

# Discrimination Experiences of Dreadlocked People in Ghana-A Case Study of Winneba

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## Abstract

The main objective of this study was to explore, understand and analyze the phenomenon of discrimination and stigmatization against persons with dreadlocks, vis-avis the level of human rights consciousness in the town of Winneba. A sample size of ten persons, consisting of five dreadlocked persons and five non-dreadlocked persons in the town of Winneba was considered. The purposive sampling method was employed in drawing ten persons for the study. Major findings show that persons with dreadlocks commonly called “Rasta” in Winneba encounter the problem of discrimination and stigmatization. The study further shows the reasons for discrimination and stigmatization against dreadlocked persons: low level of human rights education, the perception that most dreadlocked persons smoke marijuana, unkemptness, perception that dreadlocked people are arrogant and introverts, phobia for dreadlocked people and the culture of Winneba. The study established no evidence for the belief that most dreadlocked people smoke marijuana or cannabis as popularly believed. The study recommends among others that the state should address as a matter of urgency the challenges in the justice system in Ghana to enable citizens to seek redress with ease when they have their human rights violated coupled with making the provision of legal aid easily accessible for all citizens.

**Keywords:** discrimination, dreadlocked, equality, human beings, Human Rights, inalienability, Rastafarians,

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Background to the study

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood”. This provision in Article 1 of the UDHR which stems from the declaration of the rights of man and citizen (1789) but for ‘human beings’ in place of ‘men’, established the basic premise of Human Rights law. It also bestows Human Rights and freedoms to persons just because they are human, making all human beings irrespective of statuses such as gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed etc qualified or worthy to enjoy these rights such as the rights to life, fair trial, education, religion and more that can only be taken away from an individual or group on strictly legal grounds sanctioned by the principle of ‘Rights are not absolute’ (De Waal, et al 1999). As such, the moment basic principles of Human Rights such as inalienability, equality interdependence and indivisibility are compromised or breached, a situation known as discrimination is in place, and this is why international Human Rights law is grounded in the principle of non-discrimination.

Amnesty International (2014) defines discrimination as the systematic denial of certain peoples’ or groups’ full Human Rights because of who they are or what they believe. CERD Article 1 defines racial discrimination as:

any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on the equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any field of public life.

CEDAW Article 1 also defines “discrimination against women” as:

Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

Again, according to the UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education (1966):

For the purpose of this convention the term ‘discrimination’ includes distinction, exclusion, limitation or preference which being based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, economic condition or birth, has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing equality of treatment in education.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) convention No 111 Concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation (1958) regarding discrimination states:

For the purpose of this Convention the term ‘discrimination’ includes: (a) any distinction, exclusion or preference made on the bases of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality

of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation.

Basically, discrimination is the practice of treating one person or group of people less fairly or less well than other people or groups. Discrimination which often has various negative effects on its victims and the society as a whole Zick & Kapper (2010), is prohibited as a matter of global and statutory law such as in Article 15 (2) of Ghana's 1992 republican constitution which states unequivocally "A person shall not be discriminated against on grounds of gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed or social or economic status."

Though the world in general has come a long way in terms of eliminating the canker of discrimination due to a number of compelling historical forces, such as the civil rights movement and the public exposure of the genocidal atrocities of the Nazis producing a dramatic shift in the palatability of racial and gender ideologies Schuman, *et al* (1997), yet discrimination on the basis of such statuses or grounds still persists in many forms in every country in the world according to the Amnesty International (2014) and Ghana is no exception. A gray area of discrimination that is often not discussed is discrimination on the basis of an individual's hairstyle, particularly persons that have dreadlocks sometimes called "Mpersermperser" or simply "Rastas" in the local parlance (likely derived from the terminology "Rastafarianism") which is a religion with the doctrine that its members must wear dreadlocks. In fact so close is the association between dreadlocks and Rastafari that the two are sometimes used interchangeably based on the researcher's observation, as a result anytime "Rastafarian" or "Rasta" is used especially in Ghana it refers to all persons with dreadlocks.

