

GENDER SOCIALIZATION OF PRE-TEEN YOUTHS IN GHANA: ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES FOR EXTENSION

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Abstract

Agricultural and Extension education in Ghana relies heavily on traditional visit and transfer methods to impact new knowledge to farmers. Much effort and resources are thus expended to extend agricultural information to the farmer at his farm. Not much is done at the family level to identify social problems that can hinder the farm family from achieving their maximum potential. Although agriculture remains the backbone of most of Ghanaian economies, the gendered aspects – such as the sexual division of labor, and sex-differences in access to land and credit, and even marketing of produce – receive little attention and continue to hamper the development of the sector. This paper presents evidence of how boys aged from 9 to 12 years, form notions and expectations of masculinity around household tasks and how boys differ in responsibility for major decision making regarding childbirth, contraception and safe sex from girls of similar age. The authors explore alternative approaches that involve bringing young people to a better understanding of themselves. We also discuss how extension can be remodelled to address some of the problems faced by the youth in the agricultural and other sectors in Ghana.

Introduction

The stratification of gender roles are often reinforced by traditions that are passed down from one generation to the next. Male characteristics that are approved or encouraged include virility, strength, authority, power and leadership qualities, the ability to offer protection and sustenance, intelligence and wisdom, and the ability to bear physical and emotional pain. Girls are taught to defer to men and boys as stronger, wiser, and more responsible and boys are accordingly taught to lead and control women. A boy whose lifestyle does not measure up to the prescribed expectations is branded “*banyin-basia*” meaning “man-woman”.

Conversely, a girl who veers from prescribed feminine roles into the domains prescribed for boys is branded “*babasia-kokonin*”, meaning “a woman-cock” or “male-woman” (Adomako-Ampofo, 2001). How men behave in their families is strongly influenced by expectations about what it means to be a man by their fellow men, the community in which they

live and the society at large. Paechter (2003) argues that in order to sustain gender power differentials society requires children to behave in particular ways and rewards or punishes them for conformity to, or deviance from, the norm.

Purpose of the paper

The paper elaborates how socialization of pre-teen children along gender lines may lead to perception building, attitude formation and construction of masculine tendencies that might expose children in the long run to risky behaviors. The paper explores alternative approaches by which Extension can socialize children in ways that eliminate the harmful notions of masculinity and transform children's conception of their roles and functions into a responsible adulthood.

Background

Traditions and gender stratification

There are several traditions in Ghana that encourage stratification of gender roles and are reinforced by passing these traditions down from one generation to the next. Among the Akans of Ghana, a son does not inherit from his father, but fathers are expected to set up their male children in life through training, the giving of gifts such as land and guns, and to help their sons to "acquire" their first wife. In the traditional system, this practice involved apprenticing the son to either the father himself or to a master craftsman, an orator or a statesman. In times of war sons fought alongside their fathers (Awusabo-Asare 1990). During this apprenticeship process definitions of appropriate masculinity are transmitted.

Proverbs are frequently used to explain and describe, and tend to hold in place stereotypes about women and men.

Amoah (1991) and Rattray (1927) cite several proverbs that portray men as brave and those who should remain in charge of events and circumstances. Examples of such proverbs include:

The hen also knows that it is dawn, but it allows the cock to announce it.

Even if a woman buys a gun or a drum it leans against a man's hut.

If the gun lets out its bullets, it is the man who receives them on his chest

It is the woman who knows what her children would be fed on

Proverbs such as those above are used in daily discourse to endorse masculine inclinations in boys and reinforce gender positions. This ensures that girls and boys know their appropriate places in the society (Adomako-Ampofo, 2001).

How men behave in their families is strongly influenced by expectations about what it means to be a man by their fellow men, the community in which they live and conformity with certain norms and practices. In Ghana, such expectations perpetuate masculine tendencies among boys and men. In the economic and social spheres males are more frequently allotted tasks that involve leaving home and the emphasis in their training is on public accomplishments while a girl's tasks are home directed (Barry et al. 1973; Nabila, 2001).

Accordingly, girls carry the greater burden of domestic work while boys are geared towards more productive work and are permitted more time for play and to be away from home. Ghanaian societies as indicated earlier have prescriptions for acceptable male and female roles which are expressed in community norms and values that are often used to maintain social control over women and girls (Nukunya 1992, Abu 1991). Thus, in spite of the constitutional and legal guarantees, the reality on the ground does not quite measure up to the "equal rights for all"

provided under the laws. Indeed, since 1997 there has been a drive within the Ministry of Education to focus on the “girl child”. Yet, many more men receive formal education than women.

