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Accounting for Spousal Abuse in Rural and Urban Ghana

Master's Thesis in Human Development

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DECLARATION

I, **Stephen Adjei Baffour**, do hereby declare that except for references to other extant literature, which have been duly acknowledged, this work was conducted by me under the supervision of **Professor Berit Overå Johannesen** at the Institute of Psychology, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, during the 2011/2012 academic year. This work has neither been submitted in whole nor in part for any degree in this University or elsewhere.

Signed:

.....

Stephen Adjei Baffour

Date

(Student)

This work has been submitted for examination with my approval.

Signed:

.....

Supervisor / Advisor

Date

Berit Overå Johannesen

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DEDICATION

To Elizabeth Adwoa Afra, Janet Nsiah Baffour, Nana Akosua Afra Baffour, Maame Adwoa

Takyiwaa Baffour

&

To all women in Ghana and the world

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ABSTRACT

The present study use data from a semi-structured qualitative interview and focus group discussions to explore the psychosocial, structural and cultural influences of the phenomenon of spousal abuse in rural and urban areas of Ghana. The study also sought to examine, in-depth, the impact of social and economic power differentials on spousal abuse. Using qualitative discourse analysis, results showed three fundamental themes as accounting for spousal abuse: economic and social power dynamics, traditional and institutionalized practices and religious and social influences. Respondents associated men's status and power in marriage to their economic responsibilities. Men's loss of self-worth and identity as a result of their lack of economic resources to play their primary breadwinner role was seen to influence their violent behaviour in marriage in Ghana. Respondents also attributed the overlapping and conflicting identities of men and women in Ghana and the perception of masculinity and femininity to spousal abuse. Traditional and institutionalized practices such as bride price, traditional system of spousal conflict arbitration, privatization of abuse, weak social support and religiosity were discovered to influence abuse in marital relationships. However, the study did not find any systematic difference between rural and urban areas of Ghana in terms of the discourses on the phenomenon of spousal abuse.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the Study

Spousal abuse has a long history as an entrenched social phenomenon which resonates in many parts of the world. Leslie (1979) traces the origin and persistence of societally sanctioned violence against women to biblical times. Buzawa and Buzawa (1990) corroborate Leslie's assertion and indicate that the Christian Bible explains and condones violence against women on the premise that women were the source of all evil. The origin of these views dates back to the era of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when, per the Bible and Christian literature, Eve (woman) caused Adam (man) to transgress against God (Okereke, 2002; Leslie, 1979). The Christian Bible unequivocally states: "To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children, your desires will be for your husband and he will rule over you'" (Genesis 3:16, New International Version,). The above passage of the Scripture appears to establish the basis for the dominion of men over women, the perceived unwholesome tempters of men.

Historically, secular laws have also openly endorsed a male-dominated family structure in which the patriarch has the right to enforce male standards of feminine behaviour through whatever means possible including the use of brutal force (Okereke, 2002). Under the Roman laws, a husband reserved the right to kill his wife if she was found to have committed various types of offences particularly adultery (Buzawa & Buzawa, 1990). Reflecting on the historically domineering posture of men, Ammerman and Hersen (2000) assert that the legendary but

infamous ‘rule of thumb’ which restricted the instrument of wife beating to a stick no larger than the man’s thumb mirrors this idea of restraint. To help arrest the situation of marginalization and violence against women, a number of international treaties, protocols and instruments that uphold the principle of non-discrimination and equal rights have been deliberated upon, debated and endorsed by the United Nations (UN).

The 1945 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), International Covenant on Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil Political Rights are among the key components of the international bill of rights that promote and safeguard all persons and ensure that every person regardless of race, sex, creed or colour is treated equally. The United Nations General Assembly, in its realization of the perennial violence against women, adopted at its 85th plenary meeting on December 20, 1993, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW). The declaration by article 1 states that:

For the purpose of this declaration, the term “violence against women” means any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. (UN, 1993)

The provisions in the DEVAW continue to provide an overarching international framework for the elimination of physical and psychological abuse against women. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), an international treaty to which most nations have acceded, and its optional protocol also deals directly with women’s rights and empowerment. The CEDAW provides the structure on gender equality and

empowerment in terms of access to social, economic and political opportunities that are available to all in society (Catharine, 2006). Recognizing the relevance and urgency of women's right in Africa, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (The Maputo Protocol, 2003) stipulates in Article 5 that, "States Parties shall prohibit and condemn all forms of harmful practices which negatively affect women's human rights and which are contrary to recognized international standards." Indeed, the Maputo Protocol demonstrates the commitment of the African Union and its Member States to gender equality and the elimination of violence against women and girls.

In recent times, the phenomenon of violence against women has gained international attention and researchers and organizations in a concerted effort, continue to focus their attention on how to conceptualize violent behaviour in the home and find appropriate interventions to nib its toxic orthodoxies in the bud. Progress in research on violence against women especially spousal battering is so great and profound that it will not be out of place to suggest that the family and the home is no longer the sanctuary we once thought it to be (Roger, 2001).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

In spite of the successes chalked by the international community and organizations in finding a lasting solution to all forms of abuse against women, the paradox of marital life in Ghana is that many women in conjugal relationships are constantly subjected to physical, psychological and sexual torture by their intimate partners with whom they have shared comfort and pain, visions and dreams and have celebrated joyous moments together. According to the statistics of Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) for 2009 and 2010, Ghana recorded 14,428 and 12,316 cases of abuse against women respectively (GhanaWeb, 2011). The 2011-

2012 UN Women's report also indicates that over 40% of Ghanaians think it is justifiable for a man to beat his wife (UN, 2011). Researchers have documented that violence against women in intimate relationships in Africa is rampant (Amnesty International, 2005; Okereke, 2002). Nonetheless, empirically documented evidence and literature on the phenomenon is scant and views against the phenomenon are unfortunately construed as importation of Western cultures and practices (Bowman, 2003; Ofei-Aboagye, 1994). Furthermore, the unfettered right of married men to use force against their partners in marriage is apparently legitimized by the provisions of section 42(g) of Ghana's Criminal Code, 1960 (Act 29), a throwback common law from British jurisprudence (Nancy, 2008). Section 42(g) of Ghana's Criminal Code (as cited in Nancy, 2008, p. 63) states as follows:

The use of force against a person may be justified on the ground of his consent, but a person may revoke any consent which he has given to the use of force against him, and his consent when so revoked shall have no effect for justifying force; save that the consent given by a husband or wife at marriage, for the purposes of the marriage, cannot be revoked until the parties are divorced or separated by a judgment or decree of a competent court.

This code appears to endorse the use of force in conjugal relations as long as the parties remain married, on the grounds of the supposed consent given upon marriage. Nukunya (2003), a Professor of Sociology in Ghana, also points out that wife-beating is quite a common form of punishing women in many societies in Ghana and may be applied in the event of her adultery, failure to cook for the husband on time and anything the man considers to merit such a treatment. It is regrettable that until 2007, Ghana had virtually no legislative or institutional framework to forestall violence and protect women in abusive intimate relationships. Apart from the

underrepresentation of research in the field especially in patriarchal societies, context-specific research in Ghana on psychological and cultural influences on the phenomenon of spousal abuse is tragically lacking. Most published theories and interpretations or explanations of abuse dwell, to a large extent, on the experiences of US and Western women that might not meaningfully find expression in other contexts (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005). It is worth noting, however, that the fact that Western conceptualizations of abuse may not meaningfully find expression in the Ghanaian context does not render them immaterial; neither does it absolve men in Ghana from their violent behaviour towards women. A few available literature have been mostly written by either legal luminaries or feminine activists (Mensah, 2008), who through legal lenses and feminine apron focus and blame the individual perpetrators as though they act alone in free will.

While many studies have extensively focused on men and their violent behaviour as a significant cause of violence against women in conjugal relationships (Deird & Connie, 2009; Nancy, 2008; Ellsberg & Heise, 2005; Walker, 2000; Buzawa & Buzawa, 1990), context-specific research that take into account power dynamics, societal norms, customary and institutionalized practices appear scant and nascent in Ghana. In the light of the foregoing account, the necessity for a context-appropriate study that rigorously explore structural issues such as bride price practice, socio-economic power dynamics in patriarchal family structure and institutionalized customs cannot be over-emphasized. In sum, the present study does not in any conceivable way seek to challenge the assertions of available investigations on spousal abuse; rather, it points to an important oversight in the available literature and offers a comprehensive and broad-based conceptualization of the phenomenon. It focuses on perpetrators and victims within the context of their social settings of which they are part and which largely impact their behaviour.

1.3. Aims of the Study

The aim of a research, from a pragmatic viewpoint, “is not to gain access to an abstract truth independent from human experience but rather to generate understanding that will be useful to us” (Willig, 2008, p. 22). Stemming from Willig’s assertion and the foregoing background, the study investigated the following specific aims:

- ❖ To better understand the phenomenon of spousal abuse as constructed by men and women within the context of Ghana.
- ❖ To explore the psychological influence of power dynamics, cultural and institutionalized practices in patriarchal society on spousal abuse in conjugal relationships.
- ❖ To explore the social, economic and psychological reasons that account for the continuous stay of abused women in abusive consensual relationships.
- ❖ To identify and suggest practical and all-encompassing approaches to Governments, policy makers, non-governmental organizations and all interested bodies in the planning and execution of intervention strategies.

1.4. Relevance of the study

The socio-economic and health implications of violence against women in intimate relationships have been well covered in the available literature (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005; Okereke, 2002; Roger, 2001; Ofei-Aboagye, 1994). However, studies that take into cognizance the influence of power relations, cultural and institutionalized elements on spousal abuse are lacking (Mensah, 2008; Ellsberg & Heise, 2005). Coomaraswamy (2002) argues that there are

practices in the family and community that are violent and discriminatory towards women but have avoided national and international scrutiny on the basis of the fact that they are seen as culture and traditions that deserve tolerance and respect. The rationale for this study is to primarily explore how power relations, cultural and institutionalized constraints can account for intimate partner violence in Ghana.

Again, the study will point to an important oversight in the available literature and discourses on the phenomenon of spousal abuse and offer a broad-based framework for conceptualizing violence against women in matrimonial homes. The findings of the study will also be useful for individuals, national and international organizations, and all interested bodies involved in the fight against abuse of women in intimate relationships. Finally, the present study wishes to provoke further research in the academic community and help stimulate a more structural approach to the investigation and discussions on spousal abuse in patriarchal society of Ghana.

1.5. Research Questions

Fundamentally, the study addressed the following questions:

1. How do power dynamics influence spousal abuse in conjugal relationships in Ghana?
2. How do cultural and institutionalized practices influence violent behaviour of men in conjugal relationships in Ghana?
3. What are the key factors that account for the continuous stay of abused women in abusive relationships?
4. How does the phenomenon of spousal abuse in rural Ghana differ from urban Ghana?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Theories on the phenomenon of spousal abuse provide a conceptual framework of thought for evaluating, understanding and responding to the psycho-social, economic and structural factors that account for violence in consensual unions. However, most theories of spousal abuse are one-dimensional in nature and applied universally across contexts and cultural groups, which normally fall short in accounting for ethno-cultural differences in abusive relationships (Sandra, 1999). Bowman (2003) posits that there cannot be a grand theory to conceptualize domestic violence in Africa and that the only adequate explanatory framework for the incidence of violence in the home is a multi-causal one. In the present study, theory of patriarchy, investment model and resource theories have been reviewed and adopted to serve as good lens for discussing the research questions.

2.1.1. Theory of Patriarchy

In almost all the academic discourses on the abuse of women, theory of patriarchy, which indicates that there exist a fundamental division between men and women from which men gain power (Bloodworth, 2003), has been an influential frame of thought adopted to serve as a conceptual framework to adequately offer explanations for the socially legitimized structure that favour men. For example, Walby (1990) conceptualizes patriarchy as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (p. 135). Walby identifies six structures of patriarchy: household production, paid work, the state, male violence,

sexuality and culture that together are argued to capture the complexity, pervasiveness and interconnectedness of women's subordination. Hartmann (1981) also asserts that reproduction, sexuality and childbearing are largely organized around patriarchy. She further argues that the establishment of family wages secured the material base for male supremacy and domination in two ways. First, the better jobs and higher wages of men in the labour market "encourages wifery as a career" (p. 22). Second, women's home responsibilities such as housework, childcare and other domestic services, which directly favour men, reinforce women's inferior labour market position. On her part, Angela (2002) identifies socio-economic forces and the belief in the innate superiority of males as factors that further deepen the unequal power relations in conjugal relationships. These feminists' analyses of patriarchy are premised on social and ideological constructs which regard men as superior to women.

However, Silberschmidt (2001) notes that patriarchy does not mean that only men have privileges. On the contrary, a patriarch and head of household has also many responsibilities. She further argues that the key and the irony of patriarchal order reside clearly in the fact that the male authority has a material condition while male responsibility is normatively constituted. Thus, men's roles and identities become confused and contradictory because of the irony of patriarchy (ibid.). The present study explores the patriarchal tensions in conjugal relationships in Ghana vis-à-vis male violence, structural and economic dynamics, sexuality and culture. The Ghanaian patriarchal society appears to propagate the notion of motherhood which restricts women's mobility and burdens them with the responsibilities of nurturing and rearing children within the domestic sphere. By the arrangements of the family system in Ghana, the pressure to

earn and look after the family are on men while women are expected to engage in menial jobs, take care of children, cook for men and wash clothes.

Traditionally, patriarchy has been conceptualized as biologically rooted and as the biological functions of males and females differ, the social role of men and women cannot be viewed as identical (Ebert, 1988; Freud, 1924). Freud's theory of psychosocial development was based on his belief in the superiority of the male and the phallus. Freud (1924) asserts that the destiny of women is rooted in their anatomy; that it is women's biology largely determines their psychology and thus their abilities and roles in society. To this end, most patriarchal societies traditionally link women's biological function to bear children to their social position and responsibilities of motherhood: nurturing, educating and raising children.

According to Ebert (1988), patriarchy is deeply rooted in the constant reproduction of female desire for the male sexual partner in narratives and other popular signifying practices. She further notes that by the expression of the desire for male partner in narratives and other ideological materials, the female subject continually reproduces the phallus as privileged signifier around which the female's world and worth revolve. Unfortunately, these traditional notions result in patriarchal ideas that "blur the distinction between sex and gender and assume that all socio-economic and political distinctions between men and women are rooted in biology or anatomy" (Heywood, 2003, p. 248).

A number of structures have been identified by feminist scholars as reinforcing patriarchal social order. Hartmann (1981) observes that the family is a source of women's oppression in today's society. According to Lerner (1986), the family plays a significant role in creating a

hierarchical system by mirroring the order in the society, educating its children in line with this order and constantly reinforcing hierarchical social order that favours men. The family institution, notes Summer (1977), confers power and authority in society on men. The Ghanaian family system is patriarchal; men are considered heads of families by default of social expectations. Thus, the first lesson of patriarchy in Ghana is learnt in the family where men are seen dominating households and controlling women's sexuality, labour, reproduction and mobility. The family in Ghana is thus an important agent of socializing the next generation in patriarchal values: boys learn to be domineering and aggressive and girls learn to be caring, loving and submissive.

Moreover, patriarchal constructions and social structures are legitimized by institutions of religion. For example, in Jewish traditions, a wife is often referred to as a homemaker, who is largely responsible to determine the character and atmosphere in the home and thus expected to place her family above her career (Levertov, 2004). The Christian literature and tradition emphasize women's submissiveness and role in the family. For example, Apostle Paul admonishes in Titus 2:4-5 (New International Version) that; "Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands, and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one maligns the word of God." These teachings based on Christian principles define gender roles—a person's identity with regard to marriage, divorce and inheritance are largely determined by his or her religion, which laid down duties for men and women and their relationships.

The life of Christian women is constantly shaped by these (and other similar) teachings and they come to accept them as part of their social reality and religious piety. As Syed (2010),

argues “Christian teachings hold that gender differences between men and women are constructive; they contribute to what we do and who we are” (p. 287). The Islamic tradition equally places some value on the family as an integral part of the faith. Also, in Qur’an 4:31 (as cited in Syed, 2010), the responsibility to provide adequate economic resources for the family, including wife and children is placed on men. Hassan (1999), notes that Islamic teachings generally absolve women of any economic responsibility in the household unless they decide to contribute financially to the household.

This unequal hierarchical structures and ideological system of power relations where men oppress and dominate every facet of women’s life is embedded in the socio-economic and political sphere of the Ghanaian society. The structural arrangement and ideology form part of the consciousness of males and females in patriarchal societies and endorse subjugation of women by men. Dobash and Dobash (1979) also view abuse of women as a unique phenomenon that is caused by social and economic processes that overtly or covertly endorse a patriarchal social order and family structure. In her pioneering study on wife beating in Ghana, Ofei-Aboagye (1994), observes that the traditional norm in the Ghanaian society suggests that “men are infinitely superior to their wives and thus can treat them as they wish” (p. 930). In their ecological analysis of violence against women, Ellsberg and Heise (2005) assert that patriarchy leads to the domination and subjugation of women by men and explains the historical patterns of systematic violence directed at women.

Additionally, a patriarchal order gives rise to gender stereotype which account for the differences in the construction of masculinity and femininity. According to Qayun and Ray (2010), patriarchy is an essential task that identifies the multiple forms and loci of masculinity and the

prevailing domination of men in society. Masculinity is sometimes used to synonymously refer to male, man and manhood; it is also used to mean the direct opposite of femininity. In recent times, masculinity is used to refer to characteristics that are attributed to being a man such as aggressiveness, assertiveness and lack of submissiveness (Tumswesigye, 2009). For example, whereas an ideal woman is socially expected to be submissive, polite, caring and compassionate, an ideal man in Ghana has several attributes that define his manhood or masculinity: he is brave, aggressive and adventurous; he does not cry, he defends and controls his family, he is a sexual conqueror, a leader rather than a subject; and he is marrying rather than being married.

While some scholars have conceptualized masculinity as a timeless, tangible, and an objective entity which exists in the real world and deeply rooted in biological composition (Freud, 1924), others view it as a relational concept which is socially constructed and changes over time and space (Kimmel & Ferber, 2003; Connell, 1995, 2005). Kimmel and Ferber (2003), observes that masculinity and manhood is not a manifestation of an inner biological essence but rather, it is socially constructed and a creature of culture. Connell (1995) also argues that if masculinity is conceptualized as a biological entity, timeless and tangible, it creates the impression that masculinity exists in absolute terms which one either has or has not. In his recent work, Connell (2005) asserts that if the term masculinity can be defined at all, it is a simultaneous place in gender relations and its practices through which men and women engage and the effects of these practices on their bodily experiences, personality and culture.

These views highlight an understanding of the concept as not being about men as biological entities, but about practices and social ideals and their effect on men and women in a given community and context. Thus, masculinity is a configuration of practice within a system of

gender relations (Connell, 2005). In Ghana, the stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity are not regarded only as social constructs but they have also been internalized by both men and women as part of their identities and self-worth. As noted by Nukunya (2003), in many Ghanaian societies the conventional position is that women are never wholly independent. A woman must always be under the guardianship of a man, and when she marries, her original guardian hands over some or all of his responsibility for her to her husband.

