

FAMILY RESOURCES AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH OF GIRLS: A FOCUS ON MONEY AND *TUGBEWOWO*: PUBERTY RITES AMONG THE DODOME EWES

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Abstract

There has been considerable concern about the reproductive health status of girls in Ghana in recent years due to the increase in premarital sexual activities amongst the youth, socio-economic implications of teenage pregnancy and illegal abortions. The major objective of this paper is to throw some light on how proper use of family resources could help resolve the problem. All families have certain resources such as money, time, energy, skills of members, and some community resources like schools and traditional society's puberty rites. However, most families do not have access to enough money to meet all the needs of all family members. Traditionally, resources are shared without due regard to needs of individual members, but rather using gender and age as yardsticks with the resultant inequalities in access; with men always getting more than their fair share and women and children not getting enough. It is important that parents make every effort to provide the needs of their children especially the girls, so that they do not accept money from men who in turn ask for sexual favours. In traditional societies in the past, specific rites were instituted to safeguard the reproductive health of the members. Examples of these rites were puberty rites. In Dodome, the puberty rite for girls is called *Tugbewowo* but it has been suspended for some years now. As part of these rites, girls are supposed to remain virgins till after the rites are performed. They are taught the arts of womanhood, motherhood etc. and are prepared to take their places as women in society. Modernization has eroded most of these resources that prepared girls to become effective members of society, producing teenage single parents. The rites served as an incentive for mothers to constantly remind their daughters of society's expectations of them and thus they preserved their chastity. That is no longer the case. An exploratory study in Dodome revealed that the majority would like *tugbewowo* to be reintroduced. It is recommended that (1) families be empowered financially to be able to meet needs of members (2) that a detailed study be carried out into *tugbewowo* with the aim of understanding and modernizing the rites for reintroduction in Dodome and the Ho district as a whole. It is concluded that the time has come to seek African solutions to African problems and end the adoption of Western values.

Introduction

There has been considerable concern about the reproductive health of women and girls in Ghana in recent years. This is due mainly to the serious nature of reproductive health problems such as sexually transmitted diseases, unintended pregnancies and complications from childbirth especially of teenage mothers. Ghana like many other developing countries faces serious reproductive health problems and it has been realized that it is only through well coordinated efforts and a willingness to invest huge resources in these efforts that the problems can be solved. (Ashford 1997).

Observations and researches have revealed an alarming increase in pre-marital sex among the youth. It has also been realized that the reproductive health of many women and girls is quite poor. The high incidence of sexual activity amongst unmarried adolescents and young

adults in Ghana is quite widespread, resulting in unintended pregnancies and illegal abortions. (Adjei, Biritwum, Ashitey and Hill 2002)

Teenage pregnancies are on the increase in Dodome and in many rural areas in the Ho District. This is of great concern to parents and extended family. After the Junior Secondary School Examinations, many of the teenage girls have no opportunities for advancement and thus end up pregnant within a year or two. Only a few girls are able to continue to the Senior Secondary School because parents are too poor to send the girls for further education or due to some other reasons. A few of them decide to go and stay in the cities and they invariably learn a trade and postpone sexual activity and therefore pregnancy. The results of the 1998 Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (Ghana Statistical Survey 1999), revealed an increase in the median age at first birth from 20 years in 1993 to 21 years in 1998 on the national level (See Table 1). This is not the case from observations in Dodome. The situation is rather getting out of hand with very young girls getting pregnant these days. Education however has the same effect in Dodome and the Ho District in general as on the national level by compelling the girls to postpone sexual activity and thus pregnancy at an early age (Table 2). It could be said that pursuing further studies or apprenticeship provides girls with a clear objective and something to look forward to, and therefore sexual activity becomes secondary and unnecessary. It is therefore imperative on parents to plan the use of their resources so that provision is made for higher education of the girls to increase their chances of a better life in future.

