

# Expectations of and Challenges in Marriage among People with Disabilities in the Yendi Municipality of Ghana

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## Abstract

The importance of marriage cannot be underestimated as it provides social, economic and emotional benefits to partners. This study was conducted to ascertain the challenges disabled people encounter in their marriage within the Yendi Municipality of Ghana. An exploratory design with qualitative approach was conducted in which 16 participants were selected through snowballing technique. Face-to-face in-depth interview was used to collect the data through audio recordings. Data-led thematic analysis was used to categorize the transcribed data into themes which have been presented as main findings. Their expectations have not been met as they are confronted with several challenges in their marriages from society, economic and domestic fields. People with disabilities within the Yendi Municipality who are married and facing challenges should form self-help groups to manage and deal with their challenges collectively.

**Keywords:** Expectations and challenges in marriage, people with disabilities, Yendi Municipality, Ghana

## 1. Introduction

The importance of marriage cannot be underestimated as it provides social, economic and emotional benefits to partners (Abed et al, 2015). Marriage is expected to promote physical well-being due to a greater availability of emotional, social support and control which are key processes to meaning and purpose in life (Choi and Marks, 2008). Married couples enjoy several benefits with notable ones such as having fewer acute illness; fewer fatal injuries; reduce depression; lower rate of psychological distress, and morbidity risk; lower rate of suicide; better mental and physical health; better chance of living longer; better sex life; and better health and happier life (Liu and Reczek, 2012, Bhoomika, 2014, Warner and Adams 2015). Other studies have found that, division of labour, sharing of house chores and effective communication among couples are strongly associated with quality and successful marital satisfaction (Wendy et al, 2015, Yue and Sayer, 2016). Disability limits the functional status of a spouse and therefore, there is the need for healthy partner as well as the entire family to increase support substantially (Rolland, 2005). This support is always lacking because it may demand additional responsibilities on the healthy partner leading to work overload. In traditional families where the role of a husband and wife is central in every marriage, the husband serves as a bread winner of the family and the wife is to nurture and care for the family needs. Managing the day to day activities especially for those who acquire their disability after marriage might be confusing especially on how to manage their disabilities and marital issues. This can be very challenging and stressful for couples to fully accept and understand each other and can lead to lack of control over one's life and choices.

The cultural beliefs and myths among Africans have limited the marriage opportunities for people with disabilities. People with disabilities are perceived as less eligible marriage partners. In view of this, most of them who are into marriage relationships are treated as housekeepers or object of amusement as a result of unwanted or force marriages (Salam and Susa, 2014). This often puts people with disabilities in constant pains, anxiety, depression and suffering which affect their physical, mental and emotional well-being (Salam and Susa, 2014). In Ghana, traditions, religion, cultural beliefs and myths of the societies, affect the full participation of people with disabilities leading to their isolation in the society. They have limited chances of getting married as many families reject them because they are perceived to be asexual and unproductive (Mensah et al 2008). This study was conducted to ascertain the challenges disabled people encounter in their marriage within the Yendi Municipality of Ghana.

## 2. Methods

An exploratory design was used in the study through qualitative approach. The design was exploratory because not much research has been done in the area of disability and marriage in Ghana and the Yendi Municipality in particular. Exploratory design was adopted for the study to serve as a springboard on which future studies could be conducted. The study population focused on disabled people who were married to non-disabled. A total of 16 participants which comprised of 8 physically disabled and 8 with visually impaired were selected through

snowball sampling technique. In applying snowball technique, a disabled person who was married was located and through his help the other participants were selected. The principle of point of saturation was employed to guide the number of participants. The main inclusion and exclusion criteria was that all participants must be disabled and are married to non-disabled. It means that individuals could be disabled and married but if the partner was also a disabled, he/she was excluded from the study. Structured interview guide was adopted to collect data through face-to-face in-depth interview and was tape-recorded. The interview was conducted in three languages; Konkomba, Dagbani and English through the help of 3 research assistants who could speak all the three languages. Data collection lasted for a period of 10 days. Data was transcribed, coded and categorised into meaningful themes. Data-led thematic analysis was used. Three editors read through the coded data with each reader blind to the work of the others and their decisions were later compared to resolve all possible overlaps. The themes have been presented as the major findings in which quotations from participants have been given to support the findings.

