

# The Family, Gender, and Adolescents' Educational Expectations in Ghana.

Tamilka Bonjeer<sup>1</sup>

The Faculty of Educational Sciences

University of Oslo, Norway

[tamilkab@student.uv.uio.no](mailto:tamilkab@student.uv.uio.no); [ftamilka@yahoo.com](mailto:ftamilka@yahoo.com)

## **Abstract**

*The educational expectations of adolescents though have been studied for some time now, is still understudied in developing countries. Also, most studies are quantitative, and recommendations for qualitative studies are frequently suggested. This study, therefore, adopted the qualitative method of inquiry to understand how the expectations of adolescents in Ghana are formed. Participants for the study were junior high school students. The study revealed that adolescents each want to attain education and occupation that are better than or equal to that attained by a parent of the same sex. The resulting differences in their expectations thus reflected what already exists in society. Also, gender roles and the marriage market returns in education place limitations on girls' expectations but does not hinder boys' expectations in any way. These findings suggest that education that emphasises the importance of higher education for all adolescents should be encouraged.*

**Key words:** Adolescents, Gender, Possible Selves, Family, Expectations, Marriage.

## **1.0. Introduction**

The educational expectations of young people are widely studied. However, it is still understudied in developing countries (Yuping, 2014). What is also evident is the lack of qualitative studies in expectations. The literature is thus full of recommendations in that regard. For example, according to Tzanakis (2015), "...the decision to attend university is the result of a complex longitudinal process involving the home and school and future research must uncover these routes of influence..." (p. 33). Also, "...further research is needed to study the mechanisms generating gender identity and gender-specific preferences in education, such as the development of different expectations..." (Favara, 2012, p.39).

That young people's educational expectations are understudied in developing countries is no exaggeration. A search on expectations in Ghana returned fewer than five studies, with some of them mentioning expectations and aspirations only in passing. Bofah and Hannula (2015) analysed the 2011 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and reported that boys' expectations were higher than girls in Ghana. But because most of these studies are usually quantitative, there is no account of how the observed differences in Ghana came about. This study, therefore, employs a qualitative methodology to understand how young people's educational

---

<sup>1</sup>This is part of a master's thesis submitted to the Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Oslo, in 2017.

expectations are formed in Ghana, with students in junior high school (JHS). Two main questions are explored here:

1. How do individual members of the family influence the educational expectations of adolescents in Ghana?
2. How do gendered norms influence the educational expectations of adolescents in Ghana?

## **2.0. Literature review**

### **2.1. The family and adolescents' educational expectations**

The socioeconomic status (SES) of parents influences the expectations of adolescents. Past research on students' expectations is concentrated on this. However, partly because of different contexts, research findings have not been consistent on the effects of SES on gender. Kleinjans' (2010) study of young people in Denmark, for example, revealed that girls' expectations were not affected by parental income, but boys' expectations were significantly affected. In a different context, Mexico, Attanasio and Kaufmann (2014) found that higher parental income was more important for girls than boys in the decision to attend college.

It is believed that expectations are more powerful when communicated by specific family members such as fathers and mothers (Perez-Felkner, 2013). But expectations from parents have equally generated inconsistent results about gender, though most studies show that mothers' expectations have the greatest effect on all children's expectations and it is likely to be the result of the amount of time children spend with each of their parents (Sanders et al., 2001). Girls in particular take into consideration the wishes of both their fathers and mothers when forging their educational plans (Scabini, Marta & Lanz, 2007).

There are many ways in which parents' expectations influence adolescents' expectations. Parents sometimes expect children to either achieve something equal or more than what they have achieved (Rutchick, Smyth, Lopoo & Duseket, 2009). Thus, parents with bachelor's degrees may either expect their children to attain bachelor's degrees or masters or Ph.D., and it is explicitly communicated and picked up by children.

The involvement of parents in adolescents' life trajectories takes different forms, and they affect the expectations of boys and girls. Trusty (1998), for example, showed that career control is associated with higher expectations. However, extremely low and extremely high parental controls over adolescents' career decisions were found to affect college attendance decisions negatively. Home-based parental involvement also indirectly increases boys' educational expectations, but it is weakly related with girls' expectations (Trusty, 2002).