Table 1 Age at First Birth

Percent distribution of women 15-49 by age at first birth, according to current age, Ghana 1998										
Current age	Women with no births	Age at first birth						Total	Number of women	Median age at first birth
		<15	15-17	18-19	20-21	22-24	25+			
15-19	88.3	0.3	7.2	4.2	NA	NA	NA	100.0	910	a
20-24	39.2	2.0	17.9	20.7	14.8	5.5	NA	100.0	900	a
25-29	17.6	2.6	18.8	19.4	18.9	14.9	7.8	100.0	867	20.9
30-34	6.1	5.2	21.3	23.1	16.9	15.7	11.7	100.0	653	20.0
35-39	3.2	3.4	20.9	20.9	19.4	17.5	13.8	100.0	625	20.4
40-44	1.1	4.5	23.8	22.4	19.4	16.3	12.6	100.0	473	19.9
45-49	2.5	4.0	25.9	22.0	15.5	14.6	15.6	100.0	415	19.8
NA = Not Applicable										
The medians for cohorts 15-19 could not be determined because half of the women had not had a birth before reaching the lowest age 0 the age group.										

Source: Ghana Statistical Survey 1999: 35

Adolescent pregnancies may lead to school drop-out among girls, while the boys responsible are not affected in any way. This may result in shattered dreams, limited career opportunities, increased health risk from complications and several other negative effects for the girls. The general decline in traditional norms and practices that prevented pre-marital pregnancies is a contributing factor to this state of affairs. Research has also revealed that children born to very young mothers are at an increased risk of illness and death (Ghana Statistical Service 1999). The national figure for teenage pregnancies is about 14% for 15 year olds and 32% for 19 years while the situation in Dodome is much worse than that (Table 2).

Table 2 Median age at first birth by background characteristics

Median age at first birth among women 25-49, by current age and selected background characteristics, Ghana 1998						
Background Characteristics	Current age				Women age	
	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	25-29
Residence						
Urban	22.8	20.9	20.7	20.2	20.4	21.0
Rural	20.4	19.6	20.2	19.8	19.6	20.0
Region						
Western	20.2	19.5	19.1	18.7	21.0	19.7
Central	21.2	18.8	20.4	19.7	20.2	20.0
Greater Accra	24.5	21.8	21.1	21.6	20.9	22.0
Volta	20.9	19.9	21.1	20.0	19.3	20.4
Eastern	20.2	20.2	20.6	19.5	18.3	20.0
Ashanti	20.8	19.7	19.6	19.1	19.9	19.9
Brong Ahafo	20.0	19.7	19.7	19.5	18.5	19.6
Northern	20.6	19.9	20.4	20.4	19.6	20.2
Upper West	20.6	21.3	21.4	21.1	21.0	21.2
Upper East	20.4	19.4	20.8	21.5	23.4	20.8
Education						
No education	19.6	19.7	19.8	20.2	19.6	19.7
Primary	20.2	19.6	20.5	20.1	19.4	20.0
Middle/JSS	21.6	19.8	20.2	19.4	19.6	20.3
Secondary+	a	24.6	23.9	23.3	24.2	24.9
Total	20.9	20.0	20.4	19.9	19.8	20.3

Note: The medians for cohorts 15-19 and 20-24 could not be determined because half of the women had not had a birth before reaching the lowest age of the age group.
Medians were calculated for this cohort because less than 50 percent of women in the age group 25-29 in this category had a birth by age 25.

Girls grow up in families and the adolescent girl belongs to a family. It is therefore important that in discussions on reproductive health, attention be paid to the part that the family as a whole must play. Often, the emphasis is on the adolescents without placing them in the context of the family and therefore, the interventions that are implemented address only part of the problem. It is time to start looking at the problem from a holistic point of view with the family as the focal point. It is only then that we can hope to make any meaningful impact.

