

**PERCEPTIONS OF FAMILY LIFE: A STUDY OF
GHANAIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS.**

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Introduction

As the population in Ghana continues to grow, numerous familial trends have begun to change. Fertility rates have decreased. More adults are choosing to marry at later ages. Knowledge and use of contraception have increased. Perceptions of ideal family size have changed. The present study addresses some of these changes by examining the perceptions of the roles of children in families, perceptions of child rearing practices, and perceptions of husband-wife relationships in sample of 15 to 21 year old Ghanaian students.

With a population of nearly 18 million in 1996, Ghana is one of the most populous countries in Western Africa. Its population is expected to reach 27 million people by 2020 (Adlakha, 1996). The rapid population growth is attributed to high fertility and declining mortality. However, there are indications from recent surveys that the fertility rate may be declining (Ghana Fact Sheet, 1993). The life expectancy in 1996 was 54 years for males and 58 years for females.

In 1995, 37% of the population lived in rural areas and over half the population is projected to be urban by 2015 (United Nations, 1995). Improvements also have been made in literacy rates, from 30 percent in 1970 to 64 percent in 1995. However, the literacy rate for women continues to lag behind that of men, 53 percent for women and 76 percent for men in 1995 (Adlakha, 1996).

Of particular interest to researchers have been the areas of marriage, family, fertility and family planning in Ghana. Data from the 1993 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) indicate that for young people in Ghana between the ages of 15 – 19 years old, 10.5% were already married and another 9.6% were living together (Population Council, 1995). The median age for first marriage was 18.6 in 1993. However, women with 10+ years of schooling had a median age at marriage of 20.0 years (Martin, 1995).

Also in 1993, the mean number of children ever born to women who were currently age 40 – 49 was 6.2. The total fertility rate per woman in 1993 was 5.5, down from 6.4 in 1988 (Adlakha, 1996; Kirk and Pilet, 1998). Twenty-three percent of women age 20 – 29 reported giving birth by age 18. McDevitt (1996) gave Ghana a ranking of 56 (1 is highest) of countries with the highest rate of births per 1,000 women ages 15 – 19. The United States was ranked 88.

The Demographic and Health Survey also questioned respondents regarding their marital and fertility preferences. The mean ideal number of children among women 15 – 49 was 4.4 in 1993. For women age 15 – 19 the ideal number was 3.6, for women 20 – 24, 3.9, and women 25 – 29, 4.4 (Population Council, 1995). The ideal number of children increased with age, perhaps reflecting actual childbearing. Kirk and Pilet (1998) report that the desired family size among married women in Ghana decreased from 6.0 to 4.7 from the late 1970s to the 1990s. Martin (1995) reported the mean ideal number of children as 5.4. Less well-educated women desired more children than those with more education, from 6.3 for women with no schooling to 4.5 for those with 10+ years of schooling.

Data indicate that the fertility rates in Ghana are strongly influenced by residence and education. The Population Council (1995) reported that the total fertility rate for rural residents was 6.4 versus 4.0 for urban residents. Likewise, there were differences based on educational level. Women with no formal school had a total fertility rate of 6.7, those with primary education 6.1, middle school 4.7, and secondary school and above 2.9. A similar relationship is found between residence, education, and contraceptive use. "Urban married women are twice as likely (31%) to use contraception as rural married women" (Adlakha 1996, p. 2). Likewise, nearly one half of women with secondary or higher education used contraception compared with one out of ten women with no education. The number of married women with secondary or higher education is roughly 8 percent.

