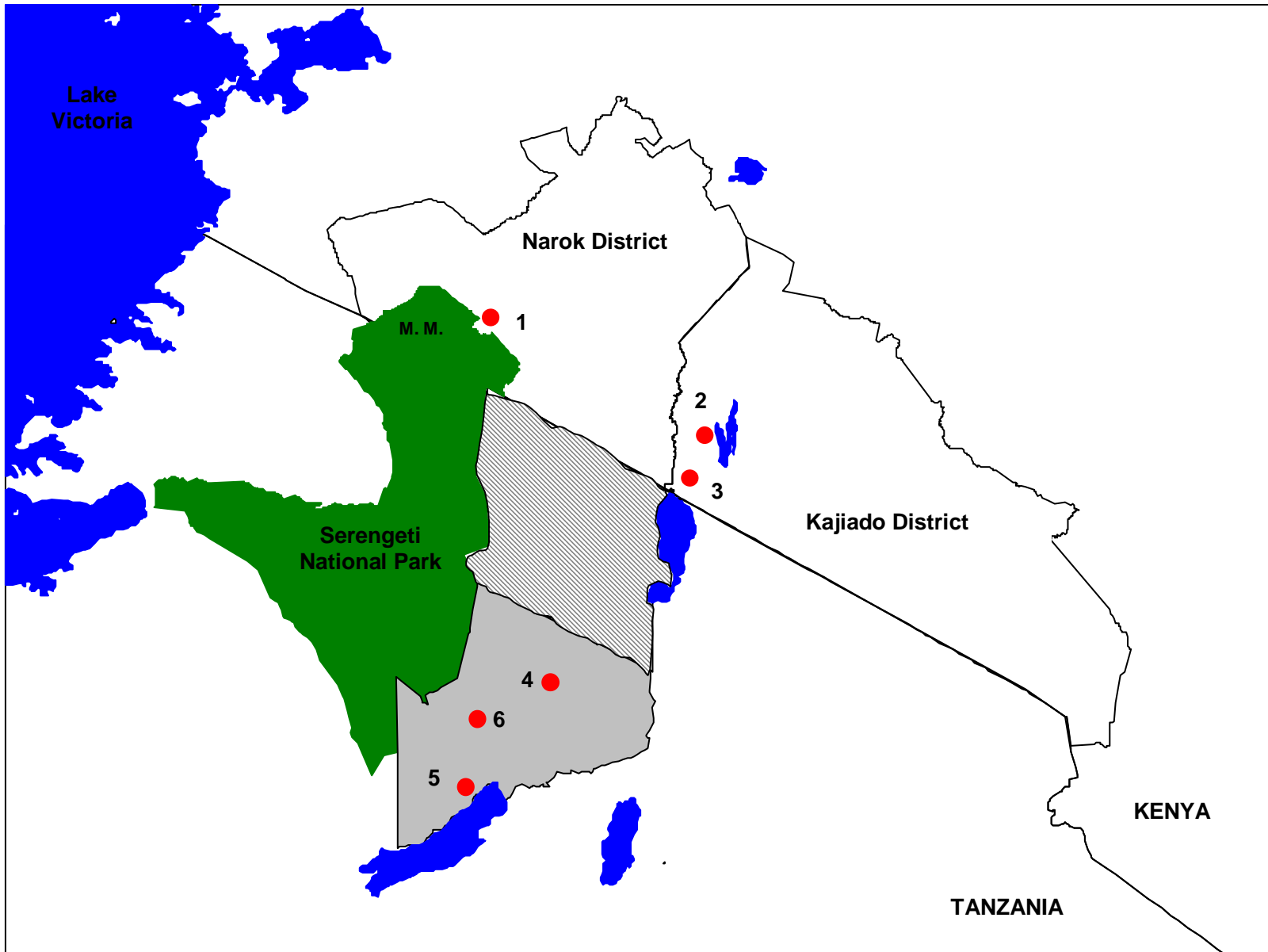
Nation states











Key			
	Ngorongoro Conservation Area		Loliondo G.C.A.
M.M.	Maasai Mara Game Reserve		
1	Koyaki Group Ranch	4	Irkeepus
2	Olkirmatian Group Ranch	5	Endulen-Esere
3	Shompole Group Ranch	6	Meshilli



## Rapidly changing livelihoods

- Tourism
- Transhumance
- Diversification
- Formal education
- Land tenure



# Lifecycle approach

Patriarchal

“women are regarded as social minors”

(Talle, 1987:51)

Gerontocratic

No female age set system

# Entito

- Pre-circumcised girl
  - Ages 8-16
- Herding and household tasks
- Sex partners of the warriors (*murrani*)

# Sexual debut

- Entitos and warriors
  - Gerontocracy
  - Milk ceremony
  - Irmerepili
  - Isinoni
- Acquisition of “social” fertility
  - Avoidance of conception
- Housing