In every family, it is the responsibility of parents to provide the needs of the children and to guide the development of the members. Families use whatever resources that are available to them to meet the needs of the family and for the development of members. It is important therefore that family members, especially the parents be able to identify all the resources available to them and be able to allocate and use these resources efficiently for effective development of the young ones. Some family resources are money, time, energy, house space and abilities of members. In many homes, money is a limited resource and the general socio-economic conditions in the country make it difficult for many families to satisfy the needs of all members of the family. (Nickell, Rice and Tucker 1976).

Families need to accept this limitation and take sound decisions regarding the use of money so that the basic needs of the adolescent/teenage girls are met. Otherwise, they will fall prey to men who will offer them money and then turn round and demand sexual favours in return. Many unsuspecting young girls are victims of this kind of situation, especially in the big towns and cities. Parents must therefore provide the needs of their wards and must give them enough guidance to protect them against these evil men. The family's money must be used on those members who need it most and not necessarily by mother or father even though they earn the money. The needs of all children are paramount.

In the past our ancestors instituted certain rites and practices that safeguarded the sexual health of the members of the society. These informal institutions known as puberty rites were resources which the families utilized to guide and direct their young ones in order to protect the reproductive health of the members. However, modernization has eroded most of these practices and has exposed young girls to a lot of risk. One such resource was *Tugbewowo* in Dodome. This has been suspended and there is an urgent need to revive it for the benefit of the whole society because, as noted by Adjei, Biritwum et al. (2002), the high incidence of sexual activity amongst unmarried adolescents and young adults in Ghana can be attributed largely to a general decline in traditional norms that prevented premarital pregnancies and partly to development and westernization. This paper therefore discusses *Tugbewowo*, the puberty rites of the people of Dodome with the view that something could be done to revive it and similar practices all over Ghana to contribute to the creation of a healthier society. Government must be willing to invest resources in this endeavor for the benefit of future generations.

Puberty rites mark the transition of girls into women and are a normal life event for most traditional societies. These ceremonies, marking this important stage in the life of an individual are sacred and very important indeed. They come with many social and spiritual obligations and roles (Gaibole 2002). Their main purpose is to instruct the young girl, in her new adult responsibilities, to confer on her, adult privileges and to celebrate the occasion with festivities. In many societies, puberty rites for girls are more common and different from those for boys, but in most Ghanaian societies they are for girls only. There are usually three to four elements involved in puberty rites and these are (1) Separation from the larger societies (2) Preparation and instruction by the elders (3) A transition phase (4) A welcoming or acceptance phase marked by celebrations (Elam 1998).

Puberty rites for girls have survived in several societies around the world in spite of the so-called modernization of the world. Even in societies where Christianity has taken roots, puberty rites still serve a purpose. A few examples are:-

- 1) The Tupinamtu girls puberty rites of the Tupinamba and the Urubu-Kaapor people, both of Brazil, have survived the years in spite of modernization and the influence of the Portuguese. Many aspects of the rites have changed or have been modified but the rites still teach the young woman the skills needed for housekeeping and other responsibilities of a woman (Kakumasu 2002).
- 2) The *Iria* of the Okrika tribe of the River State of Southern Nigeria which is performed when the girl reaches a mature age, about 17 years (Elam 1998).
- 3) The *Na'ii'ees* – The Sunrise Dance is the puberty ceremony of the traditional Western Apache which occurs soon after a girl has gone through menarche. She is initiated alone (Elam, 1998)
- 4) The *Dipo* of the Krobo ethnic group of Ghana and
- 5) The *Bragoro* of the Ashantis also of Ghana. (Osei-Adu, 2002).

Hopefully, *Tugbewowo* of the Dodome Ewes can be added to this list in the near future.

In the past, there were various types of puberty rites or "rites of passage" which marked the transition of girls and boys into women and men in different parts of Ghana. These rites varied slightly from one ethnic group to another and from one region to the other, but they had the same objectives: to transfer the status of woman and man to the hitherto little girl and boy and to protect their sexuality. Further, there were rules and regulations, sometimes taboos, regarding these rites. For example, in Dodome, before a girl child went through these rites known as *tugbewowo*, she must not have had sexual intercourse with any man. If a girl went contrary to this, there were sanctions. The nature of the sanctions was such that majority of girls would want to have nothing to do with them. Therefore they "took very good care of themselves". Unfortunately, many ethnic groups in Ghana today, do not pay much attention to these puberty rites.