This gender stereotyping which is part of the socialization process of boys and girls in the Ghanaian society eventually leads to what Connell (2005) refers to as “hegemonic masculinity.” He defines hegemonic masculinity as a “configuration of gender practices which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and subordination of women” (p. 77). Ellsberg and Heise (2005) also argue that physical punishment of women may be tolerated in a society where there is an existence and acceptance of rigidly defined and enforced gender roles; where masculinity is conceptualized as toughness, dominance, and male honour. The foregoing accounts of patriarchal social and religious structures give credence to the fact that to appreciate and adequately conceptualize the phenomenon of spousal abuse, the nuances of the multiple and overlapping identities of women in the patriarchal society of Ghana should be considered. Roger (2001) adequately captures it in the following words: “the major stereotype that arguably forms the basis of the abuse is one in which male individuals dominate, control, and use power whereas women do the opposite” (p. 45). No discussion of spousal abuse would be complete without putting perpetrators and victims, values and practices, male and female roles in relationship in context (Sandra, 1999).

2.1.2. Rusbult's Investment Model and Spousal abuse in Ghana

Social Psychologists are interested in determining which factors influence the decision of partners to remain committed to one another; to the extent that some individuals would stay in a relationship even in the face of violence and abuse. A wide range of factors have been proposed and well documented by social scientists to explain the decision of abused wives to stay or leave abusive relationships. Findings in the available literature on intimate partner violence are replete with factors such as childhood exposure to violence, economic potentials of partners, and educational status, as key determinants of the decision of abused women to terminate or continue a relationship. Investigating why abused wives remain with their violent partners in the US, Gelles (1976) identified three fundamental factors: frequency and severity of violence; education and occupational skills; and prior experience to violence in childhood. Whereas women who suffer frequent and severe forms of abuse from their partners are more likely to leave their battering husbands, women with limited education and poor occupational skills or women who experience violence in their childhood are less likely to terminate abusive relationships (Gelles, 1985).

In their study *“Using the investment model to understand battered women’s commitment to abusive relationships,”* in central North Carolina, US, Rhatigan and Axsom (2006) theorized that, compared to women who do not experience childhood violence, women who experience abuse in childhood are more likely to remain in violent relationships. The childhood-violence experience debates are premised on the grounds that these women may have developed tolerance for violence and maltreatment because of the early life experiences and resulting interpersonal schemas (Ehrensaft, Cohen, Brown, Smailes, Chen & Johnson, 2003; Cloitre, Cohen &

Scarvalone, 2002). Rusbult and Martz (1995) lament that “many explanations of why people remain in abusive relationships focus on the battered individual’s personal dispositions” (p. 559). For example, a number of researchers have assumed that women who remain in violent relationships in the face of abuse possess masochistic tendencies or pathological personalities, to suffer depressed self-esteem or have acquired a pattern of learned helplessness (Walker, 2000; Straus & Gelles, 1986; Blum, 1982; Gabbard & Larson, 1981; Snyder & Fruchtman, 1981).

By assuming that women who fail to terminate abusive relationships have unique personality traits, is to completely disregard structural and interdependence factors that may account for such behaviours (Rusbult & Martz, 1995). Contrary to the commonsensical argument that victims of beatings or abuse would flee violent relationships to protect themselves, Gelles (1985) asserts that commonsense should not equally gloss over the structural and interpersonal nature of family relations. Rather than focusing on the individual’s personal dispositions or pathological tendencies of battered women, the investment model, a social psychological theory, investigates and focuses on situational, structural and interdependence nature of relationships in the analysis of individual’s decision to stay or to leave a violent relationship. Based on Kelly and Thibaut’s (1978) interdependence theory, the investment model emphasizes the significance of interdependent processes in the stay or leave decision-making process of battered women in abusive relationships (Edwards, Gidycz & Murphy, 2011). Essentially, the investment model asserts that the decision to stay or terminate abusive relationships is most directly mediated by feelings of commitment (Rusbult, 1980).

Commitment, the overarching concept in investment model, is explained as an individual’s intent or resolve to keep a relationship and to remain psychologically attached to it (Rusbult,

1980). To this end, individuals with lower commitment are more likely to exit abusive relationships whereas those with higher commitment level are likely to stay. To help investigate what really causes the feeling of commitment in relationships, three processes have been identified as positively associated with commitment levels: satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size (Rusbult & Martz, 1995). The model upholds that to better understand the reasons for which battered women remain in an ongoing interdependent relationship, it is instructive to distinguish between the concepts of satisfaction and commitment (Rusbult & Martz, 1995). Satisfaction level has been defined as “the degree to which the individual favourably evaluates a relationship,” whereas commitment level refers to “the degree to which the individual intends to maintain a relationship, feels psychologically attached to it, and sustains a long-term orientation toward it” (ibid., p. 559).

It has been documented that high level of satisfaction in a relationship directly influences high commitment level and low satisfaction level lowers commitment level (Edwards et al, 2011; Rusbult & Martz, 1995). For instance, general expectations of the quality of relationship or social comparison levels and the ability of the partner to fulfill important needs have been implicated in the literature as accounting for high levels of satisfaction which positively affect commitment levels (Rusbult & Martz, 1995). They further posit that commitment is lower when physical abuse suffered in a relationship is severe, to the extent that the violent partner has a long history of violence; and when reasons for abusive incidents are traceable to the partner rather than to external circumstances (ibid.).

Additionally, quality of alternatives has been identified as another determinant of commitment level in an unsatisfying relationship. Alternative quality, according to Rusbult and

Martz (ibid.), refers to “the attractiveness and availability of alternatives to relationship” (p. 560). Commitment to abusive and unsatisfying relationship is likely to be weaker when attractive alternatives are available to abused partners (ibid.). In other words, abused women are likely to exit abusive relationships when options available to them are of high quality and appealing. For example, when there is a possibility of remarriage after exiting; when there is social support from family and significant others; and when individuals have skills and competencies that enhance alternative living, abused partners will feel less committed to abusive relationships and will be more likely to terminate and exit violent intimate partnerships.

Conversely, when women feel that options available to them are limited and unappealing, or there is fear of the unknown future, battered women are more likely to feel deeply committed to unsatisfying relationships and less likely to leave (Pilkington, 2000; Simpson, 1987; Rusbult, 1983). On their part, Langley and Levy (1977) usefully assert that when an abused individual has limited education or personal income or is otherwise constrained from developing a life independent of her partner; when a woman has no better place to go, it is reasonable that she might feel committed to persisting at an unsatisfying relationship. Clearly, women who owe their economic dependence on their husbands are more likely to remain with their abusive husbands (Strube & Barbour, 1983).

Investment size, the third and the final variable in the investment model, refers to “the number and magnitude of resources that are tied to the relationship” (Rusbult & Martz, 1995, p. 560). Time, self-disclosure, emotional energy (direct investments) and children, mutual friends and shared possessions (indirect investments) have been documented as enhancing commitment level and thus decrease the likelihood of terminating abusive relationships (ibid.).

To Rusbult and Martz (1995):

Commitment to an abusive relationship should be greater among women who have been involved with their partners longer, among women who are married rather than cohabitating or dating, and among women who have a greater number of children with their partners (p. 560).

Given the scope and setting of the current study, the investment model is important for two basic reasons: first, its focus on structural characteristics and interpersonal factors in family relations instead of personal or pathological tendencies of abused women will help investigate the socio-economic, psychological, religious and structural constraints that may account for the decisions of battered women in Ghana to remain or end abusive conjugal unions. Second, the investment model's assertion that individuals can sometimes feel strongly committed to completely unsatisfying marriage will be critically tested in the patriarchal society of Ghana.

There may be relatively justifiable reasons for abused women's decisions not to terminate violent relationships in patriarchal societies. The feminist perspective on abuse stresses that asking why women remain in abusive relationships covertly blames women for their own victimization (*ibid.*). Asking such questions presupposes that the decision to leave or stay rests entirely with battered women—this kind of analysis attributes women's leave or stay decisions dispositionally rather than situationally. Bograd (1988) argues that we could possibly ask “what social factors constrain women from leaving” (p. 21).

2.2. Review of Related Studies and Concepts

2.2.1. Resource Theory and Power dynamics in Marriage

The resource theory of family violence provides an explanatory framework for the power dynamics in interpersonal family relations. The resource theory, originally developed by Blood and Wolfe (1960), assumes that the balance of power in terms of control over decisions making is on the side of the partner who contributes the greatest and valued resources to the marriage (Boss, Doherty, Larossa, Schumm & Steinmetz, 1993). Despite its distant publication date, the tenets of the resource theory resonate in many contemporary findings on spousal abuse and thus suffice for the analysis of power in the present study. According to Blood and Wolfe (1960), power and control in conjugal relationships will be skewed toward the side of that partner who contributes the greater resources to the marriage.

Richmond (1976) conceptualizes resources as involving economic status and contributions, social skills, physical attractiveness and other such things. Blood and Wolfe (1960) further argue that in a relationship where egalitarian norms prevail, socio-economic resources might not largely determine relative participation in marital decision-making. However, within a more traditional setting where socio-economic resources influence power pendulum, marital decisions and control are structured according to resources a partner command (*ibid.*). Thus, the more resources (social, personal, and economic) a person can command, the more force and power that individual can muster in the marriage. Historically, the resource perspectives have been used to account for the relatively greater power of husbands in marital relationships since males have been known to wield greater control over such valued resources as income, education, and

occupational status (Boss et al., 1993). In its preamble, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW) explicitly describes violence against women as “a manifestation of historically unequal [social and economic] power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men” (UN, 1993, p. 115).

Weber (as cited in Boss et al., 1993) emphasizes that power is critical and central to human social existence. For Weber, power is “the probability that one actor within social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance” (ibid., p. 361). He believes that the relationship between power and social order is not necessarily a destructive one. Weber further argues that “under appropriate conditions, power may actually prove to be one of the fundamental bulwarks of that order that exist, even in social systems in which the potential for conflict is seemingly great” (ibid, p. 361). The social benefit of power, according to Weber, will result from the institutionalization and legitimation of the power that some actors hold over others, in a manner that the majority of the members within the larger social system are motivated to act in ways that contribute to order and stability rather than disruption and instability (ibid.).

The central premise of Weber’s assertion holds that institutionalized and legitimated power may ensure equilibrium in social relationships. Power includes the ability to influence family decisions, including which household labour one will perform (Richmond, 1976). Similarly, in the stratified social structure of Ghana, majority of men control resources and are regarded as breadwinners of families whereas women are responsible for all household chores—cooking, washing, and child care. In conjugal partnerships, husbands are traditionally required to provide

money for the upkeep of the home, which naturally makes them financially powerful. Thus, there is an institutionalized power structure in marriages in Ghana which is legitimated by customs, traditions and culture; and men and women within the larger social system are motivated to act to achieve equilibrium in the system.

Contrary to the practices of many egalitarian societies where power in conjugal relationships and within the family are mutually shared and evenly distributed (Brezsnyak & Whisman, 2004; Blood & Wolfe, 1960), wives in the patriarchal society of Ghana are proud to act as appendages of their husbands and will happily bask in the glory of their husbands (Ofei-Aboagye, 1994). The difference in power is traceable to the imbalances in valued resources and the ability to provide rewards within relationships—the power differentials can potentially create conflicts in intimate relationships (Boss et al., 1993). According to Blau (1964), power is conceived of as the ability to extract compliance in an exchange relationship by controlling valued resources and rewards. The ability to resist compliance therefore, Blau argues, is a function of the extent to which individuals can minimize their dependence on the other for resources and reward (ibid.).

In sum, the persons who possess a large number of valued resources and rewards wield greater power in conjugal unions than those who do not command resources because “they are able to violate the norms of reciprocity and fairness without experiencing negative sanctions” (Boss et al., 1993, p. 391). Significantly, dependence influences power dynamics in marital relationships. For instance, the more dependent a spouse is on a marriage, the less power she or he would possess in the relationship. This is because the less dependent partner has the ability and power to control the fate and/or the behaviour of the more dependent spouse (Thibaut & Kelly, 1978).

2.2.2. Marriage and the Family System in Ghana

Marriage is the recognized institution for the establishment and maintenance of family life all over the world (Nukunya, 2003). Biblically, marriage is regarded as a sacred institution ordained and ordered by God. According to Genesis 2: 24, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. In spite of the popular notion that marriage is a union between a man and a woman, Ghanaian marriage is mainly a group affair—between families instead of individuals. In the extended family system in Ghana, when a couple come together as husband and wife, their respective lineages and families become affinal relatives by default whereas the children of the union also become kin to all the members of the two families (Nukunya, 2003). Thus, in Ghana, marriage is an important institution that establishes and extends kinship ties. There are three types of marriages in Ghana as defined by their contractual mode, all recognized as legal: marriage under the ordinance, marriage under the Mohammed ordinance, and marriage under customary law (Seneadza, 2010; Nukunya, 2003; Adinkrah, 1980).

According to the Matrimonial Causes Act (1971) of Ghana, Marriage under the Ordinance (Cap 127) could be civil marriage, where the parties together with their witnesses are required to register the marriage with civil authority, Registrar General's Department or the Office of a City Council; or church marriage, where the marriage is performed by legally recognized churches on behalf of civil authority (Seneadza, 2010; Nukunya, 2003). The Christian or Church marriages are complete departure from the traditional ones. The marriage ceremony of the Christian marriages, popularly known as wedding, is modeled on European lines with some minor modifications (Nukunya, 2003). Marriages celebrated under the Marriage Ordinance (Cap 127)

are monogamous as opposed to marriages celebrated under the Muslim laws (Cap 129) and customary law. The wedding ceremonies in Ghana are quite elaborate and expensive given its attendant receptions at a hotel or a decent place.

In Christian or Ordinance marriages, the literate wives usually bear the title of Mrs. which “has become a status symbol denoting marriage under the new dispensation” (Nukunya, 2003, p. 156). Marriages under the new dispensation signify “enlightenment, security for the wives and children especially in the field of inheritance as well as continued monogamy because they are by definition non-polygynous” (ibid., p. 156). Thus, the Marriage Ordinance, under the Matrimonial Causes Act (1971), does not protect polygynous marriages under Mohammed Ordinance and customary law though it recognizes them as legal marriages (ibid.). According to Timaeus and Reynar (1998), the incidence of polygyny in Sub-Saharan Africa varies between 20 to 50 percent. In Ghana, about one-third of all married women were in polygynous marriages in the late 1970s (Gage & Njogu, 1994; Aryee, 1985). The proportion of women in plural marriages in the late 1990s, according to Seneadza (2010), declined to about 23 percent.

In spite of the impact of social change, globalization and urbanization, Christian or Ordinance marriages are contracted by only a minority of Ghanaians—they are limited to very well-educated and enlightened people as well as some devout Christians (Nukunya, 2003). This is because many men, including the well-educated, believe that the monogamous nature of marriages under the Ordinance tie the hands of men unduly and restrict their extra-marital behaviours (ibid.). In view of its polygynous nature, the church does not recognize marriages celebrated under customary laws unless the marriage is later blessed by a pastor or registered under the Marriage Ordinance. With the proliferation of charismatic churches in Ghana in recent

times, monogamous marriages have increased as more customary marriages are being crystallized into registered marriages (ibid.). It is instructive to state that the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, the supreme legal document, recognizes all forms of marriages as long as the practices are not indecent, immoral or abuse the fundamental human rights of the individuals involved.

One major and fundamental practice in all marriages in Ghana is the payment of bride price, popularly called *tiri nsa*¹. According to Nukunya, (2003), the payment of bride price has always been an important part of marriages contracted in Ghana. He notes that, “today those who want to go through the essentials of establishing legal unions try to abide by the traditional requirements before adding whatever embellishments they wish to offer” (ibid., p. 157). Traditionally, the payment of bride price by the family of a prospective husband to the family of a prospective bride, usually in the form of money and/or gifts, demonstrates the husband’s appreciation for the qualities and skills possessed by the bride. Another traditional wisdom behind the payment of bride price, as recounted by Okereke (2002), is that it strengthens the bond between the parties in the marriage and challenges the couple to make their marriage work. It also demonstrates the economic capabilities of the man to take proper care of the prospective bride. Nukunya (2003) captures the Ghanaian situation in the following words:

Traditional marriage payments differ from society to society and sometimes within the same ethnic group, local differences are found. Among the Ashanti, drinks and money constitute the payment. The formal establishment of marriage results from the payment by the groom and his people (lineage head and parents) of the *tiri nasa* (lit. head wine) which the Ashanti

¹ Drinks, money and other gifts presented by a man and his family to a prospective bride and her family at a traditional marriage ceremony.

describe as *aseda*, a thanking gift. This usually consists of two bottles of gin and an agreed equivalent in cash. (p. 42)

The traditional practice of dowry resonates with all the forms of marriages discussed including marriages celebrated under the Marriage Ordinance. Social change and urbanization in Ghana has done little to diminish the importance and relevance of the custom of bride price payment. If anything at all “the monetary values of the goods given have rather risen” (Nukunya, 2003, p. 157). Historically, the legendary practice of bride price payment served as a token to cement and solidify the relationship between the two families and the corresponding extended families (Okereke, 1992). The practice of bride price also requires that if a woman is no longer interested in a marriage and decides to leave her partner, she is required by custom to return the bride price to the family of the husband. This aspect of the bride price system is so important that until the bridal drink and/or the price is returned, official dissolution of the marriage is not granted to the party who seeks divorce.

The family in Ghana plays a key role in marriage in terms of the processes leading to marriage and the marriage ceremony itself. Generally, the family in Ghana is viewed as a group of individuals related to one another by ties of consanguinity (blood), marriage or adoption (Nukunya, 2003; Adinkrah, 1985). This conceptualization of the family system in Ghana is an essential distinguishing mark from Western conceptions where the family system is based on the “central relationship of husband and wife—the ‘conjugal family’... constituted by a man, a woman and their children” (Adinkrah, 1985, p. 12). The extended family structure in Ghana is built around matrilineal and patrilineal descent. Thus, kinship, the social relationships derived from consanguinity, marriage or adoption, could be either matrilineal or patrilineal in Ghana

(Nukunya, 2003; Adinkrah, 1985). Whereas in a patrilineal society a married woman bears children for the husband's lineage, children born in a matrilineal society belong to the lineage of the wife.

In the matrilineal family system, inheritance and successions are reckoned through the female line while property successions and inheritance in the patrilineal arrangement are traced to the male line of descent (ibid.). Even though the relationships that result from marriage bring the kinsmen of both the wife and the husband together as a family, in the Akan matrilineal system, the central relationship of the family is not that of husband and wife, but of blood relations (Adinkrah, 1985). To the Akan, ties created by marriage are transitory whereas ties arising from membership of a family are permanent (Allot, 1960). As Allot further observes about the matrilineal system of the Akans, in many ways a woman is more intimately connected to her brother (who is the uncle, or legal guardian of her children), than to her husband. To this end, neither the husband nor the wife (the two principal participants in marriage), entirely leaves his or her "consanguine family" to form a merged household on the Western legal conception or the Biblical understanding that the two shall become one (Adinkrah, 1985, p. 12).

Thus, unlike the Ordinance or Church marriage, a married woman in traditional customary societies, both patrilineal and matrilineal descents, keeps her own name and does not adopt the name of her husband (Nukunya, 2003; Adinkrah, 1985). In most cases, even when marriage has been established, the two parties or spouses tend to remain in their parental homes surrounded by people of their own blood (ibid.). Apparently, the complicated family structure in Ghana which endorses the patriarchal social order is implicated in the phenomenon of spousal abuse in intimate unions.

2.2.3. Conceptualizing and Contextualizing Spousal abuse in Ghana

The concept of spousal abuse otherwise called violence against women, intimate partner violence or wife battering, has been contested and conceptualized differently by various researchers and advocates. Gelles (1985) notes that one of the major problems confronting researchers who attempt to study violence in the family is the quagmire of definitional dilemmas that they have to deal with. As earlier indicated, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW, 1993) adopted by the United Nations explains violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that will result in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or distress to women, including but not limited to, acts of threat, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether these acts occur in public or in private life. The Maputo Protocol, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women (2003), by article 1 defines violence against women to mean:

All acts perpetrated against women which cause or could cause them physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm, including the threat to take such acts; or to undertake the imposition of arbitrary restrictions on or deprivation of fundamental freedoms in private or public life in peace time and during situations of armed conflicts or of war ("definitions," para. 1).