### **2.2. Gender and adolescents' educational expectations**

An extensive review of literature by Mello (2008) demonstrates that the perception of gender barriers to education and occupation causes variation in educational and occupational expectations among boys and girls. The literature is clear on the fact that females perceive more barriers to education and occupation. They are equally more inclined to anticipate gender discrimination and even to "question the utility of college than males" (pp. 1069-1070).

Gender ideologies are also shown to have influence on the educational expectations of adolescents. Davis and Pearce (2007), for instance, theorised and tested the relationship between an aspect of gender ideology they called "work-family gender ideology" and the educational expectations of adolescents. According to them, how boys and girls envisage the future families they would construct and their roles within it together with their partners in managing incomes and in caregiving have effects on the kind of education they expect. Their results indicate that, educational expectations of adolescents are significantly related with work-family gender ideology. In

particular, it was discovered that, though adolescents (both boys and girls) with egalitarian views have high expectations, the effects of increased egalitarianism is greater on girls than boys. Even among girls, those with higher egalitarian work-family gender ideologies have higher educational expectations (two times more) than those with lower egalitarian views.

Adolescent boys and girls typically make gender stereotyped choices. They make choices that may not be based on their differences in abilities, because even when boys and girls show equal academic performance, they still make different choices and in accordance with their own gender stereotype. However, the impact of gender roles on educational choices is strong on girls than boys and the effects on girls' choices start as early as age fourteen or the beginning of secondary school (Favara, 2012).

The marriage market plays a vital role in shaping adolescents expectations in education. This appears to be a new area of research among the determinants of educational expectations. In a study by Attanasio and Kaufmann (2016), they found that, for girls, the marriage market plays a vital role in their decisions to attend college. Girls' expectations were high because they perceived that by going higher in education, they could increase their chances of becoming more attractive to potential partners. For boys, the marriage market had a negligible effect on their college attendance decisions. Once married, some individuals may also find it hard to realise their expectations (McClelland, 1990).

### **3.0.Theoretical framework**

The possible selves theory, by Markus and Nurius (1986), has been used to explore numerous phenomena. Among these are academic outcomes (Leondari, Syngollitou & Kiosseoglou, 1998) and identities (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2001). The theory was therefore found to be appropriate for this present study.

According to Markus and Nurius (1986), "possible selves represent individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they will like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming, and thus provide a conceptual link between cognition and motivation" (p. 954). The theory has its foundation within the domain of "social cognitive studies of the self-concept" with interest in the relationship between "motivation and social cognition" as it functions as incentive for future behaviour (Erikson, 2007, p. 348).

The theory has two main practical implications. First, possible selves are incentives for future behaviour. That is, individuals' knowledge of what they can become, what they hope to become, what they are afraid they may become, what they fully expect they will become; or their fears, goals, threats and hopes provide them with the means-ends patterns for new behaviour; helps them to frame their behaviours and to guide their course; and it helps them to select future behaviours. Second, it has evaluative and interpretive functions. That is, this type of self knowledge helps individuals to make sense of their actions, attributes and abilities because it comes with benchmarks for evaluation of outcomes.

The theory posits that, what people expect to become or are afraid of becoming is socially constructed. The nature of possible selves and how it is valued by the individual; the intensity and extensiveness of its "cognitive and effective elaboration"; the association of such selves to categorical "plans and behavioural strategies"; all are determined by where a person finds themselves in life (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 958). Thus, they are determined by one's gender, family, school, country, culture, amongst others.

Oyserman & Fryberg (2006, pp. 29-31) aver that gender is a determinant of possible selves since boys and girls differ in self-esteem, sensitivity to social context, and in cognitive and social development. With regards to cognitive and social development, for instance, girls compared with

boys develop faster on numerous social and cognitive measures such as self-awareness, self-reflection and abstract reasoning. One of the consequences of this is that the integration of future work and family roles becomes their preoccupation even as early as in mid-adolescence. Concerning possible selves in education, the differences in cognitive and social development could put girls in a quandary. For example, faced with choosing between school and family-related possible selves, they find themselves in the awkward situation of either pursuing their personal desire for academic excellence, and their belief that they are expected to be good family members (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006).

#### 4.0. Methodology

The design for the study was basic/generic qualitative approach. According to Percy, Kostere and Kostere (2015, p. 78), this method investigates "...people's reports of their subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or reflections on their experiences..." With this approach, data analysis involves the use of concepts derived from the theoretical framework and the categorisation of recurrent themes (Caelli, Ray & Mill, 2013, p. 3).