The main objectives of this paper therefore are (1) to bring out the relevance of *tugbewowo* to our modern society (2) to show that it can contribute tremendously to a sound enviable reproductive health status in women and (3) to make a case for its reintroduction in Dodome in particular and the whole of the Ho district in general. Dodome traditional area is in the Ho district, of the Volta Region.

Tugbewowo: the Process

Tugbewowo is the name of the rites that initiated teenage girls into womanhood in Dodome and indeed the entire Ho district in the past. Many communities stopped the practice decades ago but it was continued in Dodome until the early nineteen eighties. Nobody is able to state precise reasons for the present state of affairs and the elders say that the practice it has not been stopped but, only suspended. But for how long and why? Nobody has the answers to these questions.

Like puberty rites all over the world, *tugbewowo* involves at least three of the four elements usually mentioned in relation to puberty rites as (1) Preparation and instruction by older members of the family (2) A transition phase and (3) A welcoming phase where the initiated is now accepted as a woman. There is however, no clear-cut separation from society during *tugbewowo* in Dodome (Elam 1998).

The word *Tugbewowo* literally means the "Celebration of Beauty". Indeed at the age of puberty, girls are at the climax of their beauty and those who comport themselves well and live morally upright lives really deserve a celebration of this beauty and their transition into womanhood. The whole village joins in the celebration – one old lady compares it with the certificate that those who study hard at the Junior Secondary School get after their Basic Education Certificate Examinations. "Those who work hard get distinction: *Tugbewowo* is the distinction for a girl who has comported herself well and has reached the stage where the whole community proclaims her a woman; no more a small girl" and she is accepted into the women's fold.

Tugbewowo is a word that reminded every mother of a female child or children that she had an important obligation towards society and warned every young girl that she needed to stay "far away" from a man's bed until the time was right and she had gone through these rites. It was a rite that both mother and adolescent girl looked forward to with mixed emotions of joy, anxiety and a little fear on the part of the mother. There is fear on the part of the mother because if her daughter should disappoint her, if she should have an affair with any man and get pregnant, then she would bring a lot of shame and disgrace to the family and dishonour to herself. Then all her cautions, advice, teachings and toils would have been in vain. It was a word that helped every girl from Dodome become strong and able to fight all the advances of the men. The author herself went through it and testifies to its effectiveness.

At the onset of the initiation rites, the girl is given lessons on womanhood, motherhood, and how to be a good wife and mother. As soon as a girl is old enough to understand the concept, which is from about age seven years, she is given little doses of information at the appropriate time about *tugbewowo*, so that by age nine, a girl is fully aware of these rites and knows the expectations of society of her. She must remain a virgin till it is done and therefore she must comport herself well and behave as a good and decent girl. The mother seized whatever opportunities that came her way to talk to her about the importance of keeping away from men. Sometimes, the mother and father would call the young girl at dawn, and tell her all about *tugbewowo* and the shame and disgrace that would come on her and the whole family if she should get pregnant before it is done. As soon as the breasts begin to enlarge, the aunts and grandmothers seize every opportunity to tell her about the need to keep herself away from men. They say, for example, "young girl, very soon you will have your period and you will become a woman. Be informed that in this family (extended family), nobody has ever become pregnant before the initiation rites, and make sure you are not the first. We do not want any shame and disgrace, not to talk of the humiliation you will subject yourself to", etc. etc. The burden on the girl is also quite heavy but it helps the girl to "take good care" of herself.

