

Migration and Wellbeing of Mothers and  
Children of International Migrant Fathers:  
Challenges for Social Policies Addressing  
Paternal Child Maintenance

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# BACKGROUND

## **Scale of International Migration**

- Increasing volume of international migration: there were 191 million international migrants in 2005
- international migrants in industrialized countries doubled between 1985 and 2005, from almost 55 million to 120 million
- Major destinations: North America and Western Europe
- But south-south migration is also increasing (Martin and Zücher 2008)

# BACKGROUND contd.

- Increasing concern about international migration:
  - International migration is a livelihood strategy and cannot be easily controlled
  - Management of migration is the solution to its challenges and requires:
    - Migration policy formulation
    - Adoption of legal instruments on migration to protect migrants
    - Consideration of international conventions and treaties
- The overall objective of migration management: mutual gain for both sending and receiving countries

# GHANAIAIAN CONTEXT

- Migration has been an important component of Ghana's population
- Foreigners formed 12% of the total national population at the 1960 Population Census (Twum-Baah 2005)
- Proportion of foreign nationals declined after 1969 but rising again recently (Aryeetey-Attoh 2005, Ghana Statistical Service 1995)

# GHANAIAN CONTEXT contd.

- Massive emigration from late 1970s up to early 1980s but slowed down since mid-1980s
- Major destinations with Ghanaian diasporan communities: United Kingdom, North America, African countries (Nigeria, South Africa, Botswana, etc), Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia
- Ghana has also been a major destination of refugees from the African region
- Statistics on volume of both immigration and emigration scanty and unreliable

# GHANAIAIAN CONTEXT contd.

- Ghana does not have any migration policy presently
- Remittances have been main benefit of migration in Ghana
- Many Ghanaians also have transnational livelihoods and are in touch with home country (Smith 2007, Anarfi et al. 2005)
- Sex-networking and consequent child bearing is involved in migration in Ghana
- But economic issues in migration stressed more than the social issues such as considered in this paper

# SOCIAL POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONS ADDRESSING WELLBEING OF MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

- Ghana implements policies and has institutions that seek to improve well being of children and mothers eg. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
- The Domestic Violence and Victims' Support Unit (DOVVSU), Department of Social Welfare are main institutions that address child maintenance issues
- They are unable to deal with cases involving fathers who are international migrants?

# METHODS

- The present study is part of a bigger study on child care among migrants in Accra
- 202 children in households, streets and hospital a ward
- Children selected from high, middle and low income residential areas, studied with research techniques
- Ethnographic methods used in the study of the children considered in this paper
- Secondary sources include interviews with officials of DOVVSU



# FINDINGS

## **Ewe Traditional Practices of Childbearing and Child Care**

- Premarital sex and childbearing outside marriage is scorned; a girl must be married a virgin
- Pregnancy outside marriage is stigmatized and called *gbomefu* (literally meaning a pregnancy on the street)
- A man must be independent of his parents; have his own house before marriage and childbearing

# **Ewe Traditional Practices of Childbearing and Child Care (contd.)**

- Paternity, identifying the biological father (genitor) of a child is very important for:
  - Right to paternal maintenance
  - Descent and inheritance
  - Identity in wider society (Nukunya 1969: 128)
- Kinship is also the most important source of security and welfare
- But the nuclear family is the basic unit that maintains and supports both children and adults

## Ewe Traditional Practices of Childbearing and Child Care (contd.)

- Pronatalist values in Ewe proverbs:
- *Vi vo nyo wu ko tsitsi*, (It is better to have a rebellious child than to be childless)
- *Vi vo noafe dze afe* (A delinquent child befits a home)
- Children are God's gift, and stigma is attached to childlessness as expressed in a popular song:  
*Evi ye menye nusi wofle le asime o*  
*Dogbeda Mawu ana wo*
- (A child is not something you can buy on the market. Pray, God will give you.)