Data was collected from pupils in a junior high school (JHS) in October-November of 2016, through semi-structured interviews. A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit fifteen boys and fifteen girls in the third year of JHS. There were attempts to select students from JHS 2 for this project to correspond with the grade of students that took part in the 2011 TIMSS. However, students in this class were less interested in the study; and since I was looking for voluntary participants, and students in JHS 3 showed greater interest in it, I decided to recruit informants from their classes.

#### 4.1. Determining students' educational expectations

Because of the thin differences between expectations and aspirations, vigorous attempts were made to as much as possible, capture students' expectations. To illustrate how this was done, I use the case of Mary<sup>2</sup> to do this. Her expected education was captured as a diploma in nursing. The procedure used to arrive at this was repeated with every student interviewed. Mary first reported that she would go to the university after high school for a degree in nursing. But I realised that she lacked knowledge of the entry points to nursing. I then told her about the alternative entry points and their durations. I also asked her to take her time and think about things that are equally important to her in life before telling me what she expects. I had to supply this information because "expectations are developed on the basis of information garnered by the individual from external sources" (Azmat et al., 2013, p. 99). Mary then sat for a moment and said:

*I told you that I want to go to the university. I did say that, but I don't think they [parents] can see me through the university. I know that it is the 3 years' [diploma in nursing] that they can see me through. But what I want is the university. But I know it is the 3 years' [diploma in nursing] that I would eventually attain.*

Educational expectations are often looked at in terms of whether they are low or high. For the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the borderline for high and low expectations is a university degree: students who expect less than a first degree are designated as low expecting students; and students who expect at least a first degree are considered as high expecting students (OECD, 2012). This study took a similar line: students who expected secondary school qualifications, diploma, higher national diploma, and certificates were considered as having

<sup>2</sup> Pseudo-names are used in the entire study report.

low expectations. High expecting students were those who reported first degree attainments and higher.

## 5.0. Findings and discussion

### 5.1. Parents and adolescents' educational expectations

Though families expect both boys and girls to go beyond secondary school, the expectations of boys were still higher than that of girls because of a gendered tendency, where adolescent boys hope to do better than their fathers, and girls, to do better than their mothers. This reflected the assertion that, sometimes, "children develop by taking the parent of the same sex as their principal reference" (Vincent-Lancrin, 2008, p. 281). Because in most cases adolescents' fathers were reported to be more educated than their mothers, the expectations of boys and girls tended to follow that line.

The attainments of fathers' became indexes for adolescent boys' attainments and consequently their expectations. A similar finding is reported in Scabini et al. (2007). They found that boys' expectations were more influenced by their fathers' professional status. It is apparent that some boys even see it as almost unacceptable to not do better than a father. Baba and Tommy for example respectively said:

*I want to go higher than my father. Because it is not proper that your father gives birth to you and what he is doing on earth here you would end up not able to do that, or you are not able to exceed that, or you end at where he ended.*

*My father is a teacher. Where my father has gotten to is good. People have always said that you have to give birth and the children would grow and get higher in life than you. So where my father has reached, I want to grow and get higher than that.*

The case of Kamitu, a girl, illustrates that most girls rather want to rise above their mothers. Her expectation was a diploma in nursing, and she said it was good that she attained better qualifications than her mother. According to her, "My mother is a midwife. She went to the school of midwifery. So she is not a big nurse. I also want to go to school as she went. I want to go higher than her". According to her, her father is a teacher with a diploma qualification. If it was her aspiration to be a teacher like her father and to attain more than her father, it is possible that she would have had at least a bachelor's expectation, since that is the next highest qualification after diploma.

The gendered relationship creates a situation where fathers are more likely to influence the expectations of boys through the occupational trajectories which they explicitly communicate to them. This finding is similar to what is reported in Trusty (1998). In Trusty (1998), career control was found to be associated with higher expectations. Whenever fathers were reported to have involved in deciding the future careers of adolescent boys, their resulting educational expectations usually were higher. Baba's case illustrates this.