# Circumcised girls

- Clitoridectomy
  - At puberty
  - Beliefs
- Universal
- Sanctions childbearing

# Married women

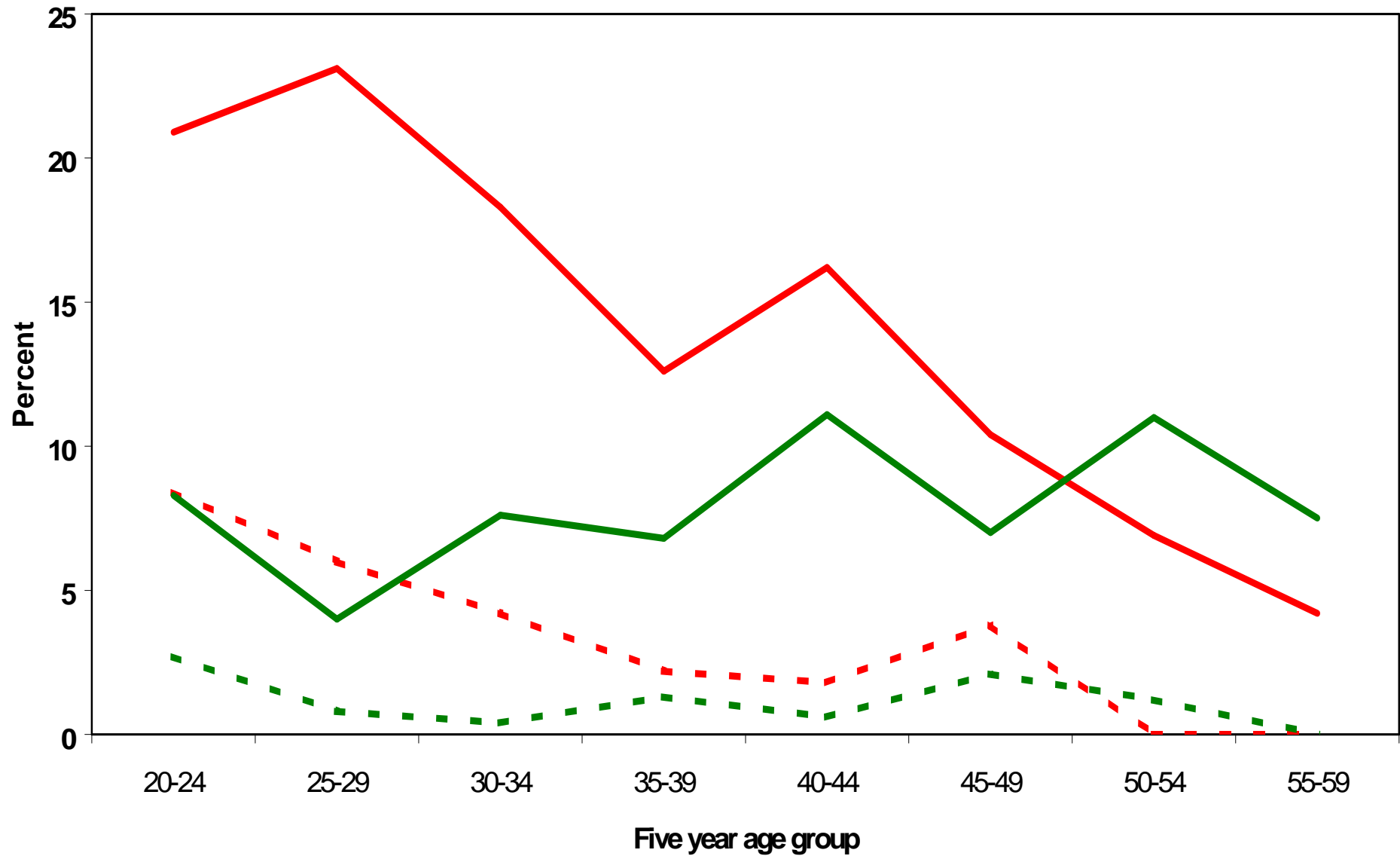
- Marriage after circumcision
- Prestige through children
- Domestic autonomy

# Education

“You give away your children”

- Supply
  - Poor education infrastructure
  - Reluctant teachers
- Demand
  - Lack of demonstrable benefits
  - Herding requirements
  - High and rising school costs

Percentage of individuals by sex and country with completed primary school education



Kenya: Males (n=954)

Kenya: Females (n=1152)

TZ: Males (n=1160)

TZ: Females (n=1628)

