

## **‘Are Men still Selling Garden-eggs?’: Reflections on a study on Paternal Childcare Among Teachers in Accra.**

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Extended Abstract:

Between 2004 and 2008 I conducted a study in Accra to explore (among other things) how teachers, who were in a form of conjugal relationship, were coping with pressures to do domestic work and childcare. This was within the context of men not being considered to be the sole providers for their families, and where many of their partners were educated and in formal, paid employment away from home, and where related female domestic helpers were scarcely available (see Kwansa 2012).

All male teachers in the 44 Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) in the five Circuits of the Ablekuma South Sub-Metro were enlisted to be part of a survey between October 2004 and May, 2005. In all 140 out of 162 questionnaires that were given out were received – a response rate of 87%. The questionnaire covered personal life history, including data on family of origin, education, travels, involvement in household tasks, marriage(s) and contraceptive use, and decision taking in the home. Since the study aimed at investigating the roles teachers played as husbands, fathers, and kinsmen, some special cases (19 in all) were selected for in-depth study and observation. These were cases of teachers who played significant roles in the lives of their children. A structured interview guide was used in this regard. The essence was to collect detailed information on the issues discussed earlier (especially on marriage and childcare activities for the children these teachers had ever had and those being cared for, and the mothers of all such children). In addition, the in-depth interview and case studies looked out for attitudes and behaviour of men as fathers in the conjugal family, and also relationship with kin.

After more than a decade, this paper reflects on the changes that have accrued in the lives of male teachers in the same schools studied earlier, regarding their domestic arrangements and childcare responsibilities. Twenty (20) in-depth interviews, conducted between 2015 and 2017 are used to augment the initial data.

As both data was analysed, it revealed the degree to which the teachers and their partners form a functionally discrete unit and the extent to which they share domestic responsibilities (including childcare), resources, and decision making, were assessed (see Oppong, 1981; 2005). The relative *openness* and *closure* of conjugal family functioning (degree of functional “nucleation” in several areas of activity) and the relative *jointness* or *segregation* of conjugal roles, were thus looked at. In addition, following earlier work by Herbst (1954) and Oppong (1981), modes of decision making were categorised as *syncratic* (teachers sharing their major decision-making with partners; *autonomous* (teachers making their own decisions separately, with very little

consultation); *teacher dominated* or *autocratic* (teachers making the majority of decisions), and *wife-dominated* (wife making the majority of decisions).

For domestic chores, the teachers who performed the chores jointly with their partners were comparatively more. This was mainly because more of the wives had less flexible work schedules that took them away from home much more than the teachers. The tasks that most of the men reported doing always, like the earlier study, were washing clothes, making beds and cleaning. Sweeping, washing sheets, setting the table, cleaning floors, making beds, cooking, and market shopping, in that order, were found to be tasks that most teachers did on occasions, such as when there is no other (female) person in the homes, unlike in the previous study when they did not do these at all. In both studies however, among the married teachers, the majority reported doing all these chores prior to their marriage; however, they currently help with these chores. Most of the teachers were of the opinion that, household responsibilities and tasks should be shared especially in families where both spouses work outside the house.

The society's perception of what a man (or husband for that matter), in both studies, greatly affected what a teacher would do in the family. Unlike the earlier study however, where most men (and even women) held on to the gender role stereotypes and found it out of the ordinary when there is a deviation, these gendered lines were more blurred in the current study. Another fact too was that when wives (partners) contributed substantially to the domestic budget, the more likely the husbands are to undertake more domestic chores. The majority of the teachers who performed quite a lot of household chores had their wives contributing significantly to the domestic budget in both studies. The case materials also suggested that most of those couples who share responsibility for domestic work, childcare, and other domestic activities are doing so because their customary alternative sources for assistance and support are absent because of convenience and financial purposes.

This paper thus shows that although the men varied considerably in their roles as fathers, husbands, and kinsmen, both in associated activities and how they allocated resources and in their expectations, the gender lines with regards to sharing domestic and childcare responsibilities are more blurred than it was ten years ago. Comparatively, only a few of the teachers still held on strictly to the 'traditional' role stereotypes. Thus the male teachers are seen as still "selling garden-eggs", that is being involved within the bounds of a stereotyped female roles of domestic work and childcare.

#### References:

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