

# The Changing Roles of Fathers in Parenting in Ghana

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## Abstract

As it is known in most part of the world, families has been basically patriarchal. So has it been in Ghana over the years. Men has possessed and exercised authority in family and marriages. Fathers were seen as people with power and influence in the family setting who are able to make their family do what they wanted them to do. Though fathers were noted to be responsible care takers of their families both economically and psychologically, fathers now have different roles depending on the economic capabilities, the economic powers of their wives and the kind of employment that they are engage in. This paper highlights the importance of fathers in the Ghanaian family setting, the need for parental framework for parenting and the challenges of contemporarily fathers. Literature reviewed indicates that, through voluntary affirmative action campaign championed by Ghana's National Council for Women and Development (NCWD) from the early nineties and the 31<sup>st</sup> December Women Movement (An NGO). It also revealed that, there are various organisations and institutions as well as individuals who wish to see that fathers do more than just being economic, social and emotional care givers to protecting their children from social vices and challenges that fathers can do. The paper suggests a comprehensive training for young men who wish to be fathers to acquire skills in parenting and fathering as a whole.

## Introduction

Basically being a parent has many rewards and pleasure. For some people, living childless even with a loving mate-is unthinkable. Most parents idealised notions of the best way to be fathers or raise their children, but the reality may not coincide with the ideal (Dressel and Clark 1990). Child rearing philosophies according to DeGenova and Rice 2002, like fashions-seems to go in cycles. Yesterday's parent's or fathers' feeling their own parents were too strict, turned to self-demand schedules child-centred homes, progressive education and more indulgent concept of child rearing (Alvin 1990). Fathering in Ghana over the years has been seen as patriarchal with fathers being imaged as 'Headmasters' of ancient school by which the headmaster holds a stick to inspect parade of his school children(Otu, 2012)

According to Otu 2012, fathers responsibilities was confined to the domain of issuing instructions of which mothers and children had no option but to obey and implement the instruction issued. Fathers' gender ideology was the best single predictor of sharing household work. These suggest that men shared more when they think they should, or perhaps that men shared more in terms of in terms of helping in all aspect of domestic activities only when they have been able to adjust their gender role beliefs accordingly (Pyke and Coltrane 1996). No matter what a woman view was as then, it could not do much to change the role or responsibility of a father until the father decided so. Despite the what is considered as short comings of fatherhood today, fathers were very responsible. Most father will leave no stone unturned to make sure that he provide the basic amenities for their children and families. Women were not so much into education especially at the tertiary levels. After the beigin conference of 1995, a number of advocacy works was embarked by Ghana's National Council for Women and Development (NCWD) and 31<sup>st</sup> Women Movement an 'NGO' to first empower women through education and conferences in Ghana and also persuade the people of Ghana to voluntarily plan affirmative actions in institutions of Ghana to help empower the girl child and women in Ghanaian society. They were of the view that men have become autocratic because of low level of girl child education especially at the tertiary level. Their advocacy works were responded to positively in 1997 when the Universities and Polytechnics in Ghana voluntarily introduced an admission policy that allowed girls with grades two points weaker than that of boys be admitted for tertiary education. For instance a girl who had a grade of seventeen (17) at the secondary education Ghanaian grading system was admitted ahead of a boy who had a grade of sixteen on the same grading system to encourage women to acquire tertiary education. This policy is still being practiced at some of the tertiary institutions in Ghana as at today. With a substantial number of women acquiring tertiary education, and been economically empowered through all kinds of employment women have been exposed to. The phenomenon of this male dominance in all spheres of Ghanaian lives as well as trends of fathering and fatherhood are changing in a very fast rate even in all sphere of live in Ghana. It can be said that a Ghanaian father is no more 'autocratic' to some extent but increasingly becoming 'democratic fathers'. This has repositioned the male ideological belief of the sole repository of knowledge and power in Ghana.

## Statement of the problem

Most people in Ghana trace the high rate of street child menace, child delinquency and school dropout of children to the neglect of the 'policing' and the 'protecting' role of fathers (Otu, 2012). Although fathers are

recognised widely in Ghana as stakeholder in parenting, some of them are absentee fathers due to work engagements outside their homes; others live in their old element of autocratic state of fatherhood equally greater number of fathers are wandering as to what kind of fathers they should be. According to Ghana's Department of Social Welfare, a national framework of parenting is required to ensure that they are able to function fully in their social care responsibilities. This they argued should be done with full participation of both fathers and mothers to ensure that the family is adequately protected.