# Enrolment levels

	Kenya	Tanzania
Girls	22.5	10.7
Boys	40.1	6.2



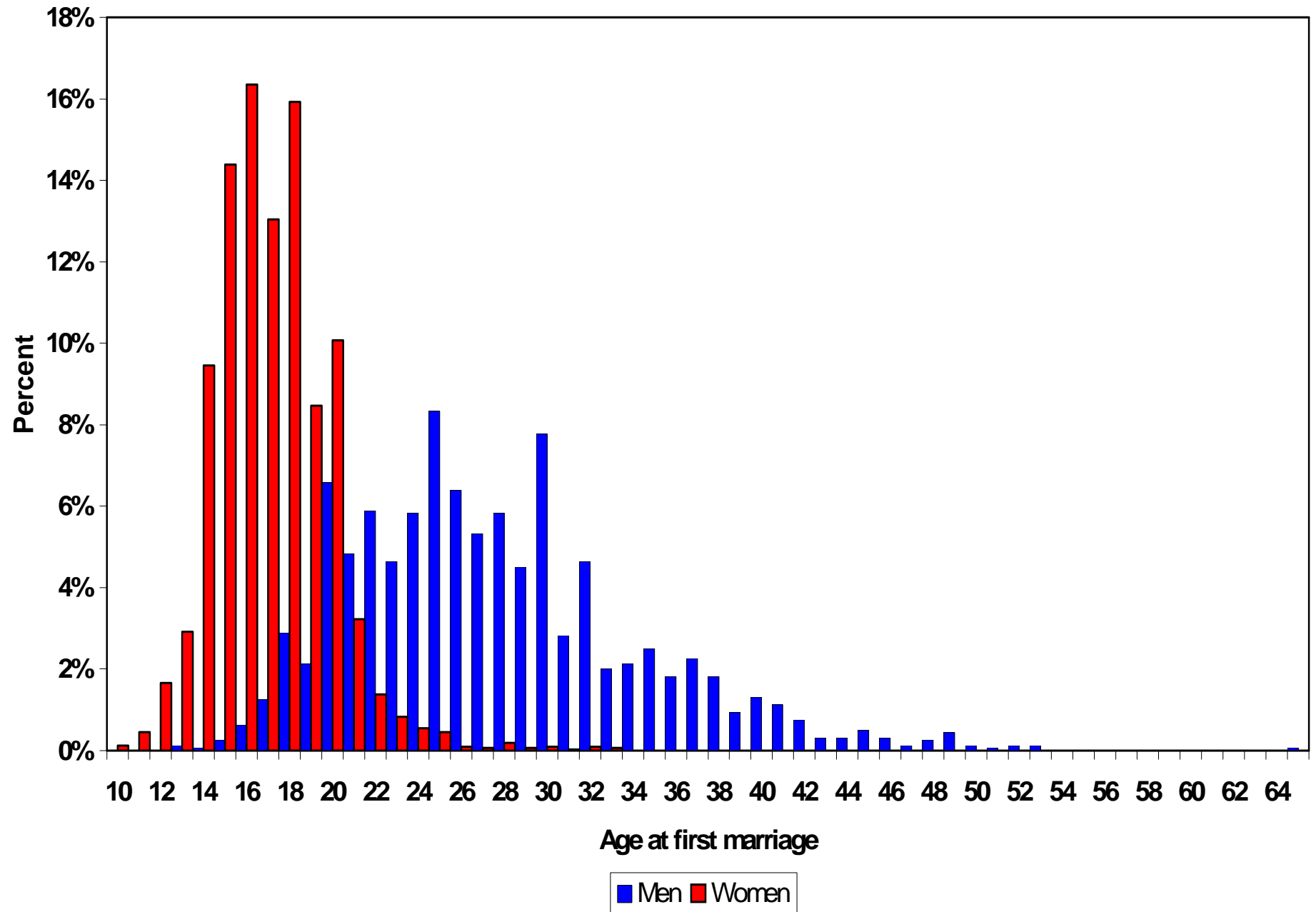
# Education

- And pregnancy
  - Case study
- Prized children
- School “ownership”