In Ghana, at least based on media reportage, discrimination against persons with dreadlocks is quite a common phenomenon. First, a Ghana News Agency (GNA) feature in September 2006 captured that "sometimes Rastafarians tend to have a rather low public image. They are seen as mentally derailed and often denied jobs as a result of wearing dreads" (Ghananewsagency, 2005). Also in November 2010, a dreadlocked Ghanaian listener of BBC Radio, Bright Quayee-Sowah aired out his experiences as a dreadlocked person in Ghana, recounting discrimination and stigmatization because of his hairstyle, beliefs and general ways of life. Mr Bright Quayee-Sowah said, "when children see me they run away", and "the general public don't seem to like us but we are all about love and loving one another" (BBC, 2010). In 2012, myjoyonline.com published a story concerning Mr Asare Okyere Darko, the administrator of "valley view University", a private tertiary institution in Ghana who stated on a radio talk show (taxi driver) via (HITZ 103.9FM) that Rastafarians (a section of persons with dreadlocks) referring to all persons with dreadlocks since "Rastafarian" and "person with dreadlocks" are used interchangeably in Ghana are not welcome to the University (valley view) notwithstanding how meritorious academically a dreadlocked admission applicant may stand (Myjoyonline, 2012). In 2013, the director of the Public affairs of the Ghana Police Service made known via that same radio talk show (taxi driver) that, persons with dreadlocks cannot join the Ghana Police Service because they are indecent when in reality there are no laws in Ghana that make it illegal the recruitment of dreadlocked persons into the Ghana Police Service (Myjoyonline.com, 2013). Finally, on Sunday April 16 2014, Ghanaweb.com published the story of ace Ghanaian footballer, Yahaya Mohammed captioned "People judge me by my rasta hair", in which the player laments "soccer fans shouldn't judge me by my rasta hair and say I am bad to tarnish my image. Our perception about rasta-haired people is wrong, that is why a thief nicely dressed in suit will hide a gun and rob us while a rasta man that we suspect him to do that will not attempt it" (Ghanaweb, 2014).

Based on the listed publications, there are clear indications of discrimination and stigmatization against persons with dreadlocks in Ghana which raise serious concerns of Human Rights of such persons with dreadlocks as a result. The probable prevalence of discrimination and stigmatization against persons with dreadlocks in Ghana is an indicator that there is the possibility of the existence of this phenomenon in the town of Winneba, located in the central region of Ghana.

But if the Constitution and electoral laws accept votes of persons with dreadlocks, taxes and other roles in national development, why are they discriminated against when it comes to giving jobs, positions, school admissions and social recognition for which they are qualified?. In the history of the world, there have been countless examples of great personalities that have contributed immensely towards the development in diverse ways that wore dreadlocks and Ghana has been no exception, ranging from legendary boxer Lennox Lewis, Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Okomfo Anokye, Kojo Antwi, Kwame Ayew, Yahaya Mohammed and many more.

The four catalogued pictures are just a few of many dreadlocked persons that have excelled in their various fields of endeavour in Ghana and globally. Consequently, the state and all citizens are burdened with the sense of responsibility and a duty of care to contribute towards the reign of equal rights and freedoms for all, eradicating discrimination and stigmatization out of the society.

Discrimination of any form with the exception of positive discrimination (affirmative action) is impermissible, unallowable and unjustifiable in Ghana since the laws of the land including the 1992 Republican constitution of Ghana frown on discrimination coupled with the fact that Ghana has signed and ratified a number of International Human Rights treaties and Conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976), International Covenant on Social and Cultural Rights (1976), Convention on the Rights of the child (1990), Vienna Declaration and Programme of

Action (1993), African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1986) and the United Nations Charter (1945). Other treaties include: The Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic minorities (1992), Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981), International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), Convention (no 169) Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (1989) etc which morally and legally bind the nation Ghana to adhere to their provisions. The Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic minorities (1992) like Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for instance asserts in Article 2 (1) that:

“Persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities (Hereinafter referred to persons belonging to minorities) have the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, and to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination”.