In their book *Researching Violence Against Women: A practical Guide for Researchers and Activists*, Ellsberg and Heise (2005) define spousal abuse or intimate partner violence (IPV) or domestic violence as "a range of sexually, psychologically, and physically coercive acts used against adult and adolescent women by current or former male intimate partners" (p. 12). The

World report on violence and health also defines intimate partner violence as “behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours” (Heise & Garcia-Moreno; Jewkes, Sen & Garcia-Moreno, as cited in WHO, 2010, p. 11).

It is apparent that there have been attempts by various researchers to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of violence against women by capturing acts or behaviours that are controlling and detrimental to the liberty and health of women. Though the conceptualizations slightly differ from one writer to another according to the goal and orientation of a particular writer, generally, there is a greater consensus. There is a nexus among concepts such as psychological, physical and sexual harm that are used by men against women in intimate relationship.

For the purposes of this study and the context of Ghana, spousal abuse and intimate partner violence or violence against women will be used interchangeably to mean physical, psychological, and sexual abuse that women are subjected to by their current or former husbands. Even though some studies have documented that both men and women are capable of violence in relationships (Suzanne, 1977), women globally and particularly in Africa and Ghana suffer more physical, sexual and psychological abuse in conjugal relationships compared to men (Ofei-Aboagye, 1994). As noted by Nukunya (2003), women in Ghana rarely beat their husbands. The various systems of customary law under which a large number of marriages and intimate partnerships are contracted in Ghana do not regard men and women as equal partners in conjugal affairs (Manuh, n.d). For example, whereas marriage of a woman to two or more men is abominable and non-existent in the Ghanaian society, the common practice is polygyny. Even

though education and social change are shifting the pattern, it is a culturally permitted practice among all ethnic groups in Ghana that a man can simultaneously marry two or more wives or engage in extra marital affairs or sexual double standard (Mensah, 2008; Nukunya, 2003). There is a generally acceptable cultural, social and religious expectation that women demonstrate respect, obedience, submissiveness, and conformity, especially with regard to husband's wishes and commands (Mensah, 2008).

Globally, research consistently predicts women as more likely to suffer physical, psychological and sexual abuse in intimate partnership than any other person. For example, Ellsberg and Heise (2005) have found that 40 to 70% of homicides of women are perpetrated by intimate partners, commonly within the context of abusive relationships. This establishes the fact that although men and women could be both victims and batterers in intimate relationships, the archetypal picture of spousal abuse, as noted by Deird and Connie (2009), emerge from domineering husbands progressively inflicting psychological, physical and sexual abuse on their partners. The abuse that women experience in intimate relationships ranges from erosion of self-esteem, depression, phobia (psychological), injuries, gunshot wounds, slapping, kicking (physical), to marital rape, compelled to engage in sexual activity she does not approve of or finds degrading and gynecological disorders (sexual) (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005). In Ghana, some of the factors that could make a husband use violence against his wife may include failing to care for children at home, not obeying the husband, questioning the husband about money, refusing to have sex with the husband, confronting or questioning him about his infidelity, not having food on time and host of others (Ofei-Aboagye, 1994). The foregoing accounts give credence to the social reality, that in the patriarchal society of Ghana, wife-beating is a common phenomenon.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

In the present study, I adopted qualitative approach because of its objective to describe, discuss and possibly explain events and people's lived experiences. The study involves married men and women from rural and urban areas of Ashanti Region of Ghana. I sought their views on the phenomenon of spousal abuse through focus group and personal interviews. To further shed light on contextual issues, I also interviewed a key informant at the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) in the Ashanti region. The choice of a qualitative approach for the research also stemmed from the aims of the study. Broadly, the study aims at exploring and understanding the phenomenon of spousal abuse as constructed by men and women in Ghana. It also has a specific aim of gaining deeper insight into the psychological influence of cultural and institutionalized practices and the power dynamics of spousal abuse in conjugal relationships in Ghana. Compared to quantitative methods, qualitative methods provide much greater insight into the meaning, motivation and dynamics of violent relationships (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005). They further contend that a focus on how people talk about and construct the phenomenon offers opportunity to pursue a better understanding of the mindset, attitudes and actions of abusive men and helps to design effective intervention strategies for victims of abuse.

Furthermore, I chose a qualitative approach over a quantitative because, rather than using preconceived variables to head-count how people experience violence in conjugal unions, a qualitative approach bears promise to foster nuanced and complex understanding of situational

and structural constraints that can potentially account for spousal abuse in Ghana. As Willig (2008) notes, the use of “preconceived variables” in a research precludes the identification of participants’ own ways of making sense of the phenomenon under investigation. (p. 8-9). I was concerned with respondents’ own multiple perceptions of the phenomenon of spousal abuse and its psychosocial and cultural underpinnings.

3.2. Research setting

Ghana, the setting for the data collection for the study, is a West African country bounded on the North by Burkina Faso, on the West by Cote D’Ivoire, on the East by Togo, and on the South by the Atlantic Ocean. According to the provisional results of the 2010 population and housing census, the total population of Ghana is 24,223,431; out of which 11,801,661 are males and 12,421,770 are females (Ghana Statistical Service, 2011). Thus, males form 48.7% of the population whereas females constitute 51.3% (ibid.). The country covers a total land surface area of 238,500 square kilometers with more than one hundred ethnic groups, each with its own distinct language (GhanaWeb, 2011).

Ashanti Region, one of the 10 administrative regions in Ghana, is the specific area of Ghana from which the data for the study was collected. Ashanti region is centrally located in the middle belt of Ghana. It is the third largest region in Ghana in terms of land surface area with 24,389 square kilometers representing 10.2% of the total land surface area of Ghana (GhanaWeb, 2011). The region has the highest number of people in Ghana with a total population of 4,725,046 constituting 19.5% of the total population of Ghana (GSS, 2011). There are 2,288,325 males and 2,436,721 females in the region (GSS, 2011). The Asantes, the largest constituent of the Akan-

Speaking people of Ghana, belong to the matrilineal descent group where property inheritance and succession is reckoned through the female line (Nukunya, 2003).

Kumasi, the capital city of Ashanti region and the second largest city in Ghana, and Mpatuom, a village in the Amansie West District of Ashanti, were the urban and rural setting of the study respectively. Kumasi has a considerable size of indigenous ethnic population. The economic life of members is dominated by commercial and clerical activities, with socio-economic status ranging from very rich to very poor. Nukunya (2003) notes, that Kumasi is a center of an economically rich environment with its inhabitants spanning many varied occupations and socio-economic groups. Mpatuom largely consists of indigenous homogenous ethnic group with strong bonds and a common tradition. The inhabitants are mostly peasant farmers with limited opportunities and means of subsistence. Majority of men and women in the rural setting have no formal classroom education. The considerations for the choice of Ashanti region and the two settings in Ghana were their convenience in terms of homogeneity of the people, expense, language and accessibility. Again, the facts that I am an Asante; that I have lived in the region since childhood; and that Mpatuom (the rural setting) is my hometown, provides me with an insider status that largely enhanced my research and the quality of data collected.

3.3. Participants/sample

In total, the study collected information from 21 participants out of whom 20 were married men and women sampled from rural and urban Ghana for Focus Group and Personal Interviews, and 1 key informant from Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU). The

sampling techniques adopted were purposive and snowball. The purposive sampling procedure was suitable because it ensured that participants relevant for the study (married men and women) were obtained. Again, according to Putman and Twohig (2002), purposive sampling approach is appropriate for focus group and personal interviews. The snowball sampling strategy facilitated the selection of participants for the focus group discussions because it ensured that the participants sampled were known to each other and thus created a friendlier and harmonious atmosphere for a balanced interactional pattern among participants.

Basically, the criteria for choice of participants for the study were that, for both the urban and rural settings, participants should be married or divorced and should have lived in Kumasi (urban) or Mpatuom (rural) for a minimum of three (3) years preceding the study. Again, to ensure that the focus group and individual interviews were not used as a platform for couples to challenge each other unnecessarily, two participants from the same marriage/household (a man and his wife) were not selected. Thus, if a husband agreed to participate in the focus group or the personal interviews, his wife was automatically out of the study and vice versa. According to Ellsberg and Heise (2005), only one participant should be selected from a household for interview about experiences of violence against women. This is done to “protect the confidentiality of the interview” as any other member from the same family interviewed on the same subject might conclude that the other respondent was asked about the same questions (ibid., p. 174).

Upon arrival in Kumasi, Ghana, I started the data collection exercise by going to the Ashanti Regional Department of the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) to inform them about the research. I met with the regional coordinator to whom I introduced myself and

the purpose of my visit. My decision to contact Ashanti regional DOVVSU stemmed from the fact that the research was being undertaken in the region and that the proximity of the unit to the research settings was appropriate in the event of referrals. I then handed copies of my research protocol, informed consent form and the ethical clearance from the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD) for his perusal. On an agreed date, I went to the DOVVSU unit to carry out the key informant interview and also to take a confirmation letter acknowledging the fact that I had adequately informed the outfit about the research.

I proceeded with neighbourhood visitations in Kumasi in search for 10 participants (5 males and 5 females) for the focus group and personal interviews. I contacted opinion leaders in the neighbourhoods, introduced myself and explained the aims of the research to them. They in turn led me to some potential families to seek for their consent. I met with these families and explained to the informants, in a clear and unambiguous language, the aims of the study and also, told them that participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any point in time if they so desired. Most of the families who took consent forms signed them and returned them later. Some recruited informants also assisted in the recruitment of other participants for the study. To ensure that the participants recruited by other participants willingly consented to the terms and conditions for the study; I explained to them, in a language they understood, the aims of the study and then gave them consent forms. We all agreed on a date for the consent forms to be returned and the interviews carried out. Different dates and venues were set for the focus group and personal interviews and for male and female participants.

3.4. Materials for the study

Materials for the collection of data included audio recorder, a semi-structured interview guide, pens/pencils, sheet of papers, and a notebook. I used an audio recorder to capture both the focus group and the individual interviews. A semi-structured interview guide I had constructed was used basically as a guide in terms of introductory statement to participants, key questions and scenarios and closing remarks (see appendix A). Whereas the sheet of papers were given to participants, at least those that could write, to jot down some reaction/rebuttal and/or confirmation notes especially when they were not speaking, I used the notebook to take notes of personal observations and informal discussions that ensued among informants and between informants and researcher. The field notes some of which took place in taxis and *trotro*² served as a complementary data for the study and as a context for the main data.

3.5. Data Collection Procedure

The procedure for the main data collection was in two folds: focus group discussion and individual interviews with married men and women from rural and urban areas of Ghana as well as a key informant from DOVVSU.

3.5.1. Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

According to Morgan (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), focus group interview is primarily “a way of listening to people and learning from them” (p. 835). On her part, Madriz (2000) argues that focus group discussion creates multiple lines of communication and provides

² The local term for privately owned commercial minibuses used for conveying commuters for short distance travel.

respondents with a serene and safe environment to share ideas, beliefs, and attitude in the company of people from the same ethnic, socioeconomic and gender backgrounds. Additionally, Kvale and Brinkman (2009) note that focus group interview is vigorous and interactive and holds a potential promise to bring forth more spontaneous expressive and emotional views from across different discussants than an individual interview. The propriety of focus group discussions for the present study is summed up by Madriz (2000) in the following words:

Focus Group can be an important element in the advancement of an agenda of social justice for women, because they can serve to expose and validate women's everyday experiences of subjugation and their individual and collective survival and resistance strategies (p. 836).

A total of 4 focus groups were organized; 2 each for urban and rural settings, 4 all male group and 4 all female group in each case. Even though 4 participants for focus group discussion fell short of the suggested 6 to 12 participants by some researchers (Willig, 2008; Chrzanowska, 2002; Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007), the 4 guaranteed effective moderation of the discussion and also ensured that all the participants were actively involved in the discussion throughout the process.

The consideration for a single sex focus group discussion was occasioned by the fact that it allows informants to share their views honestly without any inhibition from members of the group (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005). Putting males and females in a mixed group, in a hierarchical society of Ghana, would probably have hindered women from freely expressing their views—they may have been overshadowed by their male counterparts because of power imbalances. The experience of the single sex groups, as I observed, was more gratifying and stimulating as respondents were offered the opportunity to naturally share, contest and/or confirm ideas, beliefs

and attitudes among themselves. Perhaps the same could not be said if the groups were mixed sex. The focus group discussions for the rural setting were held in a classroom of one of the three (3) Junior High Schools in the village. I earlier sought permission from the head of the school who gave me the key to the room.

For the urban setting, the discussions for the female group took place under a tree on a University campus in Kumasi whereas the focus group discussion for the male group was held in one of the classrooms of the same university. I inspected the informed consent form that the participants returned to make sure they had appropriately signed to indicate their expressed agreement to the terms and conditions for the study; kept a copy and gave a copy to each participant before the commencement of each of the focus group discussions. All the focus group discussions lasted for a time period of between 35 and 60 minutes. It is instructive to mention that, apart from the fact that the focus group interview allowed me to gather large amount of data from informants in a relatively limited period of time, it also eased my involvement and participation in the discussions particularly due to the spontaneous responses from members of the group. Group ambience and the reduced pressure on each individual participant allowed members of the focus group to reflect on and describe the relationship between the comments of participants.

3.5.2. Personal interviews

To ensure that relevant and rich information that could not be disclosed in the focus group discussions due to the presence of other participants were adequately captured, I explored the views of 4 married men and women, 2 each from the rural and the urban setting through one-on-one interviews. The objective of this phase of the data collection exercise was to validate and

account for the gaps in the focus group discussion in order to provide a rich contextual data that will deepen my understanding of the practices that influence men's violent behaviour in matrimonial homes. As indicated earlier, the 4 interviewees were different from the participants in the focus group discussions. Having explained the details of the study to the sampled participants; and having assured them of their freedom of participation and withdrawal at any time of their choice, I made them sign a consent form to indicate their individual acceptance and willingness to take part in the study. I then proceeded with the interview at a venue of their choice and convenience. Most of the interviews took place at the halls or on the compound of informants. This brought intermittent interruptions during the interviews as informants sometimes had to stop midway of a statement to attend to either a visitor or a call from their children. All the interviews lasted for a timeframe of between 25 and 35 minutes.

3.5.3. Language for Data Collection

Potter and Wetherell (2001) believe that socio-psychological research can be effectively erected on the foundations of "speech act theory" (p. 198). The postmodernist paradigm of knowledge production to which the present study belongs, posits that social reality or versions of reality are constructed, manufactured, negotiated and deployed in social interaction through the instrumentality and functionality of language (Willig, 2008; Potter & Wetherell, 2001). In this regard, it is important that the choice of language for any study within this paradigm takes into account the researcher as well as the respondents' comprehensibility of the chosen language. Even though the official language of Ghana is English, Twi, the indigenous dialect for the people of Ashanti, is the most widely spoken in Ghana and by the people of the region. For this reason and also, for the fact that I am a native speaker of the Twi dialect, Twi was used throughout the

data collection apart from the key informant who indicated that he will be more comfortable with English. The use of Twi facilitated the study in two useful ways: first, it relatively created a power balance between the researcher and the respondents on one hand, and among respondents on another. There is a relationship between language and power in Ghana; people who speak English, particularly in the rural areas are mostly considered more powerful because they are regarded as belonging to the elite class in society. Second, the use of Twi enabled respondents to express themselves with some degree of flexibility and finesse which enhanced the credibility of the data collected.

3.5.4. Reliability and Validity

According to Watling (1995), “reliability and validity are tools of an essentially positivist epistemology” (p. 5). Although the concept of reliability and validity are treated separately in quantitative research, the terms are not conceptualized separately in qualitative research (Golasfhani, 2003). Instead, concepts such as credibility, transferability and trustworthiness are used to encompass reliability and validity. Additionally, Healy and Perry (2000), argue that the quality of a research in each paradigm should be evaluated by the terms of that paradigm. For them, validity and reliability within the postmodernist perspective rely on multiple perceptions about a single phenomenon; hence the need for data triangulation and their interpretations should be in line with the multiple perceptions about the phenomenon. The present study sourced information from focus group and one-on-one personal interviews which offered respondents the opportunity to construct multiple perceptions about the phenomenon of spousal abuse. The multiple perceptions from the focus group and personal interviews were carefully transcribed and analysed in terms of the common themes and constructions that naturally emerged from the data

which provides reason for precision, credibility, transferability, dependability and trustworthiness.

As Denzin and Lincoln (2000) assert, “terms such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability replace the usual positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity” (p. 21). Patton (2001) also argues that the instrument of credibility in qualitative paradigm is the researcher; that is, the effort and ability of the researcher to systematically and comprehensively provide account of the research process. Simco and Warin (1997) note that transparency of research is vital and that it can be achieved through the explicit communication of every stage of the research methodology from conception to publication. To achieve this, a detailed inclusive and comprehensive documentation of what was done and why it was done has been provided throughout the research process. The notion of craftsmanship has been used by Kvale (1995) to capture the validation process in a qualitative study.

Validation comes to depend on the quality of craftsmanship in an investigation, which includes continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings. In a craftsmanship approach to validation, the emphasis is moved from inspection at the end of the production line to quality control throughout the stages of knowledge production ((p. 27).

To ensure quality control during the focus group and personal interviews, respondents were intermittently questioned to ascertain and authenticate assertions made by them which ensured that consensus was reached on their attitudes and perceptions about the phenomenon of spousal abuse. The data was analysed and interpreted in line with the research aims and theory. The report of the study is elaborate enough to generate understanding and illuminate the reality of spousal abuse in conjugal partnerships in Ghana and the findings can be extrapolated to similar

settings. This fulfills the quality concept in qualitative research; which seeks illumination, understanding and extrapolation to similar contexts (Stenbacka, 2001; Hoepfl, 1997).

3.6. Data transcription and Analysis

It has been underscored that an important first step to data analysis in qualitative research paradigm is transcription (Bailey, 2008; Witherell & Potter, 2001; Easton, McComish & Greenberg, 2000). Bailey (2008) captures transcription as “a close observation of data through repeated careful listening...” (p. 129). I adopted the word-for-word method of transcription to transcribe all the audio recordings of the focus group and personal interviews. I carefully listened to the recordings with intermittent back and forth movement in order to check and recheck for data accuracy. According to Easton et al. (2000), researchers should check and recheck to establish dependability and confirmability of the study.

For purposes of standardization, easy interpretation and analysis, the interview recordings were translated and transcribed from Twi dialect into English while terminologies or local concepts which have no equivalence in the English language were retained. To avoid distortions of information and meanings from respondents, I carefully listened to the interview recordings over and over again and also reflected on the field notes I took alongside. I did not have much of a problem transcribing the data from Twi to English because of my good command and deep understanding of the Twi dialect. Where I perceived information not to be clear, I compared field notes in order to make such responses meaningful. This facilitated familiarity with the data and ensured that analysis of themes and concepts was according to what naturally emerged from the data rather than the expectations of the researcher. Having thoroughly and continuously read

through the data for common themes, concepts and constructions, the data was analysed using discourse analysis. In the process of constant reading and listening to the interview, ideas from the data crystallized into different categorizations out of which naturally emerged themes were formulated. The various positioning, attributions and constructions of participants' lived realities and experiences of the phenomenon of spousal abuse were analysed in the light of background features such as religion, values, beliefs and the culture of the participants. The common themes and relationships were then interpreted with regard to the research aims, questions, theory and the socio-economic and cultural context of Ghana.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethically approved and appropriate procedures were observed throughout the study. According to Silverman (2006), all the steps of the research process: the designing of the research project, data gathering and analysis, through to documentation, demand that all relevant ethical issues are observed by the researcher. To this end, I made a copy of my detailed research protocol available to the Regional Committee for Medical Research Ethics, (REK) in Norway. Realizing that the scope of the study was outside their domain and interest, REK referred the research project to the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) whose areas of operation the study focused. NSD duly acknowledged the receipt of the project description and subsequently issued me with a clearance letter (see appendix C). Upon consultation with the Ethical Committee in Ghana, Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, I was informed that the scope of my study does not fit into medicine and health, the areas of concentration for them. I therefore informed the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit who eventually issued me with a confirmation letter (see appendix D).