### 3. Results

#### Demographic characteristics of participants

**Table 1 showing demographic characteristics of participants**

Items	Number of respondents (n=16)	Percentage (%)
<b>Age (years)</b>		
20-30	4	25
31-40	4	25
51-60	6	37.5
61 and above	2	12.5
<b>Total</b>	16	100
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	6	37.5
Female	10	62.5
<b>Total</b>	16	100
<b>Education background</b>		
None	10	62.5
Primary	2	12.5
JSS	1	6.25
SHS/Vocational school	2	12.5
Tertiary	1	6.25
<b>Total</b>	16	100
<b>Occupation</b>		
Trading	6	37.5
Farming	2	12.5
Government/civil servant	1	6.25
Apprenticeship	4	25
None/Begging	4	25
<b>Total</b>	16	100
<b>Type of disability</b>		
Physical	8	50
Visual	8	50
<b>Total</b>	16	100
<b>Occurrence of disability</b>		
Before marriage	9	56.25
After marriage	7	43.75
<b>Total</b>	16	100

**Source:** Field work, 2017

Table 1 shows that 62.5% of the participants were females with 62.5% having no formal education. The dominant occupations were trading (37.5%) and farming (37.5%). Majority of the participants constituting 56.25% had their disability before marriage and 43.75% had theirs after marriage.

#### Expectations in marriage

##### Child bearing

Being married and having your own children is important in the community and to individual as well because children are perceived to be the future benefits of marriage.

*"... I wanted to get married and give birth to children so that they can take of me in future. When am sick I can*

*call them and when am old....”* (visually impaired male participant)

#### **Source of security**

Some married for security reasons. They believe that having someone by your side can prevent people from looking down on them.

*“...I was looking for, someone who will stand by me when I am in trouble, someone who will fight for me, so I agreed and married him”* (physically disabled female participant).

#### **Status and recognition**

Others also married because they wanted to be recognized by the society.

*“...People thought I could not perform sexually because am disabled...So I married my wife and gave birth to beautiful children* (physically disabled male participant).

#### **Understanding and cooperation**

Participants especially men are married to women with disabilities with the view that women with disabilities understand their condition better than non-women with disabilities.

*“...My wife and I love each other, we share our feelings together because she knows how it feels to be disabled”* (visually impaired male participant).

#### **Challenges faced in marriage.**

##### **Societal challenges**

All participants were concerned about the undesirable treatment they receive from the community, family members and friends labeling, insulting and calling them names.

##### **Opposition from family members**

Attempt by family members to prevent them from marrying their choice of partner affected their marriages.

*“...My family refused to approve my marriage just because my wife was an albino, with the believe that albinos bring bad luck to the family”* (Visually impaired male participant)

##### **Mockery and insults**

They face negative attitude from people when they go outside the home. People mock and call them derogatory names.

*“...My husband tells me he is always insulted by his friends for marrying me because of my condition”* (Physically disabled female participant).

##### **Divorce and abandonment**

Most of the participants are faced with the challenge of being abandoned and threat of divorce. This affects their marital life because they are not able to express themselves in the marriage for fear of being divorced or abandoned.

*“...My wife left me for a non-disabled man when I became disabled”* (Physically disabled male participant).

##### **Economic challenges**

The study also revealed that participants faced a lot of financial difficulties in their marriage which force them to depend on their partner for survival which leads to conflict and misunderstanding.