These two provisions include a plethora of anti-discrimination declarations across major International and local Human Rights instruments that make a strong case for individuals like persons with dreadlocks who are subjected to various forms of discrimination and stigmatization.

### 1.1 Statement of the research problem

Ghana was the first African country south of the Sahara to gain independence, making it not just a beacon of hope to the rest of Africa and the entire black race but also duty-bound to be a shining example of liberation epitomized of course by its motto of “freedom and justice”. And in walking the talk, Ghana has made some commendable strides in this regard such as a sustained multi-party democracy (from 1992 to date), being a signatory to major global Human Rights treaties, often the first to sign for that matter and instituting structures such as the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) consequently obliged to inter alia safeguard the fundamental Human Rights of all of its citizens. Ghana nonetheless still relatively lags behind in terms of ensuring proper Human Rights standards backed by Human Rights reports of bodies like Amnesty International and Human Rights watch over the years.

Based on the background to this study regarding media reportage of discrimination and stigmatization involving the Ghana Police Service, Mr Asare Okyere Darko Mr Bright Quaye-Sowah and footballer Yahaya Mohammed, there is sufficient basis to assert that some persons with dreadlocks in parts of the country Ghana could be discriminated against on the basis of their looks (hairstyle), a manifestation of the state of Human Rights in Ghana, hence the researcher's decision to embark on this study to explore the phenomenon of discrimination and stigmatization within the context of Human Rights, establish the evidence or otherwise of these discrimination and stigmatization experiences of persons with dreadlocks just because of their chosen or preferred hairstyle, as well as examine the level at which people in the township of Winneba have come to terms with the concept of Human Rights since the notch of Human Rights consciousness or Human Rights education has a correlation with the Human Rights situation of a society buttressed by Nelson Mandela's (1995) view on education and enlightenment (Human Rights) in his Long Walk to Freedom:

No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.

### 1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to document the real experiences of persons with dreadlocks in the town of Winneba in the Central region of Ghana. Special attention will be paid to the encounters of dreadlocked persons in Winneba as a result of their hairstyle and a measure of Human Rights consciousness amongst both dreadlocked and non-dreadlocked persons in Winneba. Experiences of dreadlocked persons relating to socialization, employments, education, housing and security will be profiled.

### 1.3 Objectives of the study

- To establish the evidence or otherwise of discrimination and stigmatization against persons with dreadlocks in Winneba.
- To discover which aspects or generations of the Human Rights of persons with dreadlocks are violated as a result of discrimination and stigmatization.
- To enumerate factors which account for discrimination and stigmatization against persons with dreadlocks.
- To examine the effects of these Human Rights violations against persons with dreadlocks.
- To measure persons in Winneba's knowledge and understanding of Human Rights, Human Rights instruments, and anti-discrimination laws in Ghana and in the world.

#### 1.4 Research Questions

- Are Persons with dreadlocks in Winneba faced with discrimination and stigmatization?
- Which Human Rights and freedoms of the persons with dreadlocks in Winneba are violated as a result of discrimination and stigmatization against them?
- Which factors account for the discrimination against people with dreadlocks?
- What are the effects of the Human Rights violations/discrimination and stigmatization against individuals with dreadlocks in Winneba?
- How grounded and rooted are people in Winneba regarding Human Rights, Human Rights instruments and anti-discrimination laws in Ghana and in the world?

#### 1.5 Significance of the study

The study will bring to bear the experiences of persons wearing dreadlocks in Winneba and in the process establish whether or not such persons encounter discrimination and stigmatization as a result of their hairstyle (looks) which will commence an address if there is. The study which will add to the existing body of knowledge of lookism, discrimination and stigmatization will also offer education on equality and inalienability of Human Rights which will result in a better appreciation of the concept of Human Rights manifesting in the elimination of “vices” such as discrimination and stigmatization from the society of Winneba and Ghana at large. More importantly, the study will provide an idea of the state of Human Rights (education and consciousness) in the township of Winneba and suggest ways of improving the situation.