Entry into Marriage, Fertility, and Family Planning

Although most adults in Africa expect to marry (Gordon & Gordon, 1992), Ghana has experienced a number of marital changes in the last decades. There has been an increase in the number of individuals choosing to delay getting married until a later age. Age at marriage has been of particular interest to researchers because it is seen as the marker for transition to adulthood and the point at which certain options for education, employment, and other societal activities are foreclosed. It is also the beginning of regular exposure to the possibilities of pregnancy and childbearing (McDevitt, 1996). Adlakha (1991) has argued that age at marriage helps to explain differences in fertility both across populations and within individual populations over time. This impact is made in several ways. Delayed age at marriage directly affects fertility by reducing the number of years available for having children. Populations with later mean ages at first marriage tend to be more urbanized and to have higher

levels of educational attainment and contraceptive use. Later marriage also gives women the opportunity to complete their education, build employment skills and develop careers that compete with childbearing in marriage (McDevitt, 1996). According to the Ghana Fact Sheet (1993), 18.9 was the median age at first marriage for women between the ages of 20 and 49. That delay in marriage is expected to continue. It is predicted that by the year 2020, there will be 2,137 married females between the ages of 25 and 34 in Ghana compared to only 1,103 between the ages of 15 and 24 (Adlakha, 1996). Although the trend toward later marriage continues, teenage marriages also continue. In most Sub-Saharan countries, which includes Ghana, at least one out of every four females between the ages of 15 and 19 is married, and approximately 60% of females in these countries marry by the age of 20 (McDevitt, 1996). In recent developments, the Parliament in Ghana has concluded the second reading of the Children's Bill of Rights, with most members opposing the clause that allows for people under the age of 18 years to marry with parental consent (Ghana Review International, 1998). However, the Attorney General and Minister for Justice has argued that since basic education ends at age 15 years, he sees no reason why the education of a child should prevent children between the ages of 16 and 18 years from marrying with parental consent. The Bill is still under review.

Marriage in Africa can be either monogamous or polygamous. The majority of married women in Ghana (80%) are married under customary law which permits polygamous relationships (Salim, 1992). Although polygyny is often misunderstood in other cultures as an indication of women's low status, it is more accurately indicative of the importance of women to the economic well-being of the family (Gordon & Gordon, 1992). By having more than one wife, the family gains both her productive contributions (work) and her reproductive contribution (children), thus increasing family labour and allowing the family to accumulate wealth. Although women do not practice polyandry, their relationships follow the common pattern of early marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

In selecting a marriage partner, Africans tend to place more importance on non-emotional factors, such as desire to have children, than on emotional and affectionate feelings (Staples & Johnson, 1993). Both genders prefer mates who will place love for their children before their love for their spouses. Additionally, obedience is stated explicitly as an important aspect of love when selecting a potential marriage partner.

Fertility decisions are among the most important ones made by couples. Women generally do not perceive themselves as being in control of their reproduction. Instead, they perceive their husbands or older family members as being in control of it. As such, they tend to take a relatively passive role in making decisions about fertility as their husbands make those decisions (Weeks, 1996). If a wife fails to produce male children or if she has fecundity impairment, the husband may take a second wife (Kannae & Pendleton, 1994).

Fertility has been found to be influenced by education. That influence has been explained by Cochrane (1979) and United Nations (1987) as taking three paths. First, education dampens the demand for children in that it may affect ideas of desired family size and reduce the economic utility of children. Education has mixed effects in terms of family size. While staying in school longer delays entry into marriage in the absence of contraception, more education may have a positive effect on the number of children one has because more educated women are less likely to breast-feed and that do so for shorter duration. Also, education reduces barriers to the adoption of family planning, in terms of awareness and willingness to use contraception.

The same pattern holds for adolescent fertility. Most authorities report that "regardless of the absolute level of fertility among adolescents, the proportion of young women who have begun childbearing among those with secondary or higher education is only about 30% of that for women with no education" (McDevitt, 1996, p. 82).

Much of the childbearing by married and unmarried adolescents in Ghana can be explained in terms of unmet need. "Unmet need" refers to "women at risk of pregnancy who do not want additional children or want to postpone their next birth, but are not presently using any method of contraception" (McDevitt, 1996, p. 87). Recent international data suggest the existence of unmet need as attributable to sexually active unmarried teenagers who are not using any means of contraception. Data from seven African countries (Botswana, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Togo, Uganda and Zimbabwe) indicate that approximately only 16% of ever sexually active unmarried teenagers in these countries are currently using contraception. Only 8% are reported to use modern methods of contraception (McDevitt, 1996).