The further added that the absence of national policy framework on family and parenting prevent them from ensuring that they reduce absentee fatherhood and also ensure fatherhood responsibilities are carried out by fathers.

### **Objective of the study**

The objectives of this paper are to highlight on;

- . Importance of fatherhood in parenting in Ghana
- . The need for family and parenting national framework
- . Current Challenges faced by contemporary fathering in Ghana.

### **Research Method**

This study adopted literature reviews as the main research method to retrieve data for the study. Therefore, the data gathered for discussion were obtained mainly from secondary sources which involved the use of information from conference proceedings, books, radio discussions, journals, and internet about issues raised and concepts discussed in the text. In addition various reports and documents relating to family, parenting and fathering in general and in Ghana in particular were used for the study. The analysis used for the study is basically qualitative and descriptive.

### **Discussions**

#### **Importance of fatherhood in parenting in Ghana**

Becoming a father can be one of the most exciting and meaningful experiences in life (Cowan and Cowan 1995). How men react to prospective parenthood depends on a number of factors. A very important one is whether the pregnancy is planned (Snowden etl 1998). Do the man or the will be father want a child? Does the man feel ready to accept a child at that time? Does the man feel ready to accept responsibility of caring for the child? Another important factor is whether the man is legally married to the woman or not. And again, as to whether the man relationship is harmonious. In Ghana, fathers are seen as disciplinarians and gate 'watchers' of various families. They are to require by practice and convention to provide the basic amenities of the family even when their spouses are working or gainfully employed. Their presence at home is also expected for them to instruct from time to time or order their children to behave in one way or the other. This is a cherished tradition of a typical Ghanaian family. The absence of a father at home therefore creates a very big vacuum in the family. Most women in Ghanaian family will say to their children 'you wait your father your father will come and you will see what he will do to you' that means the child will only be forced to perform a task by their father. It must be stated here that the trend has change and is still changing. However a greater number of families still look up to fathers in their homes to enforce family rules and responsibilities. The 'good' or 'bad' behaviour of child therefore is somehow traced to the skills that the father possesses to manage his family or care for his children. Families that do not have fathers at home due to work schedules or death adopt an adult male as loco-parentis or better still adopt a father of another family to act as care taker father to assist mothers to care and manage their children and families.

In addition, in Ghana, the man's responsibility primarily is that of economic. It is believed that closeness of children to their fathers adds happiness and life satisfaction to children. It also minimise psychological stress of children (GeGenova and Rice 2002). It is believed in Ghana that most fathers in though not statistically supported, takes a more active role in the education of their children at the high school to tertiary levels in Ghana that when they are at the lower levels.

#### **The need for family and parenting national framework**

In Ghana, parenting and family roles are not clearly defined except that fathers are required to take care of their children. Whether the child is biologically acquired or legally acquired (Department of Social Welfare). This therefore leaves a number of families in 'limbo'. A casual check on document accessed from the Department of Social Welfare indicates an increasing number of Ghanaian families especially mothers seeking legal intervention to compel fathers and husband to take up their fatherly responsibilities. The Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVSU) of the Ghana Police Service on countless occasions have appealed to Ghanaian fathers to protect their children from abuse especially their girl child (Ghana News Agency). Again, 'DOVSU' have been releasing some bulleting indicating that a substantial number of Fathers have been reporting of abuse

by their wives which hitherto was the preserve of men to abuse their partners. It adds that fathers should do well to provide basic amenities such as food and shelter to their families to prevent them from being abused by other people who purport to be caring for children (Ghana News Agency). The Daily Graphic of Ghana, a leading newspaper on the front page of the 9<sup>th</sup> of April edition reported of the alarming rate at which children under age sixteen are given to men of advanced age to marry. Some of the men marry these children under sixteen years are as old as Sixty-five years.