Indeed, these puberty rites used to be performed for young girls in all the traditional areas of the Ho District and beyond. However, for many years the practice was allowed to die out in many areas. It was only in Dodome that this practice continued until the early nineteen eighties when a supposed misunderstanding between some elderly women and elders of the Dodome traditional area, resulted in its suspension up to date. Since then, the lives of many promising girls have been sacrificed on the altar of men who use their authority to have premarital sex with the girls. This is because, the girls at the moment have no weapons to fight with. In the past, the clause, *Wome wo tugbe nam o* which means, "I have not gone through the *tugbewowo* rites yet" was enough to cool the most aggressive seducer! Why should we take this effective tool away from the girl child?

During the rites, the mother presented the girl with presents such as clothing, beads, gold jewellery, cooking utensils and other items that will enable the girl to start life as a woman. The father was not obliged to give anything in particular, so he could give whatever he wanted. This was usually new clothes and money. The father also provided the drinks needed for the occasion. All the women from the whole family; the extended family, gave gifts that may range from beads, scarves to household equipment. All adults in the village are expected to present gifts and this was usually in the form of money.

Many people believe that, like many other traditional practices, the cares of today's world with its difficult socio-economic conditions and poverty are to blame for the neglect of *tugbewowo*. After all, the gains of *tugbewowo* are not immediately visible. Meanwhile, "man" must eat and survive. Secondly, some believe that the so called Christians who condemned everything Ghanaian have succeeded in creating confusion in the minds of the people, so that they are not sure whether it is right or wrong to be part of many indigenous ceremonies including *tugbewowo*. If this second argument is true, or even partially true, then there is a need to help the people distinguish between good and bad traditional practices. We have many rich and useful traditional practices in Ghana and efforts must be made to modernize and preserve the beneficial ones, while the destructive ones are discarded.

Tugbewowo is definitely one of the few positive traditional practices which must be studied carefully, modified to suit modern situations and promoted, so that it will come alive again and protect young girls. When it is re-introduced, life in the rural areas in particular will improve and it will help preserve the chastity of young girls and protect them from teenage pregnancy, unwanted babies, risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and becoming mothers when they are still children themselves and not ready for motherhood.

Objectives of *Tugbewowo*

The major objective of *Tugbewowo* is to initiate girls into womanhood and to confer on girls all the advantages and responsibilities of being a woman. After this initiation, the individual is able to join women at gatherings and is expected to sit with the women and no more with the children at all functions. The way she dresses is changed completely from, for example, wearing a single cloth to wearing a double one and she must cover her head always. She is also ready for marriage and a prospective suitor can set in motion the steps and processes that would make her his wife.

An important aspect of *tugbewowo* is the lessons that the young girls are given in the art of being a woman, a wife and a mother. All her obligations and responsibilities to herself, her family and society are explained to her and she is taught personal hygiene including how to keep herself when she is in her menstrual period.

Advantages of *Tugbewowo*

The advantages of *tugbewowo* are numerous and some are discussed here.

- There were lessons on personal hygiene, housekeeping and how to be a good hostess.
- The girls enjoyed a lot of praises and kind words from the elderly women during the initiation rites and since there are not many occasions for this, it boosted the girls' image and gave her courage to face the unknown world.
- The expectations of *tugbewowo* gave the girl enough incentives to be determined to wait till marriage or at least after *tugbewowo* to indulge in sexual intercourse. Therefore, the incidence of teenage pregnancies was extremely low. Almost all girls got married first before they got pregnant.
- All pregnant women had husbands who were responsible for and took care of them and the children. There were no neglected mother and child as we see today.
- The problem of single-parenting and its attendant sufferings was not a burden on society. The rare occurrences were absorbed into their own families. However, the economic problems of today coupled with the numbers have made this impossible.
- Gifts bestowed in the girl by the parents and members of society prepare her financially for marriage.

By the time a girl has gone through these rites, she is ready both psychologically, physically, socially and financially to start her own home.