The literacy rate for men is pegged at 60% as opposed to 30% for women (Coker-Appiah & Foster 2002). Although the gap at the primary level between boys and girls is relatively small and in some places there is even no gap or girls’ enrolment rates surpass those of boys, by the time students reach the tertiary level, the gap is very wide. An important reason for this situation is that when families are faced with economic difficulties, they are more inclined to withdraw the girls because it is felt that girls do not need as much education as boys do.

In spite of women's long standing economic contributions, and traditional expectations that they would support their lineages and children, one of the most important societal roles assigned to women is to marry and have children and therefore the perception is that in the face of limited resources it would be a waste of the family’s resources to educate the girl (Prah 2002; Adu-Poku, 2001). In 1997 the government of Ghana established the Girl’s Education Unit (GEU) within the Ministry of Education, and the president under the Fourth Republic appointed a separate Minister for “Girl Child Education.” The objectives of the GEU are to achieve the following by the year 2005:

- Increase enrollment of girls in basic education to equal that of boys and to develop and maintain strategies aimed at ensuring the continuation of girls into Junior Secondary Schools;
- Reduce the dropout rate of girls in Primary Schools from 30% to 10% and of girls in Junior Secondary Schools from 21% to 15%; For the period 1998-2002 primary school enrollments for boys and girls respectively were 85% and 78%; for secondary school they were 41% and 34% (UNICEF, 2004) and for the tertiary level. Female enrollments in the nation's 5 state universities average between 15-40%, varying significantly by faculty and academic institution.
- Increase the transition rate of girls from Junior to Senior Secondary Schools by 10% by the end of the FCUBE (Free Compulsory Universal Education) program;
- Increase the participation of girls in science, mathematics and technology (SMT) subjects by improving the quality of teaching and enhancing the perception of these subjects. For the period 1998-2002 primary school enrollments for boys and girls respectively were 85% and 78%; for secondary school they were 41% and 34% (UNICEF, 2004) and for the tertiary level. Female enrollments in the nation's 5 state universities average between 15-40%, varying significantly by faculty and academic institution.

Methods and Data Sources

The paper presents qualitative results from interviews with junior secondary school (middle school) students from two towns located in the Eastern Region of Ghana (Mampong and Akropong) about their perceptions of gender roles and constructions about masculinity. Students interviewed came from one of the two towns, or from a nearby town. Mampong and Akropong are peri-urban towns, close enough to the capital, Accra, to be influenced by it, but retaining a rural, farming character.

This study is a qualitative one. We interviewed boys and girls aged between 9-12 years of age. Results presented in this paper are part of the findings from a larger study involving 58 middle school students and their parents from two towns in the Eastern Region of Ghana.

The 58 students, 28 girls and 30 boys, were selected following preliminary analysis of survey findings from among those categorised as having an “egalitarian”, “average” or “male or female dominant” orientation.

The adolescents whose responses are discussed below first took part in a survey of all first year Junior Secondary School students conducted in two towns in the Eastern region of Ghana, Mampong and Akropong in 2000. The towns share many similarities linguistically and culturally, however, in theory, people from Mampong are patrilineal while those from Akropong are matrilineal. Almost all the students came from one of the two towns, or from a nearby town. Mampong and Akropong can be described as peri-urban towns, close enough to the capital, Accra, to be influenced by it, but retaining a rural, farming character. In 2001 the IDIs were conducted among a sub-sample of those who had consented to be re-interviewed as we describe above. The Principal Investigators, Professor Akosua Adomako-Ampofo and Professor Francis Doodoo (then at University of Maryland, now at Penn State University) also interviewed a sub-sample of parents of the children in 2002.

In the following sections, we discuss the traditions and gender stratification in the Ghanaian context and point to some of the ways in which constructions of gender roles and power dynamics affect gender relations of girls and women, as well as boys and men. We then discuss how traditions and socio-cultural norms affect sexuality and how this may factor into the risk of exposure to HIV/AIDS. Then we present results and discussion from the interviews with the adolescents from our study. We follow this with conclusion and recommendations.

Results

Perceptions of adolescents in Ghana regarding sexuality, gender roles and health

In this section we discuss issues related to gender roles, gender responsibilities about sexuality, safe sex and power dynamics between males and females.

Boys’ responses show evidence of beginning to form notions and expectations of gender stratification around household tasks that differentiate them from girls. It should be noted that these are these are tasks the boys would have been expected to perform a few years earlier.

“I am a boy so I do not carry rubbish to the dumpster or cook in the kitchen; my sister however, can carry rubbish to the dumpster and she can cook.”

“They (girls) have to cook for the boys to eat but the boys don't have to cook for the girls to eat.”

“I’m a poor cook, but it’s okay; after all I’m only a boy. I do not need to cook for anybody but myself.”