3.7.1. Informed Consent

Ellsberg and Heise (2005) note that the principle of respect for persons is embodied in two fundamental ethical values: respect for autonomy and protection of vulnerable persons. These principles according to them are addressed by “individual informed consent procedures that ensure that respondents understand the purpose of the research and that their participation is voluntary” (ibid., p. 36). To ensure that participation in the current study was voluntary, I unambiguously explained to all prospective informants in a language they understood the aims of the study. I further made informants sign a consent form (see appendix B) to indicate their preparedness and willingness to participate in the study.

3.7.2. Confidentiality

To address the issue of confidentiality and problems of disclosures, I assured all participants of strict confidentiality of their identity and disclosures. This information was also contained in the consent form given to the participants. Participants were not identified by their names, house or street numbers in the reporting and documentation of the study. I asked informants to adopt pseudonyms and codes for the focus group interviews instead of their real names. These codes reflected the gender, setting and ordinal position of informants. For example, RF1 and RM1 represented rural female and rural male number one whereas UF1 and UM1 reflected urban female and urban male number one respectively. All the information provided by respondents was held in absolute confidentiality; the interview recordings remained in my custody and control and were kept under lock and key. This ensured the safety and anonymity of participants and data.

3.7.3. Participation

Participation in the study, as contained in the informed consent form given out to participants, was strictly voluntary. All participants were assured of their right not to answer any questions(s) they felt uncomfortable with; and the right to withdraw their participation from the study at any time they so desired.

3.7.4. Trust

The trust and credibility of a researcher is very paramount in any interview situation particularly to facilitate free, friendly and honest communication between the researcher and the participants. According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), trust is the foundation for acquiring the fullest, most accurate disclosure a respondent is able to make. Thus, a warm and caring researcher may achieve effective interview in which both researcher and respondent feel good, rewarded and satisfied by the process and the outcomes (ibid.).

To achieve this, I fairly interacted with informants for some minutes about topics of their interest which they could relate to. To further built rapport and trust, I dressed modestly and also, managed my appearance, behaviour and self-presentation such that all the informants could relate to me in a caring and friendlier manner instead of perceiving me as a first class scholar and elite. The issue of personal relationship with informants was necessary for trust given the hierarchical social structure of Ghana. The issue of credibility was also addressed by periodically building consensus with the informants in the course of the focus group and personal interviews in order to clarify, ascertain deny or confirm the veracity of their statements. I also ensured that the transcription of data, as much as possible, was an accurate reflection of informants' accounts.

3.8. Practical Challenges

One of the practical challenges I encountered was getting a letter of confirmation from the department of DOVVSU in Ghana. Appointment with the Coordinator of DOVVSU was either cancelled or rescheduled as the officer was busy settling domestic violent related cases at the office. Again, getting female participants at the rural setting initially proved quite burdensome as all informants approached demonstrated reluctance. According to them, their level of education could not be enough to answer questions from, as they put it, a “graduate.” In Ghana, the term graduate is used to refer to someone of higher learning or university education. For these participants, interview was synonymous with school examination; providing right answers to questions posed. I had to explain further to them that the type of interview I was talking about had nothing to do with right or wrong answers; instead, it was about their day to day experiences and realities of spousal abuse.

Additionally, some of the participants at the rural setting especially during the personal interviews faced some difficulties in understanding some of the questions. This caused delays in answering questions when posed. I had to put some questions differently using local examples in order to solicit response from them. Another practical challenge was domineering voices in the focus group discussions. Some participants dominated the discussions, particularly for the male participants in the urban setting. I addressed this by making sure that other participants were also allowed sufficient time to talk and also insisted that participants talked when invited.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Many studies on the phenomenon of spousal abuse or violence against women have extensively focused on individual's dispositional factors as key influences of the phenomenon (Panchanadeswaran & McCloskey, 2007; Walker, 2000; Buzawa & Buzawa, 1990; Gelles, 1985). Many explanations of why individuals remain in violent intimate relationships appear to downplay structural factors. A few more studies also assume that people who stay in abusive intimate unions have masochistic or pathological personalities to suffer depressed self-esteem, or to have developed a pattern of learned helplessness (Walker, 2000; Blum, 1982; Gabard & Larson, 1981; Snyder & Fruchman, 1981). Rather than extensively focusing on personal traits or dispositions, the present study sought to qualitatively explore some psychological, situational or structural factors that may account for spousal abuse in rural and urban Ghana. The study also aimed at investigating the impact of power dynamics, traditional and institutionalized practices, psychosocial and religious practices on women's decision to leave or remain in abusive relationships in Ghana. Finally, the study sought to examine the extent to which the phenomenon of spousal abuse in rural Ghana may differ from urban Ghana.

From the data, the findings of the present study are summarized by the conceptual model in figure 1 below

Accounting for spousal abuse in Ghana

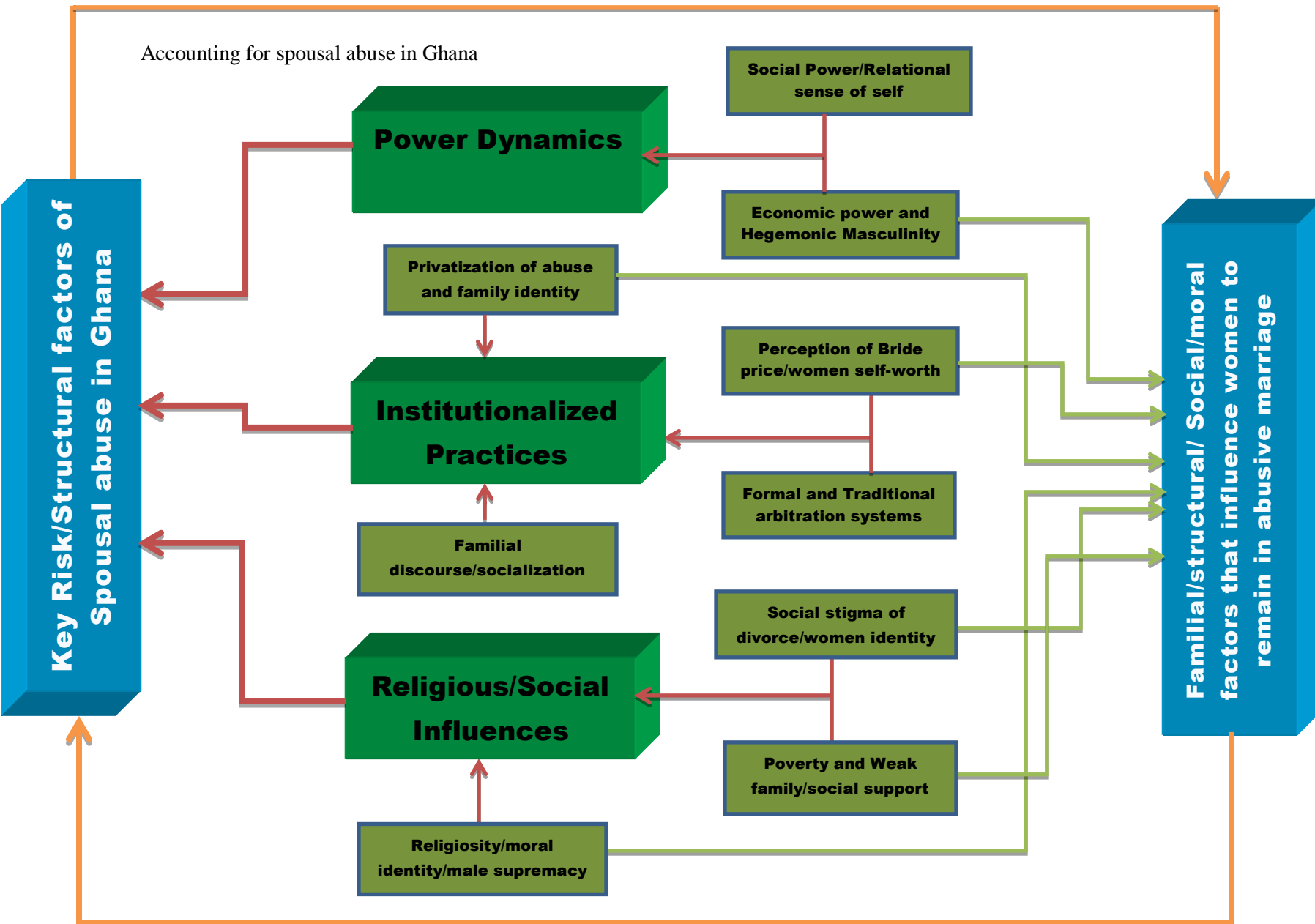


Figure 1: A conceptual model showing risk/structural factors of the phenomenon of spousal abuse in rural and urban Ghana

From the analysis of the data, as shown in the above conceptual model, it emerged that power dynamics, institutionalized practices, and religious and social influences are the three recurrent themes that both male and female respondents in the focus group and personal interviews mentioned as influencing the phenomenon of spousal abuse in rural and urban Ghana. The following sections will discuss the emerged themes and findings in the light of the data, the theoretical perspectives, and other relevant research. I will focus on structural or institutionalized level of analysis on one hand and psychological level of analysis on the other.

4.1. Power Differentials between men and women in marriage in Ghana

Power is a fundamental aspect of all human relationships including family and consensual unions. Power in conjugal relationships defines who is able to influence who in order to have the freedom to do what, and who can be restricted from exercising authority and control. Thus, power is a relational concept—it is not an individual property, it belongs to a group or society and its existence and manifestations depend on the existence of the group as well (Arendt, 1970). The theme of power and its legitimacy are discursively deployed by Ghanaian married men and women in the present study to describe and demarcate the various positions in marriage. The duties, responsibilities, rights and privileges in marriage are conferred on parties in marital relationship in accordance with the dynamics and manifestations of power in both the conjugal and the extended family. The discourses of male and female respondents in focus groups and personal interviews cover two important forms of power: economic and social power.

4.1.1. Economic Power Dynamics and Hegemony of Masculinity

Men in the Ghanaian society control economic resources and are regarded as the breadwinners of their families whereas women are responsible for all domestic duties. The economic power of men begins with the formal establishment of marriage where the man, as required by custom, pays money and some items to the family of the prospective bride. Though women perceive payment of bride price as a religious and traditional duty of men, it defines the identity, responsibilities and authority of men in the Ghanaian society. In a focus group interview, one female respondent said:

You see, men of today are not the first to pay something for a woman's hand in marriage; it started in the Bible as well. If they (men) pay bride price, it's their responsibility as men as was done in the beginning of times (Rural Female 3).

The respondent appears to effectively ground the economic and moral responsibilities of men in the Bible. Even though the payment of bride price is considered as moral and traditional duty of a responsible prospective bridegroom, it also confers power and authority on men and makes them assume the headship position in marriage. One male respondent indicated that *“what I know is that it is the man who uses his money to marry a woman and therefore controls the family. So that's my understanding of the headship of the man in a family”* (Urban Male 1). This exemplifies the fact that the superiority of men to women in marriage could be traceable to the financial commitment made by men at the outset of marriage. Besides, responsible men in Ghana are those that are able to provide enough money for the upkeep of their homes. As one female respondent captured it: *“A man has to provide money for the upkeep of the home, paying the*

children's school fees, providing the needs of the wife and all that" (Rural Female 4). This response further highlights the economic responsibilities of men and the heavy social expectations placed on them in the Ghanaian society. The identity of men is inextricably connected to their ability to live up to the breadwinner ideals of society.

During the subsistence of the marriage, the husband is required by custom to take care of the wife in her illness, provide for her accommodation, food and her general maintenance. Indeed, so absolute is the general maintenance and welfare responsibility that even if the wife has independent means of subsistence, the husband is bound to do it (Adinkrah, 1985). According to Nukunya (2003), a good husband in the Ghanaian society is supposed to provide his wife with regular gifts and bear all her debts while a good wife is expected to demonstrate greater respect and obedience to the man. The interface between men's economic responsibilities and their masculine identity has been studied by researchers in Sub-Saharan Africa (Groes-Green, 2009; Cornwall, 2003; Silberschmidt, 2001). According to them, this breadwinner ideal defines men as those who can provide economically for their female partners and who earn their male authority and control in the society from their ability to live up to the ideals of economic power. The self-esteem, confidence and honour of men in Ghana may be threatened by their inability to measure up to their responsibility as primary providers in the family.

On their part, women have social and moral responsibilities in marriage and society that define their feminine identity. In a focus group, one male respondent indicated the social expectations of women:

In marriage everyone has his or her duties. The woman has to cook, wash and take care of the children and the man has to ensure that there is money for the upkeep of the family. So if the man gives you money and you refuse to do what you are supposed to do then it's your fault if he beats you because you have failed him (Urban Male 4).

The foregoing response demonstrates specific social roles and positions men and women occupy within the social structure and space of marriage. It shows the distinction between economic responsibility and masculinity on one hand and caring role, nurturance and femininity on the other. As shown in his response, if wives fail to cook, wash or take care of the children, it is interpreted by their husbands and the extended family as shirking of traditionally gendered role and social responsibilities. These hierarchical arrangements are legitimized because they define individual identities in marriage as well as in the society. Thus, marriage in Ghana is not an individual property, it is a group affair; the marriage contract is tied to the social contract of the extended family and the community. The social ideals of “womanhood” and “manliness,” depend on the respective roles and responsibilities of men and women within the social structure.

Another marked feature of womanhood in the Ghanaian society is women's submissiveness to their husbands. As signs of respect and obedience, women are not expected to talk back when their husbands are angry or talking, and they are not expected to argue with their husbands; in fact they are required to demonstrate unquestioned obedience to their husbands. A female respondent explained what women can or cannot do in marriage:

Some of the women especially those who are educated do not want their husbands to overpower them so anytime the man issues instructions they want to do other things in their

own way. They also argue with their husbands and most men do not want their wives to argue with them because they are heads of families... a woman will remain a woman regardless of your education so if you disrespect your husband because of your education or even money, some men will also show that they are heads of the family...The Bible advises wives to be submissive to their husbands regardless of status because they control the home (Urban Female 3).

As the above response suggests, there are moral and social standard of behaviour for women that the community expects from them. The response also indicates that the status of women and womanhood, within the context of Ghana, is a “derivative identity”—it is closely linked to their family, religious belief and the society. Therefore, if women argue with husbands, they subvert the social, religious and moral order of the community. Also important in the above response is that education and economic resources may be used by women as an effective tool to somewhat challenge the authority and control of men and to question the social and moral order. However, some women perceive such behaviours of educated and resourceful women as problematic and a departure from the norm because it poses a threat to family and social structure. As she noted; “*a woman will remain a woman regardless of your education or even money.*” In other words, arguing with your husband because of education or economic resources may be considered as a sign of disrespect and a challenge to his authority and physical violence could be used by the man to reassert his authority, to silence the woman, and to maintain unquestioned respect.

The distinctive roles and responsibilities of men and women and the gendered practices in the Ghanaian society, as seen from the foregoing analysis, potentially create polarity of masculinity and femininity within the social context. Connell (2002), cautions against treating gender as a

separate and isolated sphere of social life. He argues that gender permeates every aspect of social life and that it is undesirable to treat it as confined to specific spheres of social life. He uses the concept of “gender regimes” to explain the state of play in gender relations in social institutions such as a school, a market or a workplace, where there is a regime of how boys and girls or men and women should behave. Apparently, the institution of marriage and the extended family in Ghana can be said to be fashioned around gender regimes of separate and specific responsibilities for men and women that society expects both gender to conform to in order to keep the social order.

When women are gainfully employed or are resourceful and exercise some form of control over decision making in their marriage, they are positioned by men as disrespectful. As one of the male participants indicated; *“if a woman has more money than the husband, there is no respect on her part”* (Urban Male 1). This response from a male participant also indicates the perception of men that their status and identity depends on their economic contributions in the family; and that when women assume breadwinner role, men feel insecure and personally inadequate. This response could be an expression of the psychological pain of men because of the dominant notion of masculinity and its dependence on economic responsibilities in the Ghanaian society. They feel slighted and undermined by their lack of economic resources to perform their primary breadwinner role in society.

This is consistent with Connell’s (1995) notion of “marginalized masculinity.” He observes that unemployed men miss out on the patriarchal dividend and the economic power over women. He further argues that poverty and marginalization of a social class tend to increase violence and coercion. To this end, men’s use of violence against women because of their loss of economic

power may signify that “hierarchy and hegemony is no longer stable and that the gender order is in a process of crisis and transformation” (p. 84). Given the hierarchy and structure of gender relations in Ghana, such crisis may disrupt the social order and that could provoke attempts by men to restore the hegemony of masculinity. Another male respondent highlighted the fear and insecurity of men when they miss out on the economic power over women:

I have even observed that most of the women in our society today who have work and money either do not have husbands or have left them because they cannot be subjected to the control of their men in marriage (Urban Male 3).

This observation shows that when women have work, money and autonomy in the society, men tend to perceive their decision to seek divorce or not to marry as an expression of their economic status and that this assumed status of women may subvert the moral and social order. To restore their deflated self-ego and identity as a result of their loss of economic abilities, they make attributions of disrespect on the part of these resourceful women and may engage in a defense mechanism that tend to blame women for their lack of husbands. According to Connell (1995), male gender revolves around two conflicting characterizations of the essence of manhood: first, being a man is natural, healthy and innate; second, a man must remain masculine and should never allow his masculine identity to wane in society. These attributions and mechanisms adopted by some men in the Ghanaian society may not only be necessary for the continuity of their masculine identity and male honour; they are also important for effective and smooth running of the system.

The apparent importance of economic power in marriages in Ghana resonates with Silberschmidt's study in rural Kenya and urban Tanzania. Exploring how socio-economic changes have impacted on men's power in marriages, Silberschmidt (2001) found that unemployment and insufficient income negatively affected the ability of men to play their social role as breadwinners and heads of households, leaving their self-esteem, social expectations and identity completely devastated. This is also consistent with the resource theory which posits that power and control over decision making in conjugal relationships is on the side of the partner who contributes the most valued resources to the marriage (Blood & Wolfe, 1960).

Additionally, responses of male and female participants in the present study indicated that economic empowerment of women is linked to their autonomy and independence in marriage. Respondents suggested that women who are able to provide for themselves may be more likely to terminate abusive relationships. One urban female respondent explained that; *"if a woman can take care of herself she will not continue to stay in an abusive relationship"* (Urban Female 2). This illustrates the fact that strong financial abilities of women may positively influence abused women's decision to leave their violent marriages.