But today what do we see? Young girls who have not had any training whatsoever in womanhood, forcing themselves to become women by becoming pregnant. Most of these girls engage in sexual relationships without realizing the consequences and when they get pregnant, many are desperate. It seems many girls are unaware of the fact that even your first sexual encounter can result in pregnancy and thus become very miserable after "just once". Many of these girls themselves children, become single mothers and start life with suffering and pain and many never really get out of the suffering. Many otherwise brilliant and gifted girls just waste away in the village due to what can be termed "neglect of the older generation."

It seems that because the sanctions that go with *tugbewowo* are no more being enforced, many mothers do not see the need to inculcate the virtues of morality into their daughters. Many mothers I spoke to blame the present day children, who would not listen to advice and direction. So if *tugbewowo* is enforced again, it will compel mothers and aunties and

grandmothers to find time to inculcate good moral values into the young girls before they are polluted by society. Family life education or sex education in the schools does not seem to adequately replace the role these rites and their attendant expectations played in the lives of the people.

Another important advantage of *tugbewowo* is its influence on men's behaviour towards young girls. Any man who had sex with a girl who had not yet gone through these rites, was considered cruel, heartless and not "quite correct". From generation to generation, he is pointed out to growing children as someone who was capable of doing things that could hurt children, therefore must be avoided. The act therefore attracted a stigma that majority of men did not want. So it helped to discipline the men also and acted as a positive double edged sword, cautioning both the young girls and the men. At the moment, however, young girls are "free for all" and men have nothing to lose. So they use them anyhow and the girls become pregnant at an age when they are still children and some have not even understood what menstruation is all about.

Disadvantages of *Tugbewowo*

Like all human institutions, *tugbewowo* also has its disadvantages. Four very obvious ones are discussed here, two of which are consequences of pregnancy before *tugbewowo* and two are disadvantages for mothers with teenage girls.

Consequences of Pregnancy without *Tugbewowo*

1. The stigma attached to such a girl for life.
2. The fine imposed on the mother

The stigma: If a girl got pregnant before these rites, she was referred to as becoming pregnant while naked (*efo amafui*). Little girls usually go about scantily dressed but during the rites, she was taught how to dress properly as a woman. Therefore she who had not gone through the rites was 'naked'. This term, *amafui* separated her from the other women in the village for the rest of her life. What is more, the stigma is transferred to her children also and that first born's life was governed by all kinds of taboos, especially if the child is a boy.

The Fine: Another consequence of getting pregnant before *tugbewowo* was that a fine was imposed on a mother whose daughter got pregnant before the rites were performed for her. This fine amounted to quite a large sum of money. The assumption it seems was that such a mother had not done a good enough job of bringing up the daughter. This condemnation of mothers who have worked really hard at training their children is rather discouraging and humiliating. After all, mothers can only talk to and explain values to their daughters but could not follow them around and control their actions. This must change to something more positive.

Disadvantages of *Tugbewowo* for mothers of teenage girls

1. The anxiety that mothers with teenage daughters go through and
2. The financial costs involved, especially the financial burden on the mother.

Anxiety: Mothers with daughters who had reached or were approaching puberty experienced much anxiety and were under immense pressure. They directed most of their attention to preparations toward the girls' *tugbewowo* for several years. She spent a lot of time and energy on activities that would enable her to get money such as making *dzomi* and preparing *gari* or the local soap for sale. Every penny must be put away in order to be able to organize the activities, and buy the appropriate gifts for the daughter. It is said that the quality and quantity of gifts the mother gave to a daughter indicated her love and affection for