Ngom (1997) argues that the unmet need for family planning of men should be taken into account as well. He reports that in Ghana in 1993, 24% of married men who did not want to have more children were not using any modern contraceptive method. Because men play such an important, if not dominant, role in couples' fertility decisions. It is suggested by Ngom that satisfying men's unmet need for family planning may facilitate family planning efforts.

Financial and Household Responsibilities in Families

Although wealth may accumulate in families, wives often do not have a legal right to their husband's income for their children or for themselves (Gordon & Gordon, 1992). The wealth generally is shared with other wives and children. Property holdings and inheritance are organized around blood relationships rather than husband-wife relationships, and are often the property of the husband's family (Salim, 1992). Even at the death of the husband, only about two-thirds of his property is awarded to the widow and children. Although divorce is common, when it does occur, the husband's property is not necessarily awarded to the wife and children. Instead, it usu-

ally must be refunded to the relatives of the husband (Salim, 1992).

In 1988, the percentage of Ghanaian households formally headed by women had increased to 29% from 22% in 1960. Economic growth in Ghana since 1960, the prevalence of polygamy, and a family structure that is characterized by strong lineage ties and weak conjugal ties all contribute to the composition and management of households (Lloyd & Gage-Brandon, 1993).

According to Lloyd & Gage-Brandon (1993), households that are headed by females have fewer children and fewer adults. Approximately 50% of those households contain no other adults, whereas it is rare for male-headed households to be without any other adults. Individuals aged 15 years and older are considered to be adults. Female heads work an average of eight hours more per week than male heads and are responsible for twice as much of the household work than are men. Thus, while male heads have other adults with whom to share work and household maintenance responsibilities, female heads have primary responsibility for both. Domestic work is largely the responsibility of women. Lloyd & Gage-Brandon (1993) found that when men share residence with women, they spend approximately four and a half hours less per week in domestic work than men who do not share residence with women. On the other hand, when women share residence with men, their domestic work increases by one hour. Women spend an average of three to four hours per day on food preparation, cooking, and collecting water and firewood (Gordon & Gordon, 1992).

Data Collection

The data for this paper were obtained from a questionnaire survey on life skills and social attitudes that was conducted among first-year and second-year students in three Senior Secondary Schools (SSS) in Ghana during the summer of 1997. Two of the schools are in the Ashanti Region. Both schools are co-educational institutions (i.e., boys and girls schools). One of the schools is located in a large urban centre while the other is in a mid-size urban area, which is a District Administrative Centre. The third school is an all-female institution, located in an Administrative Centre in the Volta Region.

A total of 251 students from the SSS1 (equivalent to ninth-graders in the U.S.) and SSS2 (tenth-graders in the US) classes volunteered to participate in the study and completed a questionnaire that was administered by a teacher in each school who worked closely with the students. The administration of the questionnaires in each school was preceded by a meeting between the teacher in-charge and the student respondents. The students were responding to an open invitation for volunteers at a school assembly that announced the project in each school. At the meeting, the teacher informed the students about the project objectives and discussed the issue of informed consent. The students were given an opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification about any items they did not understand, as they completed the survey.

In each school, the survey was completed in two to three days. The students were brought together in one classroom and were instructed to independently complete the questionnaire. The average time for completing the questionnaire was 25 minutes.

Sample

The sample consisted of 251 students enrolled in secondary schools in Ghana. Table 1 indicates selected demographic characteristics of the sample. Forty-three percent (43%) of the students were enrolled at the SSS1 level and the other 57% were enrolled at the SSS2 level. Their ages ranged from 15 to 21 years with a mean age of 17.7 years.