Three areas of domestic work that boys do not or no longer partake in emerge as being important markers of the transition to manhood: cooking (and kitchen work such as washing dishes); doing laundry; and sweeping. Most of the boys are very clear that kitchen work is a female preserve and their absence from this activity mark them as not female:

“Don't you see that in the house boys don't normally cook so when they cook they will be laughed at and people will say that you like food.” “Let’s say that when you are born a woman maybe if your mother is cooking you will see that the woman their daughter rather is always with her so that she teaches her how to cook, so that it is the woman who has to cook.”

“It is because sometimes the women, it is their job. Let’s say that we know that as for women when it comes to sweeping they know how to sweep.”

“Sometimes the woman, the woman knows she can wash but as for men they can’t wash well, but let me say if you are not married then as for your own clothes you can wash it, if your are a

man. But he will wash his own things only. Sometimes if he says that he is washing he cannot go for let's say his mother's things and washes them."

A girl says of her brother "He knows, he knows how to cook but he doesn't give anybody what he cooks because he is a boy so...."

Girls' responses show evidence of conforming to norms that have established certain gender roles as domains for girls and women.

"And some of the time the girls fetch the sand and the boys build the structure"

"As for the washing of pans I do but there is another sister who is my mother's relation, she does the washing of cloths"

Asked about what her brother does when a girl does all the household chores, a girl replies

"Eh he, he sits down to watch... Hmm then he will be giving his comments"

When a girl was asked about what she would expect of her future daughter when she marries, she replies

"She will have to cook for the man and wash his clothes"

Regarding childbirth she replies

"She has to give birth, she has to give birth for her child to grow up for her to send her to school and marry and have children"

One boy talking about what he would teach his sons in future explains:

"I will want to teach all of them so that they learn it because maybe some will not marry directly when they grow up. Maybe they will work for sometime before. So since he is working I will want him to stay alone until the time that he himself will feel that he wants to marry. So the time that maybe he wants to live alone, he will not get anybody, and he will not get any woman who will come and cook for him or wash his things for him. So if he does not learn those things now he will have problems when it gets there. Because every time he will have to go to town and buy food, sometimes the food will not be good food and it may give him some disease."

"I will want to teach all of them (my children) ... maybe some will not marry directly when they grow, maybe they will work for sometime before. So since he is working... maybe he will want to live alone ... he will not get any woman who will cook for him or wash his things for him. So if he does not learn these things he will have problems."

Nonetheless, in teaching his son to cook another boy says he will make sure:

"If he learns, I will not let him learn more than a girl."

We asked boys how they would deal with a situation in which a wife did not want to have sex, or turned away from her husband's advances because she was tired.

"You have the chance and she also has the chance. So if she says that she is tired you have to respect that."

We also presented the reverse scenario when the wife wanted sex and the husband didn't and the boys gave similar responses, none indicating that it was an unlikely scenario. There was only one boy who, having said that a man who didn't want to have sex (presumably because he linked sex with pregnancy) should go and buy a condom or let his wife use the pill, recommended force to be used if the wife was the unwilling partner:

"Then you may really have to force her so that she might think that when she doesn't yield you might go out and take another woman and leave her."

A girl offered a supporting view about what advice she would have given to her daughter if her future husband decided to bring in a second wife

"I would have told her that, when the husband brings in another wife she should not say anything and should not fight with her too because she should live with her as sisters"

On Protective sex, a girl had this to say:

“The other time I saw it on T.V that they put a rubber in the womb”

“Condom, when they are talking about AIDS then they talk about condoms”

“The say it protects from the AIDS”

A boy however, had this to say about condoms

“It is the man who wears it but it is the responsibility of the woman to ensure that it is used”

Asked why he thinks so he had this to say:

“Because she does not want to get pregnant”

Supposedly the same reasoning can be applied to a girl who does not want to contract AIDS. This boy thinks the responsibility rests with the woman to ensure that condoms are used. And it shows that the boy does not care much if she gets pregnant or gets some disease by having unprotected sex. This corroborates findings by Awusabo-Asare, (2004) which shows that, young people did not feel confident insisting on condom use; 27% of men and 30% of women say that they could not insist on using a condom if their partner did not want to use one. In addition, a study of three Ghanaian towns showed that 65% of 12-24 year olds thought it was inappropriate for males to carry condoms, and 78% thought it was inappropriate for females to do so. In another study of 12-24 year olds in the Central region, more than 40% of respondents agreed with the statement that a young woman carrying a condom in her purse was bad.

On power dynamics between males and females children have the inclination that, men have more “power” than women, and did not hesitate to show why they think so:

R: In marriage the man has the power

I: Where does that power come from?

R: Because the woman has to obey the man’s rules

And this “power” of a husband over a wife is reflected even in the responses of boys who oppose violence as a means to bring a wife back in line. They suggest alternatives such as reporting her to her parents, threatening her, and, ultimately, divorce, but inherent in the discourse is again, the idea that a wife is a minor, a child who needs to be frightened into obedience by the threat of sanctions or withdrawal of privileges as this girl portrays.