*“...When I use to see, I prepare my Shea butter and send it to market and sell, right now am blind am sitting here I can't do any work my husband get angry at me just because he has to give the children their money and give me too...”* (Visually impaired female participant)

##### **Domestic challenges**

The study also revealed domestic challenge as a stumbling block which affects people with disabilities in marriage. Most women also complained that, because of their inability to fulfil their household duties, their husbands have taken additional wives.

*“...When I married my husband we loved each other and we were happily living together but when my sickness occurred, my husband has married another woman* (physically impaired female participant)

#### **4. Discussion**

Different reasons account for different expectations of disabled individuals in seeking for marriage partners. The study found that people marry because of the belief that marriage gives an opportunity for partners' protection and good care. Others also married because they wanted to be recognized by society demonstrate that they could perform their sexual roles. This is due to societal belief that people with disabilities are asexual, impotent or have no desire for sex. The result corresponds to previous studies which found that people with disabilities are considered as unproductive and hyper sex drive (Mensah et al, 2008, Janet, 2011, Khasnabis et al, 2010).

The general believe was that children were the future benefits of marriage as well as sources of wealth and happiness to the individuals in marriage. Therefore having your own children gives you respect in the society and help reduce their dependency on the partners.

Marriage gives an idea that couples are going to live happily forever. But sometimes certain challenges are bound to happen. The findings show that the society has historically stigmatized and discriminated against people with disabilities in general which affect their participation in society. They were concerned about the

undesirable comments they receive from community members, family members and friends. This has resulted in labeling, insults, mockery and name calling. This may influence their lives negatively by limiting and making their participation in the society more difficult. The negative attitude, perception, cultural beliefs and traditions about the causes of disability hinder people with disabilities seeking and maintaining relationships. This shows that people with disabilities are restricted from making decisions related to their lives. In the Yendi Municipality, marrying albinos is rarely accepted. There is some believe that, albinos bring bad luck to the family. One participant's family refuses to support his marriage because he disobeyed them by marrying an albino woman. This result is inconsistent with a report by (Abed et al, 2015) which indicated that, an albino woman was raped by nine people in Tanzania who wanted to become rich because of the belief that albino women bring good luck to the community . This inconsistency could be as a result of different cultural belief of the people on albinism.

People with disabilities experience financial stress due to inability to work and earn a living. They were not engaged in any meaningful income generating activities which has brought financial burden, pressure and stress on their marriages. This also forces some of the participants, especially women to depend solely on their partners which mostly results in conflict and misunderstanding between them.

Domestic challenge was a major factor which affected people with disabilities in marriage. This is due to the traditional definition of household duties such as "breadwinner" and "housewives". The traditional role in the house is hindering people with disabilities especially women in most communities since their disabilities limited their participation. Some participants were threatened with divorce by their mother in-laws due to their inability to fulfill their duties as housewives compelling their husbands to take additional wives. This is consistent with the assertion that even those who have married before their disability especially women have been divorced by their husbands for another wife with the view that women with disabilities are not capable of performing their home chores and bearing children (Janet, 2011). However, some men also complained of not being capable of fulfilling their responsibilities. They indicated that they were supposed to be the breadwinner of the family as tradition demands but because of their conditions, they could not fulfill their duties as men which compel their wives to take over their responsibilities making them feel uncomfortable, over burden and overprotected in the house.

## 5. Conclusion

Several reasons influenced people with disabilities to get married. This reasons ranged from partner care and protection, through to social recognition, companionship and the desire to become a parent. Most of these expectations have not been met as they are confronted with several challenges in their marriages from society, economic and domestic fields.

## 6. Recommendations

- It is recommended that people with disabilities within the Yendi Municipality who are married and facing challenges should form self-help groups to manage and deal with their challenges collectively.
- The National Commission for Civic Education in partnership with the various disability unions within the Yendi Municipality as a matter of urgency should embark on public education with the focus on attitudinal change towards people with disability and their sexuality.

## Limitation of the study

The study focused on only disabled people who were married to non-disabled people. Relevant information could have been obtained if married couples who were both disabled were also considered.

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