Table 1
Selected Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

	Category	Percent
Age	15	1.2
	16	8.8
	17	33.9
	18	34.3
	19	16.3
	20+	5.6
Sex	Female	59.0
	Male	41.0
Class	SSS1	43.2
	SSS2	56.8
Father's Education	No Schooling	2.4

Some Elementary	2.0
Completed Elementary	19.9
Secondary/Technical School	24.8
Post Secondary Diploma	17.1
BA/BSc/LLB	12.2
Post Graduate Diploma	13.0
MA/MSc	4.1
Ph.D/Ed.D.	4.5
Mother's Education	
No Schooling	7.3
Some Elementary	11.4
Completed Elementary	26.4
Secondary/Technical School	31.7
Post Secondary Diploma	11.4
BA/BSc/LLB	4.9
Post Graduate Diploma	5.3
MA/MSc	1.6
Ph.D/Ed.D.	-
Residence	
Small town/village	8.6
Medium size town	34.3
Large urban Center	57.1

Household Composition

Parents and children only	70.4
Compound house with other relatives	16.3
Rented room/apt. with non-relatives	13.3

N = 251

The majority of the students (70.4%) reported their residence as a large urban center where they lived in households with their parents and siblings only. No other relative lived in the household. Sixteen percent (16.3%) lived in compound houses with other relatives and 13.3% lived in rented rooms or apartments with either other renters or non-relatives. Fathers of the students were more educated than their mothers. While 50.9% of the fathers had training beyond the secondary level only 2.3% of the mothers had such training. None of the mothers had doctorate training, but 4.6% of the fathers did.

Thirty percent (30%) of the fathers and 57.9% of the mothers were employed as skilled labourers, such as electrician, carpenter, driver, hairdresser, and trader. For fathers, other frequently reported occupations were agriculture (11%), educational administrator (11%), and professional (13%). For mothers, other frequently reported occupations were educator (11.7%), health care worker (6.1%) and businesswoman (5.3%). Interestingly, only three (1.2%) mothers were reported to be full-time housewives.

Results and Discussion

Number of Children Desired

The overwhelming majority of students in the sample expected to get married and have children. This finding is consistent with that of Gordon & Gordon (1992). As indicated in Tables 2 and 3, the mean number of children desired by respondents was 3.3. This figure is consistent with the 1995 Population Council data which state that the ideal number of children for 15 – 19 year olds is 3.6. There were few differences in the number of children desired between males and females, rural and urban residents, and the educational aspirations of the respondents. The small differences were however, in the expected direction with females, urban residents and those better educated appearing to desire fewer children.

Table 2

Number of children	Number of Children Desired		
	Female	Males	Both
N	(143)	(99)	(242)
1 – 2	25.2(36)	16.1(16)	21.5(52)
3 – 4	72.1(103)	75.8(75)	73.6(178)
5 – 6	2.8(4)	8.1(8)	5.0(12)
Mean	3.2	3.4	3.3

Table 3

Mean Number of Children Desired by Sex, Residence, and Educational Aspirations

Sex (N = 251)	
Females	3.2
Males	3.4
Residence (N = 245)	
Small town/village	3.4
Medium size town	3.3
Large urban centre	3.2
Educational Aspiration (N = 230)	
Some Elementary	3.0
Secondary Technical	3.4
Post secondary Diploma	3.5
BA/BSc/LLB	3.2
Post Graduate Diploma	3.4

MA/MSc	3.3
Ph.D/EdD/MD	3.2
Entire Sample	3.3

Perceptions of the Role of Children

Respondents were asked to respond to five statements relative to the role of children in families. They were asked to indicate whether they strongly agreed, were uncertain, or strongly disagreed with the statements. As Table 4 indicates, a majority (77%) of both males and females, with slightly more females agreeing than males, that children make a positive contribution to marriage in that they make the marriage complete. Equal numbers of males and females (84%) believed that children bring pride and joy to their parents. The responses were more mixed to the statement, "Children have become expensive and unnecessary these days." Twenty percent of the females and 13% of the males strongly agreed with the statement. Slightly over 40% of both males and females strongly disagreed but over a third of both males and females were uncertain.