“Then the man can frighten her and tell her that if she does not take care he will beat her”

“...that he will beat her and he should get close and insult her then she will be frightened”

“No he should not beat her but he should frighten her”

Adolescents in the study feel that husbands’ are under no compulsion to ask their wives’ views on important matters. A considerate and responsible man will, however, “inform” his wife, or “discuss” his plans with her as one boy denotes.

“You are telling her because you being the man she cannot tell you what to do.”

Further, although this same boy feels that it is proper for the man to show respect towards someone with whom you have a relationship about a decision, he also feels that the man has the upper hand and the woman cannot prevent him from doing what he sets out to do, or mete out any punishment. Indeed, the mere fact that a man tells his partner about a decision he has taken should be taken by her as a sign of his respect for her, thus she is not expected to question the decision but to acknowledge it (gratefully).

To recap three areas of domestic work that boys no longer partake in emerge as being Important markers of the transition to manhood: cooking (and kitchen work such as washing dishes); doing laundry; and sweeping. Most of the boys are very clear that kitchen work is a female preserve and their absence from this activity marks them as not female; Boy responses show evidence of beginning to form notions and expectations of masculinity

around household tasks that differentiate them from girls, tasks, many of which they had been required to perform a few years earlier. Respondents asserted the man's position as opposed to woman as the head of the household, and therefore as the one responsible for major decision making regarding child birth, contraceptive use and safe sex. The boys in our study evidence different meanings they attach to manhood, and they also differ in the extent to which they reflect hegemonic masculinities.

What seems clearest to them is that there are clear gender differences in gender identity according to household tasks as one moves from boyhood to manhood, especially as a married man. Typical female chores such as cooking, cleaning and laundry must be forsaken, or only performed to "help" out, or if one is single. The boys also seem to recognise that masculinity (being a man) is something to be achieved and that must be won and defended. The ascribed being a man to being a provider for wife and children, and having authority over his nuclear family.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The adolescents in our study have shown evidence of differences in gender roles as a result of traditions and norms passed down the generations through socializations in their homes and communities. It is evident adolescents differ in the extent to which they reflect differences in gender responsibilities, sexuality and power dynamics. What comes clear from results shared is that there are clear gender differences in gender identity and responsibility when it comes to household tasks, sexuality, the practice of safe sex and power dynamics. It was noted that typical female chores such as cooking, cleaning and laundry must be forsaken, by males or only performed to "help" out, or if one is single, or if he has to cook for himself or if the woman in the household is indisposed.

We learned from the adolescents that, the responsibilities of being male in a marital relationship include being a provider for wife and children, and authority over his nuclear family. This authority comes; it seems, not only from the mere fact of being a man, but also from the bride wealth payments that are paid at marriage. It is clear that adolescents in the study perceive differences in power, and that the boys recognise that men have more power and authority than women.

The way adolescents viewed risk and also the way they are socialized to become adults in society need particular attention. Working with adults to understand, and change their behaviors and attitudes has a strong potential to minimize problems brought about by the excesses of traditions and socio-cultural norms. It is time for adults to challenge harmful concepts of traditions and socio-cultural norms. Commonly held attitudes and views of men and boys that harm the welfare of girls and women, as well as other males should be earmarked for change. Adolescents need to be "captured" and socialized appropriately at an early age.

There are many windows of opportunity that can be exploited to socialize adolescents in ways that diffuse the harmful notions of traditions and socio-cultural norms and help them transform their understanding of these traditions and socio-cultural norms into a responsible adulthood. These windows of opportunity where adolescents can learn to unlearn certain attitudes and behaviors could include youth camps, church groups, boys and girls clubs, and even apprenticeships. Formal education should involve the modification or improvement of existing curricular to include topics on harmful traditions and socio-cultural norms, masculinity, gender roles, attitude formation, behaviors and socialization of boys and girls and problems associated with such formations in the real world.

The Ghanaian Ministries of Education, Food and Agriculture, Health, Youth and Sports as well as Youth Commissions and Agencies with interest in adolescent health and well being should advance an informal education strategy which could borrow from the 4-H model widely used by the Co-operative Extension Service of the United States and Colleges of Agriculture within the Land Grant Universities.

It is recommended that findings from this study be integrated with findings from other similar studies in Ghana into an intervention project leading to the development of a curriculum that will emphasize the importance of empowerment of females and respect from males as essential civic and democratic value to challenge the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Educational importance, implications and applications

Results from the study are very relevant and important. It enables us to explore alternative ways by which extension education can be refocused to transform the youth. Windows of opportunity that can be used include spaces where boys and girls could be socialized appropriately while learning to unlearn certain attitudes and behaviors such as youth camps, church groups, boys clubs, and even apprenticeship and membership of civil societies.

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