It is instructive to point out that, although the above response appears contradictory to the earlier notion expressed by another female respondent, namely; *"a woman will remain a woman regardless of her education...or even money,"* it highlights the changing realities of patriarchy and masculinity in the absence of sound material conditions. The above response further illuminates the reality that the patriarchal dividend of honour, prestige and command enjoy by men in Ghana is accrued from their economic power within the social structure. In the absence of work, status and money, male authority in marriage and the extended family may be threatened

and unstable. Thus, economic responsibilities are part of the necessary conditions for the expression of masculinity and male power. Scholars of masculinity and gender have well documented that men who lack employment, status and money may reassert their masculinity through other means such as bodily powers based on their abilities and physique of the male body (Groes-Green, 2009; Connell, 2005; Silberschmidt, 2001). In a study among young Mozambican men, Groes-Green documented that, men who were without employment and were poor reasserted their masculine powers through sexual performance and violent attacks on their partners (Groes-Green, 2009). According to her, men adopted what she termed “sexualized masculinity” based on their ability to perform sexually and give erotic pleasure to gain respect and self-worth from their partners.

Economic resourcefulness has social and psychological implications for both men and women in Ghana. Whereas it reinforces masculine authority and control over women, it also influences women’s exercise of autonomy and control in decisions in marriage. The over dependence of women on men for their livelihood may compel abused women to remain in violent relationships. As one female respondent explained; *“Some too stay because of money; they don’t have any means of taking care of themselves if they leave the men...especially here in the village”* (Rural Female 1). Angela (2000) confirms that “lack of economic resources underpins women’s vulnerability to violence and their difficulty in extricating themselves from a violent relationship” (p. 7). Rusbult and Martz (1995) equally assert that when the alternatives available to abused women are not attractive enough, their commitment to an unsatisfactory relationship are more likely to be higher than those who may be economically sound with an independent means of livelihood. In the hierarchical society of Ghana where “most women operate on the

margins of the economy in the informal sector and are trained to accept ‘female’ occupations” (Ofei-Aboagye, 1994, p. 936), abused wives may “*stay because where would they find money to buy their things and food to eat*” (Urban Female 2) if they decide to abandon their primary providers. In a related study in the patriarchal society of Nigeria, Amnesty International (2005) found that most women who were abused persistently could not leave their abusive relationship because of their financial dependence on their husbands. Clearly, the general economic situations and valued contributions to family economy are important for the status, power and identity of both men and women in the Ghanaian society.

4.1.2. Social Power and Relational Sense of Self

In Ghana, like many patriarchal social structures, traditions and culture overtly and covertly promote a male-centered thought that suggests that men are infinitely superior to women. The social power and identity of both men and women appears to be a default assumption of society and the more they act within the boundaries of these assumptions, the more they help the system to run effectively. The identity, status and power of men are linked to their ability to live up to the tenets of traditionally set standard of masculinity. For example, a male respondent explained the social identity of women:

Women are considered vulnerable in our part of the world so they are thought to be weak and cannot beat their husbands...when women beat their husbands it hardly comes out for fear of what society might say about the men involved (Urban Male 3).

This response suggests that in the Ghanaian society, women are socially or traditionally positioned as weaker sex and are expected to exhibit default standard of feminine behaviour.

Thus, women are not supposed to beat their husbands and that if a woman beats a man it is regarded as shameful for both the man and his wife. The self-ego of men becomes deflated when women violently attack them. By the same standard, women who cross the socially constructed gender boundaries may be seen as deviants. The identity of men and women are expressed in relation to the standard of the community. Society constantly serves as “gender-police,” ensuring that men and women do not act over and above gender fences. Thus, men are reinforced by this social expectation to engage in behaviours that will ensure that their power and control over women are enforced. In support of the earlier assertion, another male respondent indicated: *“If a woman beats a husband then that man is really not a man; how can a man, head of the family, allow a woman to beat him? Then that man loses his title in the marriage”* (Urban Male 4).

This is a demonstration that, to assert your authority and keep your title or masculine identity in marriage, a man is socially expected to exercise greater control over his wife. The response further shows that as much as it is shameful and morally inappropriate for women to exhibit signs of masculinity or aggression (beat men), it is morally and psychologically degrading and a sense of personal failure when husbands are beaten up by their wives. If a husband *“loses his title,”* he will be perceived to have lost his control, authority and his entire identity as a man in both his conjugal and extended family. It is therefore their moral and social responsibility to defend their *“title”* in society so that they are not perceived by others as feminine and weak. A female respondent also confirmed the need for men to guard their masculine identity; *People may even look down upon women who beat their husbands as much as they will ridicule the men for their lack of control in their marriage* (Urban Female 3). The stakes of perceived “womanhood” or “effeminate” in the society is very high for men in Ghana—it is a matter of

self-worth, self-ego and dignity in his family and the community. Consequently, men could suffer depression or despair, not because of the loss of money or the material advantage that money could buy, but because of the perception and feeling of ceasing to be a real man among men (Gaylin, 1992). Therefore, a real man in the Ghanaian society is the one who adopts measures necessary to keep his identity and to dominate and oppress women—a behaviour consistent with societal conceptualization of masculinity and manhood.

This heavy social expectation that society places on men have been studied and noted as posing a great challenge not only for men themselves, but also for their relations with women in various communities. In *“Masculinity as Homophobia, Fear, Shame and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity,”* Kimmel (2007) asserts that the complexity of maleness that defines men according to what they are not, instead of who they really are, places huge demands on them in terms of a continuous life process expected of men. A man does not only have to live to the best of his capabilities, he also has to live to the opposite of a culturally determined feminine standard of life. Thus, a man is man enough in the Ghanaian cultural and psychological frame of thought if he is the opposite of a woman. According to Kimmel (2007), if a man manages to live in a way that does not reflect womanhood in him, then he can be qualified by society as a man. This finding meshes well with Connell’s (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity: a system of gender practices which is embodied in the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and subordination of women.

From the discussions so far, it seems that the social conceptualization of masculinity is entrenched in the social existence of men and women in Ghana and the use of violence against

women appears to be connected to men's relational sense of self—it is a reflection of men's relation to their social world. In the urban male focus group discussion, a respondent indicated men's relational sense of self and masculine identity; “...sometimes a man may want to show his power over a woman so that others do not think that he is a weak husband” (Urban Male 1).

This is an obvious indication that the exercise of power and dominance over women in Ghana may not only be an individual men's experience but also, a product of their relations with other men, women and their society. Men may abuse women because of what their friends, family and the society say about them and their identity; “Yes, some men listen to people so they beat their wives to court public or societal honour” (Urban Male 4). In relation to friends, family and the society, wife-beating appears to be a symbol of male power, identity and control over women in Ghana. “Sometimes too, some of the men in conversation tell their colleagues that anytime their wives err they discipline them, just to demonstrate to their colleagues that they rule their marital homes” (Rural Female, personal interview).

Apparently, these discourses of men portray the use of violence against women as evident marker of manhood. They are afraid of societal shame; the fear of being thought weak or feminine by other men. According to Kimmel (2003), the fear of being seen woman or feminine dominates the cultural definitions of manhood in the US as well. He extended the psychological concept of “homophobia” to include men who are afraid of being regarded as feminine by other men in society. He argued that homophobia is the fear of men that other men will unmask, emasculate and reveal them to the world that they do not measure up to the “real man” identity. The finding of the present study is consistent with Kimmel's conceptualization of homophobia. The men in the Ghanaian community can be said to use violence against their wives in reaction

to the perceived social humiliation they may suffer if they are not seen as acting “manly” and taking charge of their families. They exercise control over women in response to psychological and structural or familial pressures—to reduce their perceived sense of personal inadequacy. The real fear of men in society, “is not fear of women but of being ashamed or humiliated in front of other men, or being dominated by stronger men” (Leverenz, 1986, p. 451).

As much as men’s dominance over women is important for their ego and masculine identity, women’s acceptance of their subservient role seems to be equally significant for their feminine identity and the smooth running of the social order. The data suggests that the domination of men and the subordination of women in marriage is a social mores that both men and women accept as part of the social structure and as an expression of their identities. An earlier response from a female participant also highlights the relations between feminine identity and the Ghanaian society; namely, “*People may even look down upon women who beat their husbands as much as they will ridicule the men for their lack of control in their marital homes*” (Urban Female 3).

It thus appears that it is a social taboo and perhaps immoral for a woman to beat a man in marriage. For another female respondent, “*it’s not a good thing for a woman to lay a finger on your husband whose ‘back you sleep’ (lit.)*” (Rural Female 3). The above moral positioning of what is a “good thing” for a woman to do or not to do, in the Ghanaian society, reflects the relational thinking of both men and women. The acceptance of men’s superordinate powers in marriage and society by women in Ghana confirms Weber’s conceptualization of power in society. For Weber, the social benefit of power will result from the institutionalization and legitimation of the power that some actors hold over others, in a manner that majority of the

members within the larger social system are motivated to act in ways that contribute to order and stability rather than disruption and instability (as cited in Boss et al., 1993).

Similarly, the legitimacy of men's unrestrained authority and control over women in marriage and the subordinate role of women in Ghana is entrenched and embedded in the value systems and traditions of the society such that women are motivated to act within the boundaries of norm and traditions to achieve social equilibrium. As one urban female indicated in a personal interview; *“Traditional belief systems hold that the man is the head of the family and nothing can change that....a wife should show maximum respect for the husband, be polite and submissive to him”* (Urban Female). Evidently, the institutionalization and legitimation of male power and the subordination of women do not only reflect patriarchal masculinity and femininity in Ghana, it also inures to the benefit and harmonious running of the social hierarchy and order. For example, in a personal interview, another female participant metaphorically compared the authority and control of men over women to an employer-employee relationship.

If you are under someone's authority and control you don't just do things as you please. Take work for example, you don't decide when to go to work or not to go when you are under an authority. It's true that women may have rights but you don't invoke the rights in all circumstances (Urban Female).

Indicatively, the employer-employee metaphor invoked by this female participant to compare the relationship between a husband and a wife shows the impact of masculine and feminine identities on the Ghanaian social psyche. It suggests the relationship between the social and economic

order, gender specific roles and responsibilities, moral and cultural obligations on one hand and the ethical qualities of the “acceptable masculine and feminine” gender on the other.

The forgoing analysis epitomizes Kenrick, Neuberg and Cialdini’s (2005, p. 337) “culture of honour”—a social system of norms whose principal idea is that people, especially men, should be ready to defend their honour with violent retaliation if necessary. The dynamics of economic and social power, circumscribed in traditions and customs, appear to endorse a social reality of life where women are subjugated by men in rural and urban Ghana. Masculinity has become an important and continuous test by which husbands prove to their wives, other women and men, and ultimately to themselves that they measure up to the standard of manhood in the Ghanaian society.

Psychologically, “when a person’s moral universe does not ‘fit’ social reality, that person’s identity/identities and perceptions of an individual self in relation to the other will be invalidated too” (Silberschmidt, 2001, p. 665). In the Ghanaian society, there appears to be structural and psychosocial explanations for violent behaviour of men in marriages and families—if their self-image and masculine identities do not correspond to the social norms and realities, they may experience “acute identity diffusion” (Erikson, 1980) or an “identity crisis” (Jacobson-Widding, 1983). There is a relational interface between the self and the social context of men in Ghana. In their identity diffusion, men in Ghana are caught between conflicting identities; between their biological and social identities. Individual men’s violent behaviour in marriages may be a form of “acting-out” in order to help restore the sense of reality and the sense of self. Their experience demands commitment to their social contexts and psychosocial sense of self.

4.2. Traditional and Institutionalized practices

The discourses of respondents on factors that could account for spousal abuse in conjugal unions reflect on some institutionalized practices and values that are embedded in traditions and customs in Ghana. Respondents discursively positioned practices such as bride price, familial discourses, traditional systems of marital conflict arbitration, and privatization of familial and marital matters in Ghana as some of the structural constraints of spousal abuse.

4.2.1. The System of Bride Price and Spousal abuse in Ghana

As indicated earlier, the official establishment of marriage in Ghana results from the payment of bride price by the groom and his family to the family of the prospective bride. Apart from its moral and traditional value, bride price is also perceived by women and society as a source of pride and prestige for a prospective bride and her extended family. One female explained why it is important for men to pay bride price; “...it is a tradition that every man must do before he is regarded as a married man. You can't just take a woman in marriage without paying anything; then how would you respect the woman” (Urban Female 1).

It is evident from the response that the practice of bride price is an important part of womanhood, their self-worth and honour in the Ghanaian society. The response suggests that this tradition is also a necessary condition for marriage and the identity of men. The practice is a traditional transaction between two families—one family exchanging their valued daughter for a dowry as a symbol of respect and honour for womanhood; and the other family demonstrating their moral responsibility and respect for a woman and her family. The relationship between the practice of bride price and the identity of women and their extended family is so significant that

the amount of money or the value of the items presented to the family of the bride is perceived as corresponding to her self-worth. Another female participant summed up the significance of bride price to women and their families:

But you know, if men don't pay much for women, they would also think we are cheap and would not take proper care of us or can even divorce you anytime. Haven't you heard of the local proverb that cheap things are not properly taken care of? (Rural Female 1).

This traditional gesture seeks to establish and strengthen the bond between the families in the marriage and to demonstrate the economic capabilities of the man and the value he places on the prospective bride. For some men in Ghana; *"it is not a question of abolishing the practice of head drink because that will bring the value of women down"* (Urban Male 3). For the indigenous African, the institution of bride price is a kind of "marriage insurance" especially for the bride—protecting her against possible ill-treatment by the new marital context (Valsiner, 2006, p. 164). Thus, because the bride is obtained with valued resources, the groom is expected to protect and take proper care of her.

This may be distinct from the practice of dowry in India and some other parts of Asia. In the case of the Ghanaian bride price, prospective bride is paid for whereas in the Indian dowry, the bride is paid off. Thus, in the Indian system, the prospective bride and her family rather pay dowry to the prospective bridegroom and his family (Goody & Tambia, 1973). Though the two traditions of dowry may present contradictions in practice, ideologically, they both bear some essential features that favour men and patriarchal social order. In either case, women are essentially exchanged and thus become subordinated to men in the family and society. In spite of

the transactional exchange between the two families concerned, in both the Ghanaian and Indian systems, the bride does not lose her ties of membership in her consanguine family. As indicated earlier, in the matrilineal system of the Akans in Ghana, wives in many ways remain more intimately bound to their natal group or families.

In their analysis of bride price and dowry in Africa and Eurasia, Goody and Tambia (1973) explain that whereas dowry is associated with societies with complex forms of stratification, bride price is found in societies with minimal stratification. They further assert that dowry is mostly associated with monogamous societies and societies where males contribute most in agriculture; but bride price may be restricted with polygynous societies and societies where women make major contributions to agriculture. However, they concluded their analysis with a caveat that the two practices are not mutually exclusive and should not be over-polarized. In either case, the bride price or dowry symbolizes men's control over women and reinforces the status and power of men in hierarchical societies.

Although the centuries old tradition of bride price in Ghana may be well intentioned, discourses of male respondents suggest that it significantly places a huge responsibility on men. For example, one urban male complained that; "*...why should the family demand so much from men as though they are selling their daughters outright to them? I think they should bring the charges down* (Urban Male 2). The complaint above further shows the relationship between masculinity and patriarchal control on one hand, and moral and heavy economic responsibilities of men on the other. There appears to be a huge economic price brought upon men by the extended family and a man's inability to measure up to this responsibility may significantly affect his masculine identity. It should be pointed out that these complaining men are aware that

the normative order of patriarchy and masculinity will be greatly undermined if they are not able to satisfy the material conditions of the tradition of bride price to the extended family. As another male respondent indicated; *“the practice is good but the money charged these days are on a high side”* (Urban Male 4). As Silberschmidt (2001) notes about men in rural and urban East Africa, although the main axis of patriarchal power is still the overall subordination of women and dominance of men, lack of material conditions has placed patriarchy at increased risk and uncertainty.

The heavy economic responsibilities on men and their perception of exploitation by the extended family may increase the frustrations of men and influence their violent behaviours because *“they (men) may already be angry with the family for charging so much”* (Rural Female 2). Responding to whether payment of bride price influences spousal abuse, one male respondent explained that:

...most men think that once they have paid for the tiri nsa then they have acquired you from the family and thus wield absolute control over you. Majority of men think that women will have to show maximum respect to them because of the payment or they will have to be disciplined if they go contrary (Urban Male 2).

The above response implies that instead of the conventional wisdom of value and identity that the bride price symbolizes in marriage, men perceive women as their possession and products of a commercial transaction. Thus, violent attack on women may be considered by men as a legitimate and moral responsibility because it is meant to serve as a disciplinary action towards their perceived erring wives.

In a personal interview, a female respondent explained that; *“I know men who tell their wives to give them maximum respect because they have used their money to marry them”* (Rural Female). This response is a testament of the fact that the tradition of bride price may psychologically reduce women to a commodity—women become bona fide properties of men, their buyers.

The practice brings with it an interpretative ambiguity as it may imply an activity of purchasing a wife and paying for her (Valsiner, 2006). The symbolic gesture may unfortunately enslave women to men such that the rights and privileges of wives in marriage may be at the behest of their husbands who wield and exercise unquestioned authority over them. According to Cantalupo, Martin, Pak and Shin (2006, p. 563), the idea that rape cannot exist in marriage in Ghana is based on “a view of women as the property of their husbands—like all other forms of personal property, a man may do to his wife what he wishes.” The finding of the present study about bride price tradition in Ghana is also identical with the findings of a study by Amnesty International (2005) in Nigeria. They established that the custom of bride price was assumed to be akin to payment for a commodity and as in any such transactions, the husband—the buyer took full ownership right over his ‘purchase.’

Besides the commoditization of women, the practice of bride price may also weaken the moral capacity of families to intervene on abused women’s behalf. The general economic deprivation of the extended family, which influences their huge economic demands from a prospective husband, may equally affect their ability to effectively intervene when abuse occurs.

As one of the male respondents put it:

Some of the families sometimes fail or feel reluctant to intervene because of the huge sums of money they may have taken from the man as bride price. ...if they should ask their daughter

to leave the marriage, the man may demand the return of the money and all the items he presented to them (Rural Male 2).

This response signifies the economic value of bride price to the extended family. Apart from its social value and the symbolism of self and family identity, the suggestion by this man indicates that the family charge high prices partly because of its economic situations. To this end, marriage may be regarded as an economic transaction where the bride's family exchanges their valued daughter for material wealth to satisfy the economic needs of the extended family. The response further suggests that the indebtedness of the extended family to men, as a result of the tradition of bride price, may morally, psychologically and economically weaken their capacity to intervene on behalf of the victims of abuse. Okereke (2002) argues that the higher the bride price paid by the man, the more indebted the bride's family is to the groom and the less likely her family will be to support her if she decides to leave the man in the face of abuse.

The reluctance of the extended family may stem from poverty because if they should demonstrate support for their abused daughter, they will be required by custom to return the bride price. Another male respondent in a personal interview explained why abused women continue to stay in their marriages; *"It's poverty because if the decision to break up comes from the woman, certainly the man may not be too happy with it... some men may demand for the money and all the items they presented as dowry (Rural Male).* This response suggests that whereas divorce is a permissible option under marriage and divorce laws in Ghana, the reality is that divorce may be a male prerogative. Given the link between economic responsibility and masculinity, when women decide to end their relationship, not only do men see it as a sign of personal inadequacy and a threat to their identity, they may also feel economically exploited by

women and the extended family. They may engage in violent attacks as a means to restore their dignity and compensate for their economic loss. If women are unable to fulfill the traditional obligation of returning the bride price, their autonomy over their lives will be threatened, as abusive men may still pursue them even long after they leave their marriages.