Table 4

Perceptions of the roles of Children

Category	Female	Males	Both
They make a marriage complete (N=240)			
Strongly agree	80.0(112)	73.0(73)	77.1(185)
Uncertain	16.4(23)	21.0(21)	18.3(44)
Strongly disagree	3.6(5)	6.0(6)	4.6(11)
They bring joy/pride to parents (N=238)			
Strongly agree	84.3(118)	84.7(83)	84.5(201)
Uncertain	15.0(21)	15.3(15)	15.6(36)
Strongly disagree	0.7(1)	-	0.7(1)
The more children there are, the more respect Parents have (N=238)			
Strongly agree	19.6(27)	15.0(15)	17.6(42)
Uncertain	41.3(57)	47.0(47)	43.7(104)
Strongly disagree	39.1(54)	38.0(38)	38.7(92)

They must serve their parents (run errands, Clean the house, etc.) while they are young (N=241)

Strongly agree	77.9(109)	82.2(83)	79.7(192)
Uncertain	15.0(21)	16.8(17)	15.8(38)
Strongly disagree	7.1(10)	1.0(1)	4.6(11)

They must provide economic and financial Support in parents old age (N=235)

Strongly agree	83.1(113)	74.7(74)	79.6(187)
Uncertain	10.3(14)	15.2(15)	12.3(10)
Strongly disagree	6.6(9)	10.1(10)	8.1(19)

Children have become expensive and Unnecessary these days (N=235)

Strongly agree	19.9(27)	13.1(13)	17.0(40)
Uncertain	36.0(49)	44.4(44)	39.6(93)
Strongly disagree	44.1(60)	42.1(42)	43.4(102)

Some researchers have indicated that children are valuable to their parents because of their potential productivity as workers or helpers and as a source of assistance when the parents become elderly. Approximately 80% of the respondents strongly agreed with the expectation that children should "serve their parents (run errands, clean the house, etc.) while they are young." While 7% of the females strongly disagreed with this expectation, only 1% of the males did so. The respondents also overwhelmingly (80%) supported the statement that children must provide financial support to parents in their old age.

Perceptions of Child rearing

Respondents also were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with several statements regarding child rearing. As indicated in Table 5, more than 90% of the respondents agreed with the statement that couples who do not have the means to provide for children should limit the number of children that they have. There was far less agreement on the statement "Parents spoil their children when the children are allowed to set their own goals and do things of personal interest." Almost a third of the respondents selected each of the three choices. Males (45%) were more likely to indicate strong agreement with the statement than were females (36%).

Table 5

Perceptions of Child rearing Practices

Category	Females	Males	Both
Parents spoil their children when the children are allowed To set their own goals and do things of personal interest. (N=238)			
Strongly agree	36.2(50)	45.0(45)	39.9(95)
Uncertain	27.5(38)	29.0(29)	28.2(67)
Strongly disagree	36.2(50)	26.0(26)	31.9(76)
Parents can use whipping and beating as appropriate Punishment in disciplining children. (N=240)			
Strongly agree	7.9(11)	13.0(13)	10.0(24)
Uncertain	39.3(55)	43.0(43)	40.8(98)
Strongly disagree	52.9(74)	44.0(44)	49.2(118)
Parents may starve their children by denying them food as An appropriate punishment. (N=240)			
Strongly agree	8.5(12)	8.1(8)	8.3(20)
Uncertain	9.9(14)	12.1(12)	10.8(26)
Strongly disagree	81.6(115)	79.8(79)	80.8(194)
Parents must use whatever means possible to make their Children obedient and respectful to them. (N=240)			
Strongly agree	80.0(112)	81.0(81)	80.4(192)
Uncertain	12.1(17)	16.0(16)	13.8(33)
Strongly disagree	7.9(11)	3.0(3)	5.8(14)
A couple must limit the number of children they will have If they do not have the means to look after them. (N=237)			
Strongly agree	94.9(131)	89.9(89)	92.8(220)
Uncertain	3.6(5)	6.1(6)	4.6(11)
Strongly disagree	1.4(2)	4.0(4)	2.5(6)