#### 1.6 Delimitation

There are reported violations of the Human Rights of persons in Winneba and across the lengths and breadth of Ghana, but the scope of this study was to zero in on violations and abuses that have got to do with discrimination and stigmatization against persons with dreadlocks. The researcher concentrated on discrimination and stigmatizations against dreadlocked persons in Winneba to enable him explore the phenomenon in details. This study gathered data from people with and without dreadlocks in Winneba of the Effutu municipality of the Central Region and as a result, generalizations and conclusions drawn may not necessarily correspond to experiences of people with dreadlocks in other parts of the country because of several likely disparities and differences that may exist in other societies in Ghana.

#### 1.7 The Study Area

Winneba, which is the capital city of the Effutu municipality of Winneba is located 90 miles east of Cape coast in the Central Region of Ghana with a population of 60,331 lying on the South Coast. Winneba is situated at 5.33° North latitude, 0.62° West longitude and 0 meters elevation above the sea level (Google, 2014).

#### 1.8 Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided to facilitate a common understanding of the basic terms used in this study:

*Attractive*: Pleasing in appearance, referring to non-dreadlocks persons

*Akomfo*: Akan Language slang for Priests of traditional African religion

*Certiorari*: A writ issued by a higher court to obtain records on a case from a lower court so that the case can be reviewed

*Discrimination*: Unfair treatment of one person or group, usually because of prejudice about race, ethnicity, age, religion, or gender

*Discriminator*: A person or group of persons that treat other persons or group unfairly because of prejudice about race, ethnicity, age, religion, or gender

*Dreadlocks*: Long strands of hair have naturally twisted closely from the scalp down to the tips

*Dreadlocked person*: A person who has dreadlocks

*Freedom*: A state in which somebody is able to and live as he or she chooses, without being subject to any undue restraints or restrictions

*Habeas corpus*: A writ issued in order to bring somebody who has been detained into court, usually for a decision on whether the detention is awful

*Law*: The body or system of rules recognized by a community that are enforceable by established process

*Lookism*: Discrimination based on an individual's physical appearance

*Mandamus*: An order from a high court to a lower court, or to an authority, instructing it to perform an action or duty

*Mpersemperser*: An Akan language slang for dreadlocks

*Non-dreadlocked Person*: A person who has no dreadlocks

*Out group*: Refers to the group that is discriminating against another group

*Okomfo*: A priest of traditional African Religion

*Prejudice*: A preformed opinion, usually an unfavourable one, based on insufficient knowledge, irrational feelings, or inaccurate stereotypes

*Prejudices*: Refers to persons who practise prejudice against other persons

*Quo warranto*: A document issued by a court of law formally requiring somebody to state by what authority he or she has acted or has held a position

*Rasta*: A person that practices Rastafarianism

*Rastafarianism*: Afro-Caribbean religious group that venerates the former emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie and forbid the cutting of hair

*Stereotype*: An oversimplified image of a person or group

*Stereotypes or Stereotypers*: Refers to persons who practise stereotyping against other persons or groups

*Stigmatization*: Labeling somebody or something as socially unacceptable

*Unattractive*: Not having a beautiful, pleasing or desirable appearance

*Writ*: A written court order demanding that the addressee do or stop doing whatever is specified in the order

### 1.9 Structure of the Dissertation Report

The study comprises six chapters and is presented in the order outlined below;

First is Chapter one which deals with the background to the study, the problem, purpose of study and research questions. Others are the significance of the study, limitations, scope /delimitations of the study and the definition of terms. Next is Chapter Two which focuses on the review of local and international Human Rights documents, related published and unpublished literature whilst Chapter Three touches on the methodology of the study, the research design, the population sample and sampling procedures, data collection instruments and data collection procedures and finally data analysis. In Chapter Four is the presentation of results and findings whilst Chapter five bothers on the discussion of the findings as presented. Finally, the summary of findings, conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for future research form the concluding Chapter six of the study.

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