The discourses of respondents also bring to the public radar the perception of bride price by contemporary Ghanaians. Contrary to the traditional understanding, the practice of bride price and its attendant accompaniments appears to be perceived by men as a personal consequence or financial burden. Thus, bride price, to some men, is more than the symbolic drink—it includes all the items and gifts given to the bride and her family at the marriage ceremony, and all of them are expected to be returned if the woman decides to leave the man. This contemporary understanding of the practice appears to be a departure from the status quo, where dissolution of a marriage was granted upon the return of only the symbolic head-drink by the bride. The changing perception of the practice may be as a result of the immense economic deprivation and the stresses imposed by poverty upon the extended family—the family may see their daughters as source of income.

The decision of abused women to stay in abusive relationships as indicated by respondents appears to be at variance with Rusbult's (1980) overarching concept of commitment. Even though the objective of Rusbult and Martz (1995) was partly to use the investment model to de-emphasize the assumptions that battered individual's personal dispositions may account for women's continuous stay in abusive relationships, their explanation of individual's commitment to a violent relationship still leaves the analysis at the personal rather than at the structural level.

According to Rusbult and Martz (1995) commitment mediates the decision to remain or leave a relationship: individuals with lower commitment are more likely to exit abusive relationships whereas those with higher commitment level are likely to stay. Rather than conceptualizing the stay or leave decision as a function of individual's psychological attachments, the case of Ghana suggests a structural and cultural complexities that overburden women to terminate abusive conjugal relationships. The discourses of married men and women in Ghana, as shown in this study, attribute the decisions to leave abusive partnership to cultural, situational and structural factors than to dispositional factors or individual's psychological orientation. This supports Bograd's (1988) assertion that instead of asking why women remain in abusive marriages, we should possibly ask what social and structural factors constrain women from leaving.

The accounts of respondents clearly indicate the possessive behaviour of men and that the autonomy of women in marriage in Ghana may be restricted by customary practices that favour a patriarchal social structure. As Amnesty International (2005) notes about patriarchal societies in Africa, men can divorce their wives without any justifiable reason. Meanwhile, there are no such restrictive customary laws and provisions for men (Okereke, 2006). The abuse of women is a unique phenomenon that is caused by social and economic processes that openly endorse a patriarchal social order and family structure that inure to the benefit of men (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Given the forgoing accounts by male and female respondents, it can be said that although the bride price tradition may reduce women to properties of men, it also defines the dignity and worth of women, and serves as a source of income to the extended family.

4.2.2. Discourses around marriage and the family

Also connected to the tradition of bride price, are discourses that are weaved around the traditional fabric of marriage and the family system in Ghana. As part of custom marking the marriage ceremony, newly married couples are advised by elders of both the man and the woman's family to uphold traditions and culture. Customarily, the bride is told by her family to return to them (her kinsmen), every good thing she finds in the marriage whereas all bad things should be borne by her husband. In a focus group, one of the male respondents expressed disquiet about this custom:

What is also worrying is the kind of advice given to women when they marry; that if they gain something in the marriage they should bring them to their family but if they incur debt, then men should bear them. I think this does not auger well for a peaceful living (Urban Male 2).

The complaint by the above male respondent is a further indication of the overburden moral and institutional constraints placed on men by the practices of the extended family. Men perceive that their effort in marriage, within the matrilineal family system, inure to the benefit of women and their family. The view expressed above again suggests that in marriage, the couple keep their individual extended families and show stronger bond towards it than the conjugal family. This is consistent with Allot's (1960) observation about the Akan matrilineal system. Allot notes that ties created by marriage are temporary as compared with the permanent membership of blood ties or family. This is further reinforced by familial discourses that directly or indirectly suggest that while the goodies in the relationship are shared with the family of the bride, the husband bears the troubles alone or perhaps with his family as well. This potentially engenders mistrust

and lack of faith between the parties and can disturb peaceful coexistence in marital homes. Adinkrah (1985) found that in matrimonial homes in Ghana, there was no common budget for couples because of the apparent lack of trust and the fear that the man or the woman may spend on their individual family members at the expense of the conjugal family. According to Adinkrah, the male participants in his study in Ghana laughed at the idea of a common budget to the extent that even literate and salaried husbands remarked that “anyone telling his wife his true income is a fool” (ibid., p. 27). The basic problem of trust lies deeply in the traditional social organization and familial discourses and the demands from the respective families of the couple.

Another practice within the matrilineal system of inheritance is that children are born to the woman and her kinsmen and inheritance is traced to the woman’s descent. As indicated by this male respondent, “*In the Akan tradition, children in the marriage belongs to the woman and her family so why should the family demand so much again from the men?*” (Urban Male 2). It can be inferred from this response that, although men are aware of the matrilineal system of the Akan, they may not be happy about the fact that they expend all their energy and economic resources in marriage to keep the maternal blood line of their wives. This may have an impact on men’s love and commitment to their wives and even children; one may wonder if men within the matrilineal arrangement really work their hearts out in the conjugal family. The mistrust created by matrilineal family structure and discourses may result in constant confusion in matrimonial homes and may cause men to be annoyed at the least or imagined provocation.

Again, familial discourses on the normality of wife-beating in the family appear to create incentive for men to abuse their wives. The responses also show the importance of the collective interest of the extended family. For example one female suggested that:

The family believes that misunderstanding in marriage is bound to come...during marriage ceremonies, couples are told that misunderstanding is part of every marriage so when it happens the woman should not pack out of the marriage (Rural Female 1).

The response indicates that misunderstanding, possibly including wife-beating, is not too unusual in marriages and that women should not leave their marital homes because of that. These discourses also highlight the historical significance of the extended family and its precedence over individual members and their wishes. The identity, importance and the existence of the extended family may take precedence over the individual right of women to complain about their ordeal in marriage. It shows that women are often, if not always, at the receiving end of these “*misunderstandings*” which are portrayed as a necessary part of marital life. They are reminded of their moral responsibility towards protecting the identity and interest of the extended family; even at the expense of their natural right to leave abusive and unsatisfactory marital relationships.

This finding supports Bowman’s (2003) observation in sub-Saharan Africa. According to her, the family in Africa “is considered to be prior to the individual and a woman’s status is a derivative one; that is, her identity and status are defined by and inextricably linked to her family” (p. 481). In a personal interview, a female respondent recounted her experience in a manner that underscores the pervasiveness of this social reality:

I have witnessed a case where a family member of a woman told the husband to slap the wife to demand respect. The Abusuapain³ said the man owes it a responsibility to discipline his wife when she goes wrong (Urban Female).

This account apparently establishes the fact that wife-beating in Ghana is a moral responsibility of men and an integral part of the social and the family mores; it is considered as a husband's entitlement to demand respect from his wife or/and a form of physically chastising and disciplining a perceived "erring" wife. This interpretation is supported by the study of Human Right Watch (2001, 2002) in Africa. In an interview, they found that wife beating was seen as customarily 'normal' and inseparable part of marital relationships and that men and women did not see any wrong doing in a husband 'disciplining' or beating his wife. It is also consistent with the 2011-2012 UN Women's report—which indicated that over 40% of both men and women in Ghana think that it is sometimes acceptable for a man to beat his wife (UN, 2011). Familial discourses that regard women as subordinate to men have remained unchallenged in the Ghanaian society, such that when women are physically assaulted or sexually abused within marital relationships, it is not regarded as unusual (Manuh, n.d).

This perceived "culture of entitlement" of a husband to discipline an 'erring' wife is widespread and draped around the Ghanaian family and social system, such that; *"if the wife complains, members of society may think that it's rather the fault of the woman"* (Urban Female). These discourses may reinforce masculine psyche, male power and the dominance of men over women in Ghana which may consequently serve as a reward for spousal abuse. Given

³ Head of the extended family or lineage

these dominant cultural notions, men who violently attack women “are not likely to think themselves as deviant. On the contrary, they usually feel they are entirely justified, that they are exercising a right. They are authorized by an ideology of supremacy” (Connell, 2005, p. 83).

4.2.3. Privatization of familial conflicts

Another traditional norm which potentially account for the phenomenon of spousal abuse, particularly the continuous stay of abused women in marriages in Ghana is what this study refers to as “privatization” of familial conflicts or marital abuses. Responding to a question of whether or not a sexually abused/raped wife should report the case to public institutions of law enforcement, almost all the participants for the study responded in the negative. One male respondent argued that; “*Bedroom issues should not be discussed outside much less in the court room or police station*” (Urban Male 4). Most victims of abuse in marriages in Ghana do not publicly complain about their ordeal because of the acceptable norm that issues in conjugal relationships are private and should not be taken outside the sphere of the matrimonial home. As Manuh (n.d) notes, many women tolerate and remain in abusive relationships and do not complain publicly about their ordeals because spousal/marital conflicts are considered ‘private’ in the Ghanaian society.

This conventional wisdom of ‘privatization’ is psychologically reinforced by popular sayings and folklore. For example, there is a common maxim in Ghana that married couples should not wash their ‘dirty’ linen in public, meaning that the unpleasant aspects of marriage should not be brought to public scrutiny. Thus, if an abused woman reports her suffering to the police or another person outside the immediate family, she is considered to have “washed her dirty linen in

public” and this can incite public condemnation of the woman. This may impede reporting of abuse by victims and negatively affect their help seeking behaviour.

To fully understand the pervasiveness of the private sphere in marriages in Ghana, it may be relevant to mention some historical comments by Ministers of State and legal luminaries in the debates and discussions that ensued before the Domestic Violence bill was passed into law in 2007. For example, Ansa-Asare, a former director of Ghana law school, and Gladys Asmah, a former Minister of Women and Children’s Affairs (MOWAC), singled out the marital rape clause in the bill and described it as threatening to Ghanaian culture and family structure. Ansa-Asare (2003) described the marital rape clause as foreign imposition and dangerous to the Ghanaian family and culture and that it should be kept outside the purview of the Ghanaian civil and criminal jurisprudence. He further averred that domestic violence was best adjudicated by traditional authorities rather than the formal civil courts. On her part, Asmah, a woman and a Minister in charge of women and children, held press conferences and community meetings to mobilize support against the marital rape clause (Hodžić, 2009). According to her, the framing and conceptualization of domestic violence based on other cultures such as Western, European and American notions may not be appropriate for Ghanaian circumstances (*Public Agenda, 2003*). In one of her community meetings in the Northern part of Ghana, the former Minister is reported to have stated that:

It is my responsibility as a Minister to caution as we go around with this Bill. Because Cabinet wants the people of this country to have a law that will suit them. Not to take ideas from someone else. We are Ghanaian[s]. We must do what we think will fit Ghanaians (Hodžić, 2009).

In respect of the protection of the family, she indicated that: “All of us, all of us must think how to protect the family. It is very crucial. If the family is going to be able to develop properly and for Ghana to develop properly, we must protect everybody” (ibid.).

The historical accounts demonstrate the importance of the family structure to the social order in Ghana—it permeates Government and policy decisions. Indeed, some participants in the present study, both males and females, did not think of forced sex in marriage as rape, much less reporting perpetrators to the police. One female respondent said; *“I think that men do not see forced sex in marriage as a rape because they have married the women and think that they could have access to them any time”* (Urban Female 1). Corroborating the above response, a male respondent had this to say; *I think in Ghana, our understanding of rape is when forced sex is between a man and a woman other than your wife, so I am yet to hear of a case of rape in a marriage* (Urban Male 3). In the light of the foregoing accounts, it may be considered *“a disgrace to bring some of these issues in the bedroom to the public”* (Rural Female 2). It is thus “unfeminine” or outside the norm for women in marriage to discuss their sexual life or private bedroom issues in public. An ideal woman, in the Ghanaian social thought, is the one who does not report familial conflicts to groups, institutions or individuals outside the immediate family.

Unfortunately, this practice which is part of the social ethics of the Ghanaian society makes married women vulnerable to all forms of abuse in marriage, particularly sexual abuse. As one female respondent emphatically explained:

The problem is that if your husband forces to have sex with you, the woman cannot discuss it publicly because it's a private matter. If you discuss it people might not believe the woman or they might despise you for reporting issues of private realm (Urban Female 2).

Clearly, the sanctity and precedence of the extended family over individual rights in Ghana is evident in the above response. Practices of individuals that may subvert the family structure and its identity may not be countenanced at all levels of society. The social cost of discussing marital conflicts in public in Ghana seems very high in the society. As noted by Ofei-Aboagye (1994), people do not talk about wife battering in Ghana because it appears acceptable and part of the societal norms of the communities. She further emphasizes that “Ghanaian women are discouraged from discussing their domestic affairs with ‘strangers’” (ibid., p. 928).

Contrary to the communal system of Ghana, familial conflicts are so ‘privatized’ that law enforcement agencies rarely receive complaints or cases of marital rape. As the key informant in the current study bemoaned; *“You will hardly find cases of marital rape...because sex is between two parties and you will find it difficult getting corroboration”* (KI). Thus, if husbands sexually abuse their wives, the wives are socially expected not to complain about it to any outsider including law enforcement institutions. Women carry and bear their emotional pains at the expense of the system, the extended family. They are morally and socially expected to make sacrifices for the smooth running of the system; they are to sacrifice their individual rights, the right to complain and report sexual abuse. The culture of private sphere in marriage is so ingrained in the Ghanaian social fabric that even when abuse cases are reported to appropriate authorities, details of abuse are still shrouded in secrecy. The officer continued; *“...when it comes to cases involving spousal parties...cases involving marital couples, hardly that they will come*

out with certain facts because of the cultural implications” (KI). The response highlights the fear of women, their fear of social humiliation and societal condemnation if they go public with issues in the conjugal home.

Again, respondents in the current study suggest that women perceive the law enforcement officers as equally guilty of spousal abuse, except that they too do not discuss bedroom issues in public because of cultural norms. For example, one female respondent underscored that; *“After all, what do you gain if you go to the police or court? Do you know what the police too do to their wives in the bedroom?”* (Rural Female 1). This account suggests that women position men ideologically; they perceive all men in the Ghanaian society as wrapped in the same masculine identity and social belief system. It further points out the institutional expression of masculinity and power—power over women. Everywhere women look, they see the institutional expression of the masculine power: in national Legislature, in the Executive arm of Government, in the Judiciary, in Schools and in the Police Service. Tragically, women abused by their husbands may persist in their violent relationship because of the traditional belief that reporting the offenders to authorities would be tantamount to discussing private family matters with ‘strangers.’

Contrary to her earlier responses, one rural female respondent further indicated that some women do not report abuse because of their emotional attachment to their partners or relationships. She explained that; *“I know of a woman who loved her husband so much that even if the man beats her and leaves bruises on her face, she tells people that she fell and sustained those bruises instead of reporting her husband”* (Rural Female 1). The reference to “love” departs from the structural and institutional analysis. Although this response suggests emotional commitment and psychological orientations women may have towards their unsatisfactory

relationship, as Rusbult and Martz (1995) indicated in the investment model, the earlier responses of this female respondent suggested structural and cultural constraints as preventing abused women from publicly reporting familial conflicts. It may be appropriate therefore to assume that the *love* alluded to by the respondent could be an inverted “love”. It may be as a result of the material benefits women enjoy from their partners or relationship that drive their commitment level. For instance, Rusbult and Martz assert that social comparison levels and the ability of a partner to provide important needs in a relationship is likely to increase satisfaction levels and consequently improve one’s commitment level in unsatisfactory relationships. To look at love and psychological commitment of women in the context of Ghana, without looking at the structural and cultural implications, may prevent deeper understanding of the phenomenon of spousal abuse.

It appears that rather than reporting abusers and subverting the family structure, victims of abuse may prefer to remain in abusive conjugal unions. This practice sits well with patriarchal social structures in collectivistic cultures as reported in other studies. For example, in Nigeria, as indicated by Okereke (2002), family issues are private and outside the jurisdiction of the police and reporting family cases to the police is strictly against tradition. Ellsberg and Heise (2005) also points out that wives are frequently abused in cultures where family affairs are regarded ‘private’ and outside the purview and scrutiny of the public. In the exchange theory of Gelles (1983), it is noted that rewards for abuse and violence are high in societies where family matters are regarded private and outside public gaze. In Ghana, family values, identity and structures take precedence over individual women’s rights and interest and spousal abuse, particularly marital rape, is regarded as a private matter and kept in the private sphere of life.

4.2.4. Traditional and formal arbitration systems of spousal conflicts

Discourses of respondents in both the focus group and personal interviews implicated systems of arbitration as one of the structural constraints influencing the phenomenon of spousal abuse in rural and urban Ghana. The Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) in Ghana was set up by an Act of Parliament (Act 732) in 2007, to among other things, receive complaints, investigate and prosecute persons alleged to have committed domestic violent offences. However, respondents in the present study expressed that women who experience abuse mostly have a preference for resolving the problem within the family or report the matter to a Priest, Pastor or a traditional leader than to go to the police or DOVVSU to initiate prosecution proceedings. For example, one male respondent indicated that; *“A woman sending her husband to court is rare in our society. They would rather send the case to pastors and head of families or elders of a community”* (Urban Male 1). Expressing similar perception, a female respondent also explained that: *“Most marital conflicts can be settled amicably by the families involved or even the church; and I think that is the best way to go”* (Rural Female 3).

It is evident from the foregoing responses that traditional family tribunal and religious institutions are the first point of call for assistance when women are abused by their partners. Again, the accounts establish the significance of the extended family structure and its relevance in resolving conflicts between spouses. As Asmah, a former Minister of MOWAC, asserted: *“We have the social structure ...the chiefs are there, the imams are there, the mallams are there, everybody is there in the community to talk to somebody who is misbehaving – they don’t need to go to the police”* (Hodžić, 2009, p. 340). Thus, the identity and status of both men and women in Ghana is ascribed by the family and significantly dependent on the social structure; where

traditional authorities and religious leaders are regarded as a viable option in the settlement of spousal conflicts. Perhaps, abused women are motivated to seek traditional/family mediation rather than accessing the formal justice system because their interest may lie in getting the violent partners talked to rather than punished by law. This is reflected in the above response that “*the best way to go*” is to seek for “*amicable settlement,*” which according to women, can be handled by Pastors and elders of families. Unfortunately, when abused women approach these family tribunals for redress, they do not obtain fair and impartial proceedings and judgment.

The problem is that the families are headed by men who sometimes also beat their wives... they only come in when beating is serious or persistent. What the family does is to make sure that divorce does not come as a result of the beating (Urban Female 4).

The female respondent appears to complain about institutional expression of patriarchal power and the collective practice of masculinity in the context of Ghana. The *Abusuapanins* and elders of the family may mediate spousal abuse cases with the masculine notions at the back of their minds rather than pursuing justice and fairness. The response also indicates two basic reasons for which women are unable to procure balanced and impartial hearing of abuse cases brought before family tribunals. First, because the arbiters of spousal disputes are men, traditional proceedings operate under the belief that women are inferior to men and this presumption makes it doubtful that women can receive a fair hearing at such forum. The family heads, the arbiters, may themselves be guilty of abusing their wives. Thus, when beating is persistent, the family elders may only come in to warn against continuous and severe beating rather than prescribing stiffer sanctions for abusive men. These men may make promises to the family elders to end the violence only to go back and inflict more severe pains on their partners.

The women never get justice because of the rule of patriarchy and the collective practice of masculinity embedded in the social fabric. Second, the preoccupation of families and the Ghanaian society to preserve marriages against divorce usually comes with a cost to women. Instead of punishing abusive partners to deter recurrence of such behaviours, the family interest mostly lies with preventing divorce. The family's preoccupation to protect the social structure rather than punishing abusers may reinforce abusive behaviours of men. The family and community mediation system is more reconciliatory than punitive with traditional leaders or Pastors often espousing gender role values, encouraging women to endure abuse and change behaviours that provoke men.