In reference to handling children in the household, while 80% of the respondents agreed that parents should "use whatever means necessary" to secure obedience and

respect, there was less support for severe punishment. Nearly 90% of the respondents disapproved of denying food as punishment and roughly half were opposed to "whipping" and "beating" as appropriate punishments. Males (13%) were slightly more supportive of corporal punishment than were females (7.9%).

Decision to Marry

The majority of respondents expressed a strong interest in marrying and starting their own family. Ninety-one percent (90.5%) of females and 87% of males indicated that they definitely plan to marry and start a family of their own. Only 2.4% indicated that they did not plan to marry and start a family. Eight percent were uncertain if they would marry. These results are presented in Table 6. These findings suggest an appreciation for the value of family as is customary in Ghana and a strong desire to continue with it. As Gordon & Gordon (1992) have stated, most adults expect to marry.

Table 6

Decision to Marry

Category	Females	Males	Both
Do you plan to marry and start own family? (N=249)			
Yes, definitely	90.5(133)	87.3(89)	89.2(222)
Uncertain	7.5(11)	9.8(10)	8.4(21)
No	2.0(03)	2.9(03)	2.4(6)
Age you expect to get married? (N=248)			
17 - 20	5.4(08)	1.0(01)	3.6(09)
23 - 25	63.3(93)	21.8(22)	46.4(115)
26 - 30	23.8(35)	53.5(54)	35.9(89)
31 - 36	4.1(06)	14.9(15)	8.5(21)
38 & Older	-	5.0(05)	2.0(05)
Expected age of your partner at time of marriage? (N=251)			
18 - 21	2.0(03)	16.5(17)	8.0(20)
22 - 25	8.8(13)	53.4(55)	27.1(68)
26 - 30	68.2(101)	24.3(25)	50.2(126)
31 - 35	13.5(20)	1.0(01)	8.4(21)
38 & Older	4.1(06)	-	2.4(06)

The age at which respondents expect to marry is consistent with the trend of delaying marriage until a later age. Only 3.6% stated that they expected to marry prior to the age of 20 years. Forty-six percent (46%) (63.3% females and 21.8% males) expect to marry between the ages of 22 and 25 years. Thirty-six percent (35.9%) (23.8% females and 53.5% males) expect to marry between the ages of 26 and 30 years (See Table 6).

In considering a marriage partner, half of the respondents (50%) (68.2% females and 24.3% males) expect him/her to be between the ages of 26 and 30 years. Twenty-seven percent (27%) (8.8% females and 53.4% males) expect the partner to be between the ages of 22 and 25 years. Only 8% (2.0% females and 16.5% males) expect their marriage partner to be younger than 22 years of age (See Table 6).

Expectations about the age at which one marries and the age of one's marital partner were significantly related to sex of respondents. These findings suggest that not only do respondents expect to marry later but that they also expect their partners to marry at a later age.

Perceptions of Primary Duties of Husbands and Wives

Means for questions assessing perceptions of primary duties of husbands and wives are presented in Table 7. When asked if the wife must do all of the housework, 39% of the females and 32% of the males strongly agreed. 30.8% of females and 43% of males were uncertain. Only 8.6% of the females and 5% of the males agreed that the wife must always stay at home to take care of the children instead of going to work. These findings reflect those of Lloyd and Gage-Brandon (1993) in that women have primary (but not total) responsibility for domestic household work while at the same time maintaining employment outside of the home. These dual responsibilities of the women are necessary in order to help take care of and provide for the family. The woman's employment outside of the home is of added importance because in polygamous relationships, the husband's earnings are shared with the other wife and children (Gordon & Gordon, 1992). Furthermore, wives generally do not have a legal right to their husband's income for themselves or for their children. The majority (53.3%) of the respondents in this study, however, agreed that the husband must always be able to provide all the financial needs of his wife and children. Only 9% disagreed. This discrepancy may reflect respondents' dissatisfaction with the way financial situations in the family actually are and a desire to see a change.