# Marriage

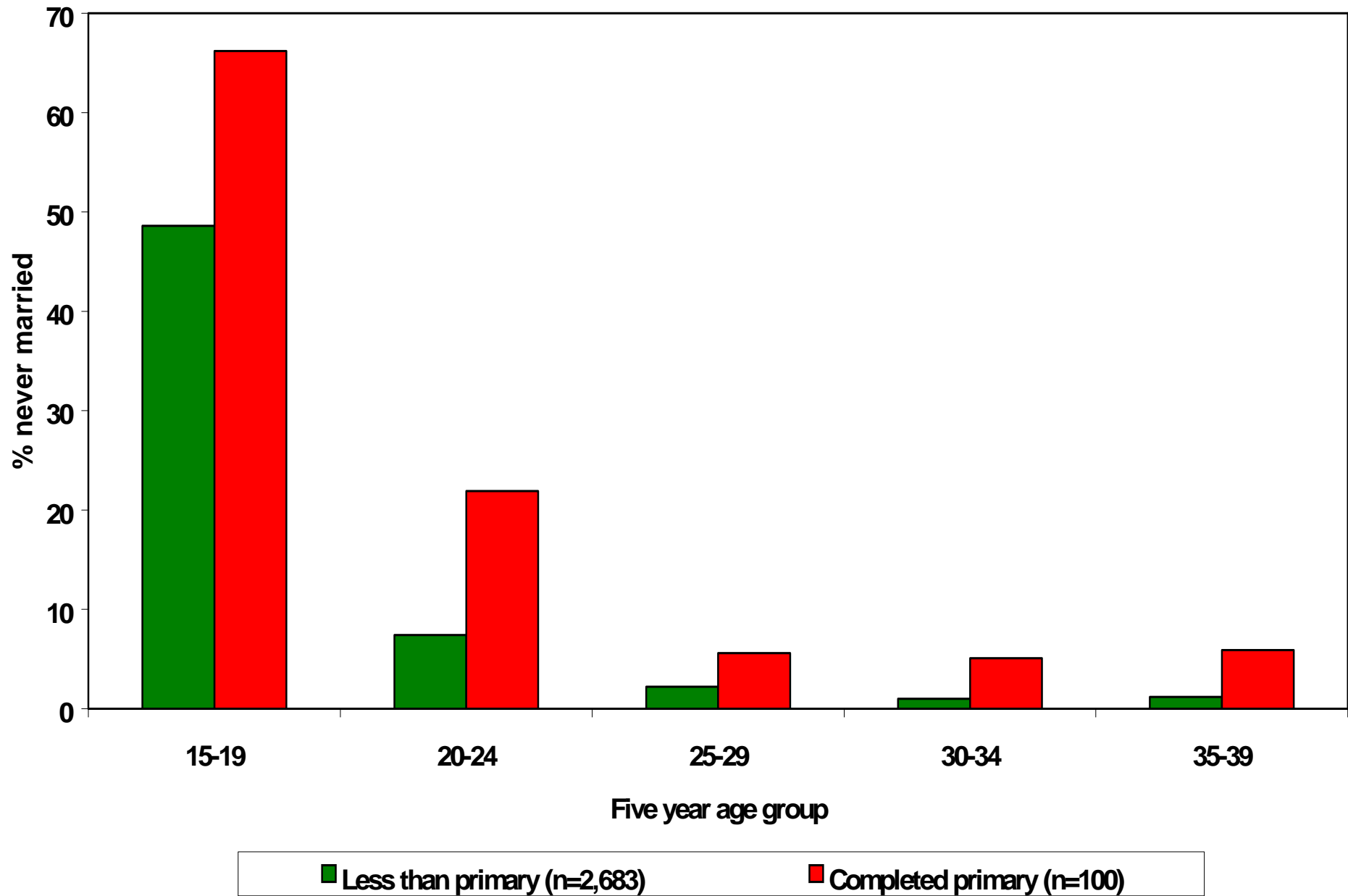
- Pre-arranged during childhood
  - Allegiances, power and influence
  - Age sets “quasi incest”
  - Forced sex and marriage
  - Extra wife acquisition

Distribution of reported age at first marriage, by sex.



	Median	Min	Max
Women			
Kenya	16.1	10	34
Tanzania	17.7	11	32
Men			
Kenya	24.3	13	50
Tanzania	28.2	13	65

Percentage of women never married, by five year age group and education



	Kenya	Tanzania	All
% of men in polygynous marriages	46%	46%	46%
Average number of wives per polygynist	2.7	2.9	2.8

# Spousal age difference

- Increases with low ranking wives
- Highest reported difference of 63 years
- Age-set alliance ideals
- Is it increasing? Why?
- Implications for
  - Sex
  - Widowhood

# Fertility

- High
- Status
  - Consolidation of patriline
- Little contraception
- Resource
  - Access to livestock milk
  - Care in widowhood



# STDs

- Evidence
- No social stigma
- Gender and STDs
  - Heightened risks at younger ages
- STDs and HIV/AIDS

# Gender and HIV

- Women more at risk from heterosexual transmission
  - infected male semen contains higher concentrations of the virus
  - the surface area of the female genitalia is larger
  - semen is in contact with female genitals for longer
- Higher risks for girls + young women
  - Immature cervix with thinner mucous membrane
  - Higher risks of STD and other infections
  - Rapid intercourse increases risk of injury of mucous membranes

# HIV/AIDS

It is difficult to separate the social and physiological causes, especially in a context where young girls and women have little control over the context in why they have sex.

The future?

# ABC?

- Abstinence
- Be faithful
- Condoms

# Community responses?

- Separate *entitos* and *murrani*?
- Housing changes?
- Condom use?