Social barriers and dysfunctional justice system were found to be some of the problems associated with navigating the formal justice system by women. Stigma from family and community, lack of information about the formal justice system and resources are some of the social cost that respondents indicated as hindering the ability of abused women to report abuse to formal state institutions. In the Ghanaian society, *"people will always talk about it if you send the man to court and if he's imprisoned it will tarnish the image of the woman"* (Rural Female 3). Given the social pressure and the stigma of reporting marital abuse in public, and the fact that the identity of these women is significantly defined by the norms of their community, abused women bear the pain of abuse in marriages without stepping forward to pursue justice in the law courts as provided for in the Domestic Violence Act of Ghana. The weight of stigma becomes heavier when women are abused sexually in marriage. Another respondent plainly stated that; *"the society does not even want to see that a woman sends her husband to court over marital rape; it's even a disgrace to the wife"* (Urban Male 1). Relationally, the self-esteem and identity of

women depend on the family and the society. It is considered shameful and perhaps ‘un-Ghanaian’ for women to haul their husbands to the police or court on charges of sexual abuse.

As the UN women report shows, generally, social sanction for women who approach the formal justice system for redress is especially acute in cases of sexual abuse (UN, 2011). The report further indicates that globally, “sexual violence is the only crime for which the victim is more stigmatized than the perpetrator, with women who report such crimes being shunned by their families and communities” (p. 52). In their study in Ghana, Cantalupo et al. (2006) found that even when victims of abuse attempt to circumvent the traditional system and report cases to the criminal justice system, Chiefs and Queen Mothers often sought to withdraw reported cases on their own initiative, with or without the victim’s consent.

Additionally, respondents associated weak legal and institutional structures in Ghana with spousal abuse. The demand for money from victims of abuse by the police, the bureaucratic and cumbersome nature of the formal justice system and the unresponsive legal system were found to be some of the reasons for which abused women do not report abuse cases to state institutions. Although the Domestic Violence Act and the Constitution of Ghana frown over the collection of illegal money from complainants, respondents reported that police officers routinely demand for money from victims of abuse before they take action. One male respondent explained;

I think the formal legal process is very cumbersome. Also, you have to pay money to the police before your case is taken seriously. So if the woman has the money and time to go through all that then they can report (Rural Male 3).

Again, when victims of spousal abuse report cases they are given medical forms by the police to take to public hospitals for medical examination and certification. The medical treatment and

examination is vital because without medical evidence, which the medical certification form provides, the police and judges cannot independently ascertain the abuse or believe the victim. Apart from the bureaucracy that this process brings, medical officers demand for huge sums of money before the examination and the report are carried out. The cost of having to go through these long and unabated legal processes, coupled with additional responsibility to pay money to medical and law enforcement agencies, discourage abused women from approaching formal state institutions to report and/or pursue abuse cases. In cases where alleged perpetrators are arrested by the police, some may pay money to officers of the law to get the case dropped or closed. For instance, in a personal interview, one male respondent alleged that:

Some men can even pay for their release especially in minor cases such as beating. The consequences after their release may be too bad for the wife so it's better if the matter is resolved by elders of the family (Urban Male).

The sad aspect is that when these men are released after bribing the police, as suggested above, the result may be a reprisal attack; abuse becomes more severe for women for having reported their husbands to the police. The dysfunctional justice system may result in high attrition of reported cases either because the victim could not pay money demanded, could not navigate the legal bureaucracies or the perpetrator pays for his freedom and closure of abuse cases. For all these factors, namely, social barriers, insufficient resources, weak and unresponsive institutional structures; cases of abuse are commonly resolved by the families and communities that also lack the capacity to punish perpetrators.

4.3. Religious and Social Influences

The third theme that emerged from the data is religiosity and social influences which participants attributed to the phenomenon of spousal abuse in Ghana. Religious endorsement of male supremacy, social stigma of divorce and weak social support are the main religious and social categorizations that respondents attributed to spousal abuse in Ghana.

4.3.1. Religious discourses and endorsement of male supremacy

According to Nukunya (2003), religion is an integral and a core element of the Ghanaian and his/her worldview of social pursuits as it permeates every social sphere of his/her life, from family, public, private, political to economic life. Even though Ghana is said to be a secular state, it is a Christian dominated country. The Christian Bible has set of principles and teachings that define gender roles and who women and men really are. The patriarchal social order of male supremacy is further endorsed by religious teachings. In a focus group interview, a female respondent echoed that; *“The Bible says that the husband is the head of the family...I also agree with RF4 that women too should be submissive to their husbands as dictated by the Bible”* (Rural Female 3). The status of women in marriage reflects their religious identity and implicit moral responsibility in society. As Syed (2010) asserts, Christian teachings hold that gender differences between men and women are constructive because they contribute to male and female roles and identities. For example, Apostle Paul admonishes Christians in the Bible (Titus 2:4-5) to train their younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind and to be subject to their husbands so that no one maligns the word of God. These teachings and belief system which support patriarchal structure may motivate men to

assume control over women, to take responsibilities in the family and to make all decisions regarding the welfare of women.

Another female respondent stated in a personal interview that, “...*the Bible makes it clear that the man is the head of the family so he is supposed to make decisions and do so many things*” (Urban Female). The above accounts by female respondents also point out that, not only do women accept their subservient role; they may also be happy that they are absolved from all economic and other responsibilities in their conjugal and extended family. In the Christian tradition and literature, there is a high emphasis on men’s supremacy and women’s submissiveness. In an interview in Ghana, Cantalupo et al. (2006) discovered that many religious leaders believe that women have a responsibility to keep their husbands happy, and if they do not, they are guilty of “provoking” their husbands to violence. The aforesaid accounts reflect the social reality of the lack of autonomy for women in marriage which may be traceable to faith-based traditions and discourses that they have accepted as part of their social and religious identity and commitment.

Again, respondents’ discourses appear to implicate religion and faith-based traditions in sexual abuse and women’s decision to stay in abusive marital relationships. The control and power of men in marriage permeate every aspect of women including their sexuality and this is further reinforced by religious discourses. One male respondent explained that; “*The Bible says that a woman should not refuse her husband sex; given men some power and control over women and their sexuality. So why should a woman deny the husband sex if the Bible says that is wrong?*” (Urban Male 3)

The above remarkable reference to the Bible and the rhetorical question posed by this respondent appears to psychologically reinforce the thinking of men that they have unconditional power and control over the sexual life of women in marriage because adhering to these principles is part of both men and women's religious identity and piety.

So if a wife refuses her husband sex when she knows there is nothing wrong with her body, I will say it's not good before God... The Bible says both should not refuse each other sex unless they have decided to devote themselves to prayers and fasting (Rural Female 4).

This is another indication of the derivative identity of women in Ghana. The essence of womanhood and their identity is in their adherence to some implicit moral obligations in society; women are morally expected to behave in line with their religious beliefs. According to Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 (New International Version):

The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourself to prayer...

Thus, sex in marriage is considered a moral and marital responsibility that the parties cannot deny each other unless by a mutual consent and for a period devoted for prayer. But for the condition of prayer, a wife has no right to say no to her husband when he demands for sex because the Bible says her body does not belong to her alone but also to the husband. This belief is so pervasive that women readily identify with it and the breach of which is viewed by them and society as morally transgressive.

Besides, the position of the Bible on divorce also appears to discourage women from leaving abusive marital homes. As explained by one female respondent; “*The Bible also discourages divorce so Christians would normally prefer settlement to divorce*” (Urban Female 3). Apostle Paul again declares that “a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone...” (1 Corinthians 7:39, NIV). Women may be entangled in marriage by chains of religion and moral rules that favour patriarchal structure.

This confirms the findings of Cantalupo et al. (2006) in Ghana. They reported that religious leaders in Ghana frequently counselled victims of domestic abuse to be more submissive and endure the violence in their relationships. They further found that religious leaders universally rejected the possibility of advising victims to divorce their violent partners. This is also in line with theory of patriarchy which identifies religion as one of the structures in society that legitimizes male superiority and female submissiveness. The Bible largely endorses patriarchal social order through religious socialization, practices and rituals that may be detrimental to women and their welfare. The teachings and discourses of Christianity on sex and divorce and the relationship between women and men’s identity to these belief systems may significantly influence spousal abuse.

4.3.2. Stigmatization of Divorce

Marriage is considered a sacred institution by both religious and non-religious people in the Ghanaian society. All married persons, particularly women, do their best to save marriages and to keep its sanctity. Thus, divorce is not socially approved in the Ghanaian society. Respondents in the study positioned divorce as a social stigma to women, their family and the society at large. This positioning largely influences the decision of whether women should leave abusive

relationships. For example, one female respondent indicated that; “*Some of the women stay because if they leave, people might think they don’t have a good habit or the man has divorced them*” (Rural Female 3). This suggests the implicit moral obligations of women and their relational sense of self in society—their self-respect and dignity is linked to their ability to keep their marriages. It is indicative from the above response that the integrity of divorced women becomes a subject of social evaluative scrutiny—people impugn ill motives in respect of the character of women who leave their marital homes regardless of the cause of divorce. Society questions and scrutinizes the moral integrity of divorced women and thinks of them as without “*good habit*” for which reason their husbands may have left them. In other words, the causal attribution to divorced women in Ghana is more to their moral and personal character than the existence of battering which may have necessitated divorce. To escape this staggering burden of ‘integrity scrutinization’ and the concomitant stigma in the society, abused women persist in unsatisfactory marital relationships.

Besides, some members of society view divorce as shameful and bad omen to the family, especially families that have a history of divorce for women. As one female respondent suggested; “*Some families too do not like divorce especially if women in the family are known to suffer cases of divorce*” (Urban Female 3). This may account for family’s preference for amicable settlement of spousal abuse to divorce. Such families may also discourage women from reporting their abusive husbands to law enforcement agencies as that might result in a divorce. Women who may be bold enough to report abuse cases may later decide to drop and withdraw cases because of the threat of divorce from men. A male respondent captured women’s fear of divorce this way; *...if she goes to court the man may divorce her afterwards...every woman is*

afraid of divorce so if you send me to court, then you have terminated the marriage yourself” (Urban Male 1). The threat of divorce and the thought of scornful look from neighbours, family and friends appear to influence the decision of women not to report their abusive husbands. Men’s perception about women’s aversion to divorce as suggested in the above threatening response apparently motivates men to physically, sexually and psychologically abuse their wives with impunity.

Another worrying situation is the seeming premium law enforcement agencies place on marriage reconciliation instead of encouraging abused victims to pursue spousal battering cases at the law courts. For them, hauling abusive partners to court will engender divorce in society so they would rather drop these cases and save society from the shame of divorce. The key informant revealed that: *“Not all the cases go to court because if you send all of the cases to court, you will have a lot of divorce cases in the society”* (KI). It appears from the foregoing account that it is not about what the law says; it is about saving society from registering more divorce cases. In the face of over-crowded dockets, a lack of resources, and unresponsive judicial attitudes towards spousal abuse, the courts often will permit and even encourage traditional settlement of spousal disputes. This practice denies victims the prerogative to pursue criminal punishment of perpetrators for the harms victims have suffered (Cantalupo et al. 2006). The seeming lack of agency of women to terminate abusive relationship in Ghana is more structural than individual’s orientation.

This is at variance with Rusbult’s principle of commitment in the investment model. Contrary to the position of the investment model that women may stay in unsatisfactory relationships because of their high commitment level or psychological orientation toward it (Rusbult & Martz,

1995), the continuous stay in abusive marriages in Ghana may be a result of structural factors embedded in patriarchy. The unbearable social cost of divorce to individual women, the family and the society and the desire to identify with the society restrain women from fleeing violent marriages. They relate to their social environment and their self-respect, identity and status are tied to their morally and socially “acceptable” behaviour within the social structure. Thus, to treat it as an individual’s psychological orientation rather than structural factors will be blaming women for their own woes.

4.3.3. Weak Social and Family Support

Participants also traced the helplessness of abused women to terminate violent relationships to weak social support and support from other significant others. As established earlier (section 4.2.1), though Ghana, like many collectivist societies in Africa, prides itself in communal support system through extended family ties, the influence and support of the family in issues of spousal conflict is waning because of poverty and the increasing economic dependence of members of the extended family on married couples, particularly on the husband for their livelihood. The stresses imposed by poverty on both the family of the husband and the wife means that they may lack the will and capacity to intervene on behalf of women whose husbands beat them. In a personal interview, one female respondent indicated that; *“Some of the families will pack your things and send you back to the man especially if the family benefits from the relationship”* (Rural Female).

As noted earlier, women who report their violent partners to the criminal justice system may risk divorce or reprisal attack. Sometimes, jail terms or prosecution for their husbands may deprive them of economic and emotional support. They would naturally turn to their families and

significant others for psychological, emotional and economic support. Unfortunately, some families either do not have the resources or are not willing to help victims of abuse. In some cases, family members of the women fail to intervene, not only because they might need to repay the bride price should their intervention results in divorce, but also because they would become economically responsible for their daughter and her children if she returned home.

In a personal interview, another female respondent recounted that; *“sometimes the family cannot do anything about it particularly if the man provides everything for the wife and the family cannot do any of those responsibilities if the woman should seek divorce”* (Urban Female). The family believes that if they assist their daughter to leave their violent husbands, she will be a burden on their scarce resources. An obvious result of the lack of social support is the continuous stay of abused women in violent conjugal unions and the painful endurance of multiple beatings or abuse. For these women, reporting abuse to the public criminal justice system or seeking divorce may not be a viable option. Bowman (2003) found that non-availability of psychological support systems, economic deprivation and weakening family influence account for domestic violence in Ghana and many other African countries. Similarly, lack of psychological support systems and economic deprivation of the extended family may influence spousal abuse in Ghana.

Additionally, the acceptable notion by many families that wife beating is a “disciplinary” measure a husband can employ to correct his wife may prevent abused women from seeking refuge with their families and significant others.

I have personally seen a woman who packed her things from her matrimonial home because the man continuously beat her. But her family sent her back to the man saying that wife beating is normal in most marriages and should not be grounds for divorce (Urban Male 3).

Instead of sympathizing with victims of abuse and offering them psychological, emotional and social support, families encourage women to endure abuse and advise victims to restrain from behaviours that may “provoke” their partners to violently attack them. This meshes with the principle of “alternative quality” in Rusbult’s investment model. According to this principle, the attractiveness and availability of alternatives to abused women is vital to their decision to exit or stay in unsatisfying relationship (Rusbult & Martz, 1995). As Langley and Levy (1977) argue “when a woman has no better place to go, it is understandable that she might feel committed to persisting at a relationship, even if the relationship is not very satisfying” (p. 560). Social and family support is significant in resolving spousal conflicts and when this support is weakened or unavailable, abused women are compelled to persist and bear the painful experience of violence in abusive marital relationship.

CHAPTER FIVE

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5. 1. Overview of Findings

The analysis of the data indicated three recurrent themes as influencing the phenomenon of spousal abuse in Ghana: power dynamics, traditional and institutionalized practices, and religious and social influences. The findings of the present study indicate that within the marital space in Ghana, there are role expectations specific to males and females. Men are expected to be the breadwinners of their family whereas women play caring and nurturance role. The responses of both married men and women in the present study showed that the economic power and responsibilities of men are inextricably linked to their masculine identity and that the enjoyment of patriarchal dividend of honour, privilege and command significantly depends on sound material or economic resourcefulness of men. When men are unable to perform their primary breadwinner role, their self-ego becomes deflated and they may feel insecure, undermined and slighted. Thus, when men miss out on their economic power over women, their hegemonic masculinity becomes unstable and the gender order faces crisis and transformation (Connell, 1995). The finding indicates that such gender crisis in Ghana may disrupt the social order and that could provoke attempts by men to restore their sense of self and hegemony of masculinity.

The finding also indicates that submissiveness and respect for men are marked features of femininity or womanhood in Ghana. Regardless of women's economic resourcefulness or level of education, they are not supposed to argue with their husbands as such behaviours challenges the authority of men in society. In fact, the study shows that women who are economically

resourceful and exercise some form of control over decision making in their marriage are positioned by men as disrespectful. Moreover, responses of male and female participants showed that economic empowerment of women is linked to their autonomy and independence in marriage. Besides, the finding also suggests that women who are able to provide for themselves may be more likely to terminate abusive relationships. Clearly, the economic power/resourcefulness has social and psychological implications for both men and women in Ghana. While it reinforces masculine authority and control over women, it also influences women's exercise of autonomy and control in decisions in marriage.

Again, the findings suggest that the male-centered thought of masculinity in Ghana appears to be based on men and women's relational sense of the self and default social assumptions. In line with Ghanaian social conceptualization of masculinity, the study suggests that men use violence against women as evident marker of manhood—they are afraid of social humiliation and the fear of being thought weak or feminine by other men in society. Apparently, a man is man enough in the Ghanaian cultural and psychological frame of thought if he is the opposite of a woman. The finding also indicates that men who do not exercise control over their wives risk losing their masculine title in society. Wife-beating is perceived by society as a legitimate moral right of men to discipline their wives for real or imagined wrongdoing. Therefore, if men's self-image and masculine identities do not correspond to the social norms and realities in Ghana, they may experience "acute identity diffusion" (Erikson, 1980) or an "identity crisis" (Jacobson-Widding, 1983). Individual men's violent behaviour in marriages may be a form of "acting-out" in order to help restore the sense of reality and the sense of self. The study equally established that women accept their subservient status and regard their feminine identity as ascribed by the society. The

benefit of the relational thinking of men and women in Ghana is that it contributes to the social and moral order and ensures stability of the social structure.

On traditional and institutionalized practices, the finding shows that bride price custom, privatization of abuse, familial discourses and systems of arbitrations for familial conflicts are categorized by informants as influencing spousal abuse. The study shows that the practice of bride price symbolizes the value of women and their self-worth or the identity of womanhood. However, responses of participants also suggest that the custom may reduce women to a commodity/property of men and that men perceive the exercise of male power and control over their wives as moral and legitimate because of the payment they make to the family of the bride.

The finding also suggests a link between bride price practice and women's continuous stay in violent relationships. For example, the general economic deprivation of the extended family, as the finding shows, may incapacitate them from returning the bride price for their abused daughter in marriage. Again, the study discovered a changing perception of the custom of bride price among contemporary Ghanaians. Although the practice traditionally symbolizes the value of women and confirmation of men's financial ability to protect and care for their prospective brides, the practice and its attendant accompaniments appears to be perceived by men as an economic burden. Thus, bride price, to some men, is more than the symbolic drink—it includes all the items and gifts given to the bride and her family at the marriage ceremony, and all of them are expected to be returned if the woman decides to leave the man. When women leave abusive partners, men may feel economically exploited by women and the extended family and may engage in violent attacks as a means to restore their dignity and compensate for their economic loss. This contemporary understanding of dowry appears to be a departure from the status quo,

where dissolution of a marriage was granted upon the return of only the symbolic head-drink by the bride.

The finding of the study indicates that the matrilineal system of descent coupled with the precedence of the extended family over one's matrimonial family appears to create mistrust and lack of faith between couples in conjugal homes as individuals partners may be more inclined to keep their extended family identity. Familial discourses that regard wife-beating as customarily normal and a husband's moral entitlement to demand respect from a perceived "erring" wife may serve as an incentive for spousal abuse in Ghana. It was established that the discourse of "culture of entitlement" may reinforce masculine psyche, male power and the dominance of men over women.