# Socio-cultural Transformation of Ewe Society

- Migration
- Modern ways of living
- Evidence is found among the children and the mothers in this study
- Some aspects of transformation are due to processes of globalization, as evident in the international migration experiences under study

# Living Arrangements of All the Children Studied

- 68 out of all the 172 (approximately 40%) children were not living with both parents
- Of the 68 children:
  - 59% (40) were living with their mothers only
  - 10% with mother's mother
  - 3% with mother's sister,

# Paternal Maintenance of All the Children Studied

- Three main types of paternal support investigated:
- Money
- Material needs (clothes, food, etc.)
- Joint custody
- Only a third, 33.8%, received maintenance from their fathers with different combinations of the three types of support
- 25% did not receive any form of paternal support at all; **they included five children whose fathers were international migrants**

# The Well being Of The Children And The Mothers of International Fathers

Factors that determined their well being included:

- Relationship between the mothers and the fathers of the children and paternity of the children
- Socioeconomic characteristics of the mothers
- Ability of the mothers to secure assistance from DOVVSU and Social Welfare Department for child maintenance

# The Well being Of The Children And The Mothers

## **Relationship between the mothers and the fathers of the children**

- There was no marriage between any of the mothers and the fathers of the children
- None of the sets of partners and children ever co-resided
- The pregnancies were unintended in four cases; two mothers do not know where the fathers were:
  - A teenage girl (Madam) and a Liberian refugee
  - A teenage school girl (Dzodzome) and a young man who emigrated before delivery of the child



# The Well being Of The Children And The Mothers contd.

## **Relationship between the mothers and the fathers of the children: Madam**

Madam met a Liberian refugees in Tema, near Accra ...got pregnant ... told him about the pregnancy, and that was the last time that she saw him.

She contacted the Departmental of Social Welfare to assist to get him; was asked to provide GH¢60.00 for transportation to the refugee camp. Madam could not afford it.

She nearly died during the delivery of her son at home against doctor's advice.

# The Well being Of The Children And The Mothers contd.

## **Relationship between the mothers and the fathers of the children: Dzodzome**

Dzodzome's mother died in La Cote d'Ivoire. She was brought to Ghana and raised by her mother's sister. She got pregnant in her final year in vocational institute. Her sexual partner promised to send her back to school later. He, however, emigrated to an unspecified destination; told Dzodzome he might go to Germany or Britain, depending on how the journey went ... called her twice since he left, and had not called during the last six months before the interview.

## **Socioeconomic characteristics of the mother and wellbeing of mother and child**

**Some mothers are professionals can provide for their children, one even had support from the father of her child:**

**While studying abroad Davi met Ganyo ... they had a daughter, first-born to the mother at 39 years and second-born to the father at 46 years. Ganyo is a citizen of an European country ... has Ghanaian parents; visits Ghana regularly. Davi holds a doctorate degree and has a good career. Ganyo also has a professional career ... maintains his daughter regularly.**

# **Socioeconomic characteristics of the mother and wellbeing of mother and child**

## **Dagã**

At 39 years, Daga gave birth to her first-born, a son. The father is a Nigerian, a 42 year old businessman whose mother is a Ghanaian. He travels from Ghana to Nigeria back and forth, regularly. But Daga hardly sees him. He is not married, has no other children. she was paying GH¢100 (US\$103) a month for his three-year-old son to attend a first class day care facility. She holds a master's degree and worked as a tour coordinator.

# **Socioeconomic characteristics of the mother and wellbeing of mother and child**

## **Poor mothers:**

- Madam, Dzodzome are teenagers had no career and could not care for their children
- They were part of a larger family
- They had no hope of securing paternal maintenance for their children
- Two other mothers, with low depended on others to care for their children
- One of them, Seli, has no prospects of receiving paternal maintenance

# Seli

Seli and Susu were both Ghanaian emigrants in Nigeria. Susu, had another girl friend (Esi) who moved back to Ghana after the birth of their first child. Esi got to know about Seli's relationship with Susu ...returned to Nigeria... fought with her. Seli moved out ... took her case to the Police Station; police told her it was a foolish case. Seli moved back to Ghana, launched her complain at DOVVSU, got to know that Susu (38 years then) had four other children with two other women in Ghana; Esi also had a second child. Seli's children (11 and 8 years) were not yet going to school.

# Discussion and Conclusion

- Sex-networking and consequent child bearing is involved in migration in Ghana
- Transnationalism accounts for some aspects of migrants' connections with Ghana and the sexual relations of fathers
- Some mothers and children are able to meet their needs irrespective of no paternal support for the children
- The poor teenage mothers have no paternal maintenance for their children and were supported by their families to meet their children's needs

# Discussion and Conclusion contd.

- DOVSSU is unable to assist them
- Issues such as child maintenance need to be addressed in discussions on migration
- Ghana needs a migration policy, and one that addresses social impacts of migration
- Collaboration with other countries will be required to address some issues such as are discussed in this paper