Table 7
Perceptions of the primary duties of husbands and wives

Category	Females	Males	Both
Wife must do all the housework (N=243)			
Strongly agree	39.2(56)	32.0(32)	36.2(88)
Uncertain	30.8(44)	43.0(43)	35.8(87)
Strongly disagree	30.1(43)	25.0(25)	28.0(68)
Wife must always obey husband (N=238)			
Strongly agree	55.1(76)	67.0(67)	60.1(143)
Uncertain	31.2(43)	30.0(30)	30.7(73)
Strongly disagree	13.8(19)	3.0(03)	9.2(22)
Wife must stay home to care for children (N=240)			
Strongly agree	8.6(12)	5.0(05)	7.1(17)
Uncertain	22.9(32)	33.0(33)	27.1(65)
Strongly disagree	68.6(96)	62.0(62)	65.8(158)
Wife must bear child when husband wants (N=241)			
Strongly agree	9.2(13)	32.0(32)	18.7(45)
Uncertain	24.8(35)	29.0(29)	26.6(64)
Strongly disagree	66.0(93)	39.0(39)	54.8(132)
Husband may beat wife when she misbehaves (N=236)			
Strongly agree	5.9(08)	9.0(09)	7.2(17)
Uncertain	14.0(19)	15.0(15)	14.4(34)
Strongly disagree	80.1(109)	76.0(76)	78.4(185)
Husband may divorce wife if she cannot bear children For him (N=237)			
Strongly agree	8.7(12)	17.2(17)	12.2(29)
Uncertain	23.9(33)	25.0(25)	17.9(43)
Strongly disagree	67.4(93)	53.5(53)	61.6(146)

Husband can have extra-marital affair but wife should not
(N=240)

Strongly agree	8.6(12)	13.0(13)	10.4(25)
Uncertain	12.9(18)	25.0(25)	17.9(43)
Strongly disagree	78.6(110)	62.0(62)	71.7(172)

Husband must provide all financial needs for his wife and Children (N=244)

Strongly agree	58.3(84)	46.0(46)	53.3(130)
Uncertain	34.7(50)	42.2(42)	37.7(92)
Strongly disagree	6.9(10)	12.0(12)	9.0(22)

In response to questions about childbearing, sex of respondents was significantly related to perceptions about wives being required to bear children whenever the husband desired, even against her own wishes. Thirty-two percent (32%) of the males, but only 9.2% of the females agreed that the wife must bear children whenever the husband desired. Sixty-six percent (66%) of the females disagreed, while only 39% of the males disagreed. Yet, when asked if the wife must always obey the husband and do whatever he says, 60.1% (55.1% female and 67%) agreed. Thirty-one percent were uncertain, while only 9% disagreed. When asked if a husband may divorce his wife if she cannot bear children for him, only 12.2% of the respondents agreed, while 61.6% disagreed. These findings are particularly interesting given that husbands generally make decisions about fertility in the marriage and frequently take a second wife if the first one is unable to bear children.

When asked if the husband can have an extra-marital affair but not the wife, 71.7% (78.6% female and 62% male) disagreed, while 10.4% agreed. Similarly, 78.4% of the respondents disagreed that the husband may beat his wife when she misbehaves. Only 7.2% agreed. These findings appear to suggest that respondents believe that wives should be treated with a certain level of respect.

Conclusions

The results of this study examining the perceptions of family issues held by high school students suggest that a number of the current trends of change in Ghana are likely to continue. In particular, they suggest that adults will continue to marry at later ages and that they will have fewer children than their parents may have had. As these changes are likely to continue, the importance of family remains evident as most respondents express a strong desire to marry and have children.

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