Additionally, the finding of the present study shows that women cannot easily complain about spousal abuse publicly because of an institutionalized and legitimated norm that regard spousal conflicts as belonging to the private sphere of life. Thus, to protect the sanctity, structure and identity of the family, women may bear their emotional pains and keep cases of abuse outside the purview of Ghanaian civil and criminal jurisprudence. Since women's sense of identity and dignity are inextricably connected to their general attitude towards their community, and that their self-respect comes from being members of their community, they perceive public discussion of spousal abuse, particularly marital rape, as a subversion of the moral and social order. Further discovery was that women position men ideologically; they perceive all men in the Ghanaian society as wrapped in masculine identity and social belief systems that consider women as inferior to men. To this end, informants discursively point out an institutional expression of power and a collective practice of masculinity in Ghana, such that law enforcement

institutions to which abuse cases could be reported are mostly headed by men who may also be guilty of wife-beating. Spousal abuse has been found to be high in societies where family matters are regarded as private and outside public gaze. (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005; Gelles 1983).

Similarly, the study found that abused women seem to prefer amicable settlement of abuse by the extended family, a Priest or a Pastor, to formal institutions of justice. Although informants' responses suggest that women may not procure fair proceedings at family tribunals because of institutional expression and collective practice of masculinity, abused women are motivated to seek family mediation because their interest may lie in getting their violent partners talked to rather than punished. The reconciliatory nature of family tribunals and the preoccupation of the family to protect the social structure rather than punishing abusers may reinforce abusive behaviours of men in marriages.

Again, the finding indicates that social barriers and dysfunctional justice system may be some of the problems which discourage women from navigating the formal justice system. Stigma from family and community, lack of information about the formal justice system and resources are some of the social cost that informants highlighted as impeding the ability of abused women to report abuse to formal state institutions. Informants also suggested that bureaucracy, corruption and poverty may hamper women's effort to report cases of spousal abuse to formal institutions of law enforcement. In sum, informants' discourses reflect on traditional and institutionalized practices embedded in customs as some of the key risk factors of spousal abuse in conjugal unions in Ghana.

Finally, the finding shows religious and social influences such as social stigma of divorce, religious endorsement of male supremacy and weak social or family support as structural factors

that may account for spousal abuse in Ghana. The study established that both men and women in Ghana engage in behaviours that reflect their religious identity and demonstrate their implicit moral responsibilities in society. Apart from absolving women from all economic responsibilities within their conjugal homes, Christian tradition also emphasizes male supremacy and female submissiveness as part of religious commitment and piety. In line with their religious identities, both male and female informants in focus group and personal interviews positioned men as head of households and that women should be under the control and care of their husbands—the control permeates every aspect of women including their sexuality. The position of Christian religion on divorce, which is that divorce is not an acceptable practice, was not only found to reinforce men's abusive tendencies, but also, it was found to influence the decision of abused women not to terminate their relationships.

Discourses of respondents reveal that social stigma of divorce and the link between the self-respect and dignity of women and their ability to keep their marriages influence spousal abuse in Ghana. People do not only impugn ill motives to the moral integrity of divorced women, but also to the family to which they belong. Women, thus appears to have an implicit moral obligation to themselves, their extended family and the society to remain in their abusive marriages even at the expense of their right to divorce. These women may have come to regulate themselves through the internalization of dominant social and cultural prescriptions and have formed their identities around them. The fact is that our choices in life are highly circumscribed by norms of conformity we have made our own, not because they are necessarily good for us, but because we are subjected to social influences all the time; these are psychological chains we wear all the time

(Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2009). It became evident that women's perceived aversion to divorce may motivate men to physically, sexually and psychologically abuse their wives with impunity.

The finding also indicate that weak family and social support, as a result of the general economic deprivation of the extended family and the non-availability of psychological support systems for victims of spousal abuse in Ghana, may account for the continuous stay of abused women in violent conjugal relationships. The support and intervention of the extended family in spousal conflicts may have waned because of poverty and their increasing economic dependence on the conjugal family for livelihood. In other studies, the non-availability of psychological support systems, as well as economic deprivation and weakening family influence, has been found to account for domestic violence in Ghana and many other African countries (Bowman, 2003). It has been asserted that "when a woman has no better place to go, it is understandable that she might feel committed to persisting at a relationship, even if the relationship is not very satisfying" (Langley & Levy,1977, p. 560).

In view of the findings of the current study, it can generally be inferred that male and female participants in the focus group and personal interviews in both rural and urban Ghana attribute psychosocial, situational and institutionalized or structural factors to the phenomenon of spousal abuse. These structural constraints (economic, social, cultural, and religious) cyclically influence spousal abuse in rural and urban Ghana. The framing of spousal abuse and intervention strategies that enhance the maximum potential of individuals and their personal dispositions, without regard for contextual, situational and structural factors may not strike any responsive chord in the patriarchal and hierarchical society of Ghana.

5.1.1. Rural and Urban Differences

The findings of the present study do not indicate any specific and systematic pattern of differences between rural and urban settings. Rather, the study points to deep structural factors within both the rural and the urban settings that may account for the phenomenon of spousal abuse. I discuss below possible links between spousal abuse and the general features of rural and urban settings for the study.

5.1.2. Rural Area

Given the predominant cultural and socio-economic conditions, as indicated earlier, the prevalence of spousal abuse may possibly be high in the rural Ghana. Women may be economically dependent on their husbands given the limited employment opportunities and abilities in rural communities. The rate of reporting abuse may be low in rural Ghana because of the lack of information about the formal systems of adjudication. The few who may be privileged to have information about the formal legal system may also be hindered by such factors as poverty, family or social support and non-availability of institutions of law enforcement in rural areas.

Again, given the relatively small size of the rural population, the high sense of belongingness and the fact that members of the community may be known to one another, stigmatization for publicly reporting abuse and social humiliation for divorce may be high in rural Ghana. Thus, there may be a more relational sense of self in such settings—women’s high sense of family and community may prevent them from either discussing abuse in public or seeking divorce. As Andoh-Arthur (2011) asserts, psychological sense of community in Ghana is high with high level

of belongingness and emotional attachment. He further posits that rural folks in Ghana have a sense of awareness that seems to suggest that the community is the pathway for incorporation into the universal world. The risk factors of spousal abuse discussed in the current study may be high in rural communities in Ghana because the desire for family and community identity for both men and women may be high in rural areas.

5.1.3. Urban Area

Economic dependence of women on men may be minimal due to the many economic opportunities in urban areas, and thus, the economic power differentials between couples may not be as acute as compared to rural Ghana. Given the possible economic independence of women in urban areas and the fact that masculinity and men's self-esteem may be linked to their ability to live up to primary breadwinner ideals, the identity and status of men may be under threat in urban Ghana. Therefore, unemployment and economic marginalization of men in urban Ghana may provoke attempts to restore their undermined identity and the hegemony of masculinity.

The relatively easy accessibility to police stations and other institutions of law enforcement, high educational levels and economic independence of women in urban centers may encourage reporting of abuse and help seeking behaviours. The high preponderance of churches in urban Ghana may facilitate more Christian marriages or marriage under the ordinance and thus may prevent polygynous marriages. However, exposure to Christian/religious practices and rituals which endorse male supremacy and female submissiveness may influence spousal abuse in urban areas, particularly sexual abuse and women's persistence in abusive unions. High formal

classroom education of men in urban areas may restrain husbands from wife-beating or they may exercise moderation in wife-beating.

There may be no difference in terms of the social notions of male power and supremacy and its attendant perceived culture of entitlement for husbands to physically chastise and correct their wives for a perceived or real wrongdoing. The perceived commoditization of women, as a result of the custom of bride price and its contemporary changing understandings, may be predominant and more pronounced in urban Ghana; in that, prospective husbands in the cities pay higher bride price than their rural counterparts. Although social change has impacted on the lives of Ghanaians, some cultural practices such as bride price has not felt the impact that much in Kumasi because of its large indigenous population which provides a lead in cultural life. The impact of social change in terms of education, religion and socio-economic life may reduce the prevalence of spousal abuse and increase reporting of abuse in urban Ghana. It is important to reiterate that the rural/urban differences discussed above are my own assumptions, based on the general features of the two settings, and relate to possible future research.

5.2. Limitations of the Study

Although the present study provides useful exploratory insights into the phenomenon of spousal abuse in Ghana, a few weaknesses are worth mentioning. Given the small sample size and the fact that informants were selected from only matrilineal family descent in Ghana, findings of the present study cannot bear wider applicability and generalizability. It is possible that if there was a larger sample and a more elaborate data collection, a more systematic rural-urban distinction could have been established. Also, economic tensions and familial discourses

may have been different if the sample was broadened to include participants from patrilineal family descent.

Again, my situation as a researcher from abroad and as a Ghanaian married man positioned me both as an outsider and insider at the same time. My researcher/outsider position demanded that I put away all personal presuppositions and perceptions. However, some participants of the study saw me as a Ghanaian married man with adequate knowledge of the social structure and gender practices in Ghana. Statements such as “you men in Ghana,” “as you are aware” kept coming from some participants. Whiles this may not have created much of a methodological problem, it may have affected full disclosure of important and basic information as participants may have considered them insignificant or that I was already aware of them.

5.3. Strengths of the Study

Notwithstanding the aforementioned weaknesses, the present study offers useful insights into the phenomenon of spousal abuse in rural and urban Ghana. It illuminates some of the structural, contextual and psychosocial influences of abuse in conjugal unions in Ghana. Its focus on situational rather than dispositional factors has also helped to point out some important oversight in the conceptualization, analysis and framing of intervention on the phenomenon of spousal abuse in Africa in general and Ghana in particular. The present study, through empirical data from rural and urban Ghana and other existing research, has provided broad understanding of the phenomenon of spousal abuse.

5.4. Implications and Recommendations

5.4.1. Community Psychological Interventions and Praxis

The response of community psychologists should be to first recognize the contextual and structural factors that may be accounting for the phenomenon of spousal abuse in rural and urban Ghana. The present study has provided another justification and framework for ecological analysis of injustices and oppression that women in Ghana may experience. I have argued and empirically demonstrated that the community or social system to which men and women in Ghana belong is the ground for their identities, perceptions, feelings and actions. In this regard, community psychologists can work in partnership with both men and women, families, religious and civil society organizations, community based organizations, non-governmental organizations, Ghanaian media, and institutions of law enforcement towards social change.

The development of personal empowerment for women can begin with a process of “conscientization” to make men, women and the community aware of the structural and contextual factors that may militate against the realization of the full potentials of women. Social change and the journey to personal empowerment begin with disadvantaged people’s awareness and understanding of the unjust psychological and sociopolitical circumstances that oppress them (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2009; Lord & Hutchison, 2007).

It has further been noted by researchers that oppression is a relational concept that means asymmetric power relations between individuals, groups and communities (Quinones, 2007; Watts & Serrano-Garcia, 2003). The core of oppression has been observed as power inequality experienced at the personal, relational and community levels of analysis (Nelson & Prilleltensky,

2009). The phenomenon of spousal abuse in Ghana can be conceptualized as occurring at multiple levels of analysis: individual, relational and collective. At the individual level, men and women have come to internalize dominant cultural and social notions of masculinity and femininity which include self-blaming and sense of personal worthlessness if their actions appear to subvert the social order. In relationship with their community, men in Ghana are regarded as powerful and heads of households, whereas women are perceived as inferior, weak and powerless, and are treated as such by society. These dominant notions of male supremacy and subordination of women reflect institutional expression of power inequality, and are embedded in structural arrangements that are manifested in Government and social policies and community settings.

Community psychologists, in collaboration with other stakeholders, can engage in consciousness-raising exercise to create awareness about these dominant cultural ideologies that appear to oppress women. Relationally, community psychologists can help promote a mutually positive and supportive relationship between men and women in Ghana in which power can be shared in a more benign manner. Both men and women in rural and urban Ghana can be encouraged, through community based workshops, to support each other in terms of domestic duties and economic responsibilities. At the community level, community psychologists can lobby institutions of government, such as the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWAC), policy makers and the Ghanaian Parliament to design and enforce gender mainstreaming programmes that will enable women acquire valued resources such as education, employment, income and housing for their well-being and empowerment. Governmental and non-governmental organizations can support small and medium scale enterprises, especially in the

rural areas of Ghana, to economically empower both men and women and to take the overburden economic pressure off men.

Community psychologists can also create or support male peer groups in rural and urban communities in Ghana and engage them in discussions that promote alternative conceptualizations of masculinity. When the natural potentials of men are harnessed through peer group discussions, these men can in turn initiate discussions on issues such as bride price and gender practices in their own communities to positively influence the behaviour of men in the larger Ghanaian society. It is important to note that when seminars/workshops on women empowerment are predominantly initiated and led by women, men may consider them as women's business and may stay away from such programmes. More importantly, community psychologists can advocate for the full implementation of the several relevant international conventions, protocols and legal statutes regarding the welfare and empowerment of women in Ghana. Clearly, there is a contextual need to reframe the problem of women so that there can be a more structural and nested ecological levels of analysis of the etiology of spousal abuse in rural and urban Ghana.

5.4.2. Research on the Phenomenon of Spousal Abuse

The present study has empirically documented situational, psychosocial and structural factors that may account for the phenomenon of spousal abuse in rural and urban Ghana. Based on the views of married men and women in the Akan matrilineal setting, the study has offered useful explanations to support the call by community psychologists for "person-environment fit" conceptualization of problems that face disadvantaged people over time and across multiple

levels of analysis. For a more holistic view, future studies should explore the views of married men and women in patrilineal settings in Ghana. It is possible that economic dynamics of power and familial discourses on inheritance/succession may differ in a patrilineal family structure.

Again, future research should endeavor to explore the perceptions of victims and perpetrators of spousal abuse in order to further establish the structural factors that influence men and women's behaviour in conjugal relationships in Ghana. The sample size in future studies should also be broadened to include heads of families, religious leaders, opinion and community leaders, chiefs, queen-mothers and policy makers. Their views may further shed light on the dominant cultural and religious notions that may restrict women from fleeing violent relationships. Empowerment is ecological in nature and can be conceptualized at multiple levels of analysis (Rappaport, 1981, 1987). Failure to think and practice ecologically reproduces the dominant culture's emphasis on individualism and promotes the tendency to engage in 'victim-blaming' (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2009).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview guide (semi-structured)

Knowledge of spousal abuse

Scenario 1

According to the statistics of Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) for 2009 and 2010, Ghana recorded 14,428 and 12,316 cases of abuse against women respectively. In 2010, over 2000 men were abused by their female partners. The abuses against men included harm, physical assault and few cases of women abandoning their children and that of women also included battering or physical assault, rape/sexual assault among others.

- Do you think the statistics about abused men is consistent with the situation in your area?
- Do you think men are physically abused by their wives in conjugal relationships?
- Which people are mostly abused in marriage, men or women? How and why?
- Which type of abuse is usually suffered by women?

Attitudes towards violence/abuse in conjugal relationships

- What do you think about men using violence against their wives?
- Must a wife always tell her husband or seek his approval before she visits friends or relatives?

Scenario 2

Must a man be angry with the wife because she refuses to cook for him assuming the wife justifiably explains that she went out to visit her parents and that she could not return early enough to cook? If the man returns from work to find his money on the table, must he be annoyed with the wife to the extent that he assaults her; bearing in mind that the woman too has the right to visit her parents at her convenience and choice?

- How do men ensure that their wives do what they want them to do? Do they use force? If yes, why?
- What will make a man use violence against his wife?
- What do you think about the payment of bride price? Does it give men control over their wives? How?
- Do you think using violence against wives makes a real man? How and why?
- Do you think men should forcefully have sex with their wives against their wish?
- Do you think it is appropriate for a wife to report her husband to the police/court for marital rape?
- What do you think will make an abused wife continue to remain in her marriage?
- What does your family/community think about husbands using violence against their wives? Are they helpful? When and how?

Key Informant

- What does DOVVSU considers as abuse?
- What kind of abuse cases are reported to the unit?
- Which group of people/gender regularly report cases of spousal abuse?
- What do victims say cause their abuse?
- What do you think encourages people to report or not to report cases of abuse?
- Do the police prosecute reported cases of spousal abuse?
- What role does DOVVSU play when cases are reported?
- How does DOVVSU resolve reported cases of abuse?

- Do family members report cases of abuse on behalf of victims?
- Is marital rape an offence under Ghanaian laws or does DOVVSU considers marital rape as an offence?
- Do you have any other comments?

Ending Note

Let us summarise the main points of our discussions. (The researcher briefly outlines the main points to the key questions). Is this summary a true reflection of our discussion? Are there any additions or changes you would like to make?

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Information

My name is Stephen Adjei Baffour, a Student of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) in Human Development at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, Norway. I am currently spending part of my graduate programme in Ghana collecting data on the chosen area of study for my master's degree thesis. The topic of my research is, "**Accounting for spousal abuse in rural and urban Ghana.**" The study will, with the consent of informants, involve focus group discussions and individual interviews with married men and women as well as key informants from Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) in Ghana. The discussions and interviews would be audio recorded so that responses can accurately be documented. This would enable the researcher to review the topics and responses later for purposes of analysis. Participation is possible if only you are willing to have the interview or discussions recorded.

Aim

This study is significant in that the findings will help provide a better understanding of violence against women in Ghana, and be useful for all interested bodies involved in the fight against abuse of women in intimate relationships. Again, the study will provoke further research in the academic community and help stimulate an all-encompassing approach to the investigation into, and discussions on spousal abuse in patriarchal societies.

Confidentiality

Participation is strictly confidential: you would not be identified by your name or your house in the reporting of the study. All information provided in this study will be held in absolute

confidence; the tapes would remain in the custody and control of the researcher always and would not be given out for any purpose to anyone who is not working directly with the researcher. The researcher will not share information which could identify you with anyone or in publication. The information would be destroyed when the entire research is over in August 2012.

Participation

Your participation is strictly voluntary. If you decide to participate, you have the right not to answer any question(s) you feel uncomfortable with and you can withdraw your participation at any time if you do not want to continue.

Contact

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact me at stevo024@yahoo.com or stephea@stud.ntnu.no or by telephone on 0244840378. You can also contact my supervisor, Prof. Berit Johannesen at berit.johannesen@svt.ntnu.no

Signature of Researcher

(Date)

(Stephen Adjei Baffour)

Consent of Informant

I certify that the purpose of the study has been thoroughly explained to me in a language I understand to my satisfaction and I have received a copy of the consent form. I understand that any information obtained from me for this research will be kept confidential. To further ensure privacy, I have the option of using a pseudonym. I understand that participation is voluntary and I have the right to refuse participation at any time in the course of the interview. I agree to participate in this study.

Signature/Initials/thumb Print (Informant)

(Date)

Appendix C

Letter of ethical clearance from the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD), Norway

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES

NSD

Harald Hårfagres gate 29
N-5007 Bergen
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Tel: +47-55 58 21 17
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nsd@nsd.uib.no
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Org.nr. 985 321 884

Berit Overå Johannesen
Psykologisk institutt
NTNU
Dragvoll
7491 TRONDHEIM

Vår dato: 13.05.2011 Vår ref: 26851 / 3 / JSL Deres dato: Deres ref:

KVITTERING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 28.03.2011. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

26851 *Accounting for Spousal Abuse in Rural and Urban Ghana*
Behandlingsansvarlig NTNU, ved institusjonens øverste leder
Daglig ansvarlig Berit Overå Johannesen
Student Stephen Adjei Baffour

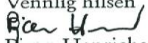
Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i henhold til personopplysningsloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personopplysningsloven.


Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i melde skjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, eventuelle kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven/-helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/prosjektoversikt.jsp>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 31.08.2012, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Bjørn Henriksen


Juni Skjold Lexau

Kontaktperson: Juni Skjold Lexau tlf: 55 58 36 01
Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering
Kopi: Stephen Adjei Baffour, Herman Kraggs Vei, 24/41, 7050 TRONDHEIM

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Appendix D

Letter of Confirmation from Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit, Ashanti, Ghana