her and more importantly suggested to the world how proud she was of her. So mothers had to work hard and save money over a long period of time while fathers played almost no part at all, giving whatever he feels like to the girl. These must change so that the responsibility would be equally shared by mothers and fathers as far as the financial aspects go. The anxiety is over enough money, the girls' ability to resist temptation, the degree to which she would do what her mother told her and not what an irresponsible man would say. How can all these be reduced? Presently, with the rites suspended, mothers have no pressures on them and as a result have relaxed to the extent that some are neglecting their duties and are not giving proper training to their children. Everything is blamed on modern society as if modern society has decreed that all children must be left to grow up like wild weeds; without any control. Many young girls are at a loss as to what to do; all in the name of modern society. Therefore, some children pick up unacceptable practices and information from their peers instead of the right and acceptable behaviours from their parents. Can the children, today's children be blamed for the situations they find themselves in? No! not completely. It is true that modern society presents several challenges to both parents and children alike. Children are exposed to information from sources that their parents had never known in the form of news papers, books, T.V. programmes, radio and as though that were not enough, the internet which provides information on virtually anything, some good but some not helpful for children. Unfortunately, many children have access to the internet while their parents do not.

Therefore it is true that bringing up today's children is a more challenging task than in the past. However, the responsibility still lies on parents, especially mothers to train their young ones. If the training starts at the right time, the young ones can grow up and face the challenges of modern society. If parents wait till children have acquired bad habits and behaviours from outside and then try to change them, it is very difficult, if not impossible. So timing is very important in training children and they must be shown much love and given attention so that they realize that their parents want the best for them.

Attitude to Reintroduction of *Tugbewowo*

An exploratory study to find out the attitudes of the people towards the revival of *tugbewowo* revealed an overwhelming support for its revival or re-introduction.

Forty women and fifteen older men were interviewed on their attitudes towards the fact that *Tugbewowo* has been suspended for several years and whether it should be revived or not. All the men indicated that the matter was entirely over to the women because *tugbewowo* is women's responsibility. It was clear that the men are not ready to assume a role that was traditionally a woman's role. However, all of them commented on the high incidence of unwanted pregnancies and unmarried pregnant girls, and blamed them on the freedom that has resulted since *tugbewowo* was suspended. They felt things would be corrected if the rites are revived but all the men did not seem to realize that this was as much their responsibility as that of the women. This must change; the men must get involved

Fortunately, the attitude of those women interviewed, who knew the value of *tugbewowo* was one of concern and great desire for reintroduction of the rites. The responses are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Women's Attitudes toward the Revival of *Tugbewowo* in Dodome

Age of Women	Total No.	Should <i>Tugbewowo</i> be revived?					Comments
		Yes		No		Undecided	
Elderly 60 - 80	10	10	100%	-	0%	-	The moral decay is too much and girls are being destroyed
40 - 59	10	8	80%	2	20%	-	Those who said no said there is no money for the rites but they are good for the girls
30 - 39	10	6	60%	4	40%	-	Those who said No indicated that they did not understand the whole concept of <i>Tugbewowo</i> .
Under Thirty	10	4	40%	2	20%	4 = 40%	All displayed a limited knowledge and understanding of the rites of <i>tugbewowo</i> and thus do not know its importance
Grand Total	40	28	70%	8	20%	4 = 10%	

Source: Field work

The initial plan was to interview as many men as women but after a while it was considered a waste of time because all the men said the same thing - it is up to the women. It is the women who go through it so they must decide. When the men were asked if they felt the effect of the suspension, they said yes but six of them added, that the same problem is everywhere. However, nine men said they were concerned greatly about the increasing number of unmarried teenagers who become pregnant these days. They felt the women must do something about it to get *tugbewowo* back on track. Just as many household problems in our culture, the men felt they do not have to get involved; the women must sort it all out. The time however, has come for our men to get involved more actively in the training and shaping of the character of the young ones.

The very old women are all quite unhappy about the situation and would want the rites revived. Some complained that the men are not doing enough for the welfare of women and girls. Eight out of ten women (80%) between the ages of 40 - 59 years wanted the rites reintroduced while two (20%) said no because, as they said, they had teenage daughters but had no money to finance the *tugbewowo* rites. So even though they saw a need for it, it should be left alone so that they the poor would be free. But is it really freedom when the girls are wasting away and not getting ahead in life? It is suggested that the financial aspects of the *tugbewowo* be reviewed so as to reduce the pressure on the mothers.