Discussant on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2015 edition held from 6:00am (Gmt) to 10:00am (Gmt) of joy fm a local radio station at the capital city of Accra Ghana expressed worry about lack of clear parental framework guideline that will clearly define the basic role of fathers in a family setting. This they believe will help protect their children especially the girls from being exploited by men. Other discussant on other networks also demanded that authorities call for stakeholder's forum to discuss the increasing neglect of fatherly responsibilities and suggest ways to tackle it. In other write ups, others suggested that a legal regime should be introduced in order for parents who give of their children under sixteen to be married to be prosecuted. It is largely accepted in Ghana that the child right law should be reviewed to ensure that parental neglect sanctions are added to it. This they believe will compel parents especially fathers perform their roles in parenting as they used to.

1. Table 1: The structure and institutions in charge of families and parenting in Ghana.

Ministry	Family/Parenting	Goals	Outcomes
Ministry of Gender and Social Protection	Fathers, Mothers and Children	To provide social protection for the family	Able to provide limited protection to selected few in Ghana
Ministry of Health	Fathers, Mothers and Children	To ensure the Biological, Physical and Psychological wellbeing of the family	Provides biological and physical well-being but does little about psychological well-being
Ministry of Manpower and Employment	Fathers Mothers and Children	To ensure equity in employment for the family and to prevent child labour	Is unable to adequately ensure labour equity as well as child labour
National Council for Women and Development	Mothers and Children/NGO's	To ensure the empowerment of women and children	Have being working on its goals

Sources: (Otu 2012)

### Current Challenges faced by contemporary fathers in Ghana.

It should be every man's dream to perhaps to provide or cater for his family especially as fathers by making sure that their families are economically for. Fathers also wish that they are available to provide the happiness and psychological as well as emotional support that their children require of them especially in the formative years of their children.

It is however increasingly becoming difficult for such dreams and wishes to be fulfilled due to a number of factors. Economic challenge has placed on some fathers in Ghana some psychological stress due to the fact that some fathers have taken two jobs which virtually take them out of their homes for days. Another factor is that, there are an increased number of unemployed fathers and also retrenched fathers who are unable to provide economic protection to their families. This is partly due to rural urban migration and the share neglect of farming by young fathers and men in Ghana. This has rendered most fathers 'powerless' in making sure that there is discipline in their homes and also provide shelter for their children as they used to day in some time past. Another important missing link is a comprehensive data on fatherhood in Ghana that will be used to plan for families and social protection.

Most children are also born out of wedlock due to economic challenges, Ghanaian men do not want to marry and take on the fathering responsibilities. They however give birth anyway resulting in absentee fatherhood. Children who are born out of wedlock are sometime denied fatherhood because most families in Ghana do not recognised men who impregnate women whom their not married to as unworthy of acting as fathers.

Again, quite a number of men lack adequate knowledge on parenting and how to play a fatherly role thereby preventing them from functioning fully as fathers. In addition most men impregnate women when they are not ready economically and psychologically to cater for the children. Some even abandon their family and flee to other regions of the country or sometime outside the country. This behaviour used not to exist in recent years past.

Education also takes a number of fathers out of their homes. As other families are being empowered economically the currently, they are seldom seen at home to play their complementary roles in parenting. Compared to recent past it was 'un-heard-off' for a father to abandon his family for economic empowerment or for any other reason either than death. These indicate a remarkable change in fatherhood in Ghana.

### **Conclusion**

The primary desire of every father is to be able to meet the basic needs of his family in order to ensure family unity and cohesion. Fathers by virtue of their responsibilities become a symbol of discipline, contribute to sustainable social, economic and psychological and physical wellbeing of their children. The paper highlighted the importance of fathers in parenting in Ghanaian family life. It also stressed the need for national framework for parents to stem the upsurge of fatherhood neglect and also ensures that fathers live up to their fatherly responsibilities. It was also noted that, fathers do not always do what is required of them partly due to challenges such as unemployment, retrenchment, unplanned family life and sometimes due to sheer negligence. It is expected that young adult men are given a well thought out fathering training to empower them to play their roles as fathers in their families. Young men should also be given entrepreneurial training to empower them economically. The need for a comprehensive data should be developed about fatherhood in Ghana to be used as basis for national policy framework on parenting that will ensure that specific areas challenges are identified and tackled head-on.

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