The younger the women the more likely they were to say no to *tugbewowo*. Most of the younger women admitted they have not really understood the concept and thus did not care whether it was discontinued or reintroduced. This is because since its suspension, mothers have not been making much reference to it to their daughters as before, so many young women do not understand its meaning and benefits.

All the women aged forty and above were either married or divorced, while five were widowed. However, most of those aged 39 years and below were either living with their parents or living with a man who is the father of their child/children but who has not married them properly according to the laid down customary marriage rites of the people. This is of great concern to many parents of girls and is mainly a result of the breakdown of morality among girls which in turn could be blamed on the absence of the puberty rites.

In order to improve the reproductive health of young girls and women in Dodome, *tugbewowo* must be reintroduced so that the family life education (FLE) aspect could help the girls develop a healthy attitude to womanhood, motherhood marriage and family life as a whole. If this is not done, it will not be long before HIV/AIDS will have its grip on many young girls and their babies. And this will be very sad indeed!

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that *Tugbewowo* is a positive traditional practice with numerous advantages which far outweigh the disadvantages and which must therefore be reintroduced in Dodome with modifications. It is also clear that the main reason many women are not pushing for its reintroduction is the costs involved. It is as though each woman is wishing that her child would outgrow *tugbewowo* before it is reintroduced. The women do not seem to realize that sometimes the cost of avoiding these costs are much higher. For example, what can be more expensive than a young teenage girl's unwanted pregnancy with all the risks involved. The increased teenage pregnancies often result in difficult and life threatening labours, malnutrition of both mother and child and poor mental and physical health of these "baby mothers". Some hardly have any clothes to wear and others curse themselves daily, but it is too late!! What about the shattered dreams of these girls?

It is therefore up to the older generation to reintroduce *tugbewowo* to save the situation and to protect the innocent and ignorant young girls. Clearly, *tugbewowo* is a resource which could be available to all the families of Dodome; to women and the family as a whole to train young girls in order to reduce the incidence of serious reproductive health problems among the youth. Like all resources, it is of no benefit if it is not used appropriately.

Recommendations

It is recommended that a more detailed study be carried out on *tugbewowo* for a thorough understanding of the various rites involved, their significance and usefulness. Then these rites could be modified to suit modern circumstances. The modifications must focus on drastic cost reduction among other things.

It is also recommended that all girls of the same age could be initiated at the same time so that it becomes a once a year affair in each village instead, of each mother doing it when she pleases. This could lead to less cost per family. It could also attract those living outside to come home for the rites. It could become a tourist attraction when packaged for that purpose. In order to generate and maintain interest in *tugbewowo*, girls that go through it can form year groups or clubs which can come together from time to time to help one another and for general development of women in the area.

Finally, it is recommended that a workshop be organized to study and discuss the issues with the elders, the elderly women, the young women and to come out with the modalities for the modernized version of *Tugbewowo*.

In order to improve the reproductive health of the young, especially young girls, it is important to recognize the important role of the family in this regard. If children start well in

life, if they are properly trained and cared for, with all basic needs provided by their own families, there will be great improvements in this direction. However, the family income of many Ghanaian families is woefully below what is needed to meet the basic needs of family members. Therefore, children look elsewhere to satisfy their needs with the girls becoming pray for men and the boys taking to the streets for armed robbery. Families must be financially empowered by one programme or another so that they can play their roles properly. This needs to happen in the near future to avoid total disaster amongst the youth.

Posterity will not forgive us, if through our negligence and indifference we lose all the traditional practices that make us Ghanaian and rather prefer to grope in the dark! Indeed, generations unborn will not take kindly to the lukewarm attitude of the present generation to the rate at which our culture is being consumed by Western values and ideologies, because sooner or later, these foreign values will not provide the solutions to the realities on the ground. We need to push some Ghanaian solutions for this modern age problems because the western ideas fit situations that are different from the situations in Ghana.

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