Baba reported that he had always wanted to be a nurse. However, his father, who is a teacher with a bachelor's degree, said he wants a lawyer in their family. According to him, he had heard a lot of things about lawyers which makes him dislike the law profession. However, according to him, the suggestion of his father is inviolable, and this is compounded by the fact that he is the first child and 'only son' of his father. He said, "But I would have to stick to what my father says. Because, whatever your father says, if you don't take it, it is disobedience. But it is nursing that is in my mind". Perez-Felkner (2013) asserted that expectations are more powerful when communicated by specific family members such as fathers and mothers. This assertion apparently applied to Baba's case in this study.

Unlike a boy like Baba, whose father could suggest to him where to go after secondary school, girls usually receive 'prayers' and encouragement from their mothers concerning choices which girls themselves make known to them. Previous studies show that parental encouragement affects the

expectations of boys and girls. Reynolds and Burge (2008) for example, found that parental encouragement increases girls' expectations more than boys. But in this study, it was revealed that encouragement from mothers does not translate into specific expectations either than what girls' make known to their mothers in particular. Laat, for example, said, "My mother once asked me what I want to become in the future, and I said, a nurse. So every day she is praying that I would become a nurse. But for my father, he doesn't know. He doesn't even sit in the house". This encouragement for girls to excel in what they decide for themselves suggests that there is recognition for girls to get an education, but parents seem to be content as long as such education could give them employable skills.

A number of reasons accounted for why parents expect more education from boys. The case of Baba shows this: parents are usually concerned about who would take care of them in the future. The position of Baba in the birth-order even makes his case more unique. He frequently used, "the only son", in his responses, and that was to put across that he is highly valuable in the family, relative to his siblings who are girls. A similar expression from a girl does not convey a similar message of invaluable, at least in the patrilineal societies of northern Ghana. His father's expectation for him, therefore, reflected families' expectation of older children, especially boys, to serve as 'co-parents' as far as family responsibilities are concerned, leading to parents willing to invest more in their education than in girls' (Lloyd & Gage-Brandon, 1993, p. 299).

By identifying themselves with this role of 'co-parents', boys tended to think of higher educational attainments. This reflected the proposition that individuals' goals and hopes provide them with means-ends patterns which determine their actions (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The case of Tommy also illustrates this. Tommy said he was confident of attaining a degree in nursing. He was aware of the other categories of nurses, but he was specific on degree nursing because, according to him, that would allow him to earn good salaries to achieve his goal of improving his family's welfare. He said,

*Having a degree in nursing...the one which is four years...I know I can get there...They said that one is better than the one in Nalerigu<sup>3</sup>. I am praying, I know I would be able to complete that one and become a big nurse so that I can take care of family members well.*

The expectations of parents from girls are apparently different. Girls are considered not effective for the role expected of boys in the family since they would marry and eventually lose touch with their families. This affects girls' expectations especially when there is accompanying lack of interest in their education. This desire for parents to stay connected with their children is partly because children are seen as a source of security in old age because of the lack of effective social welfare in place (Twum-Danso, 2009). Edith, for example, was asked why she is interested in a diploma in nursing and not a degree in nursing. She partly attributed it to the relatively lesser interest of her father in her education. She said:

*My father says that the education of a girl is not important. According to him, we can easily go wayward; and that, with time, when they need us [in old age], they would not find us. But my mother always would say that it is not all girls who are like that. She usually says that some girls even get higher in school than boys and take care of their parents better than boys.*

---

<sup>3</sup> There is a nursing Training college in Nalerigu, 18 miles away from their town. It awards only diplomas and certificates.

The relatively lesser involvement of parents in girls' education is also heightened by the incidence of teenage pregnancy. The reason is that teenage pregnancy truncates education, and reduces girls' chances of completing school and finding jobs to support their families financially. The occurrence of teenage pregnancy in a family affects not only the girl who became pregnant but also other female members of the family. For example, according to Edith, her father is also not concerned about her education because her older sister became pregnant and could not complete secondary school. According to her, "they always say that what happened to my sister may equally happen to me. It is my father who always says that".

## 5.2. Siblings and adolescents' educational expectations

It was found that educational and occupational trajectories are often discussed among siblings. This provides opportunities for older siblings who have more information about higher education to know how their younger siblings currently perform in school; the subjects they are good at; the courses they want to do in high school; and, the higher educational institutions they wish to attend. From these interactions, they are able to influence adolescents' life trajectories, since they are seen as parents and are expected to direct their younger siblings (Lloyd & Gage-Brandon, 1993). Also, it is part of a deep-rooted cultural phenomenon that in Ghana, younger siblings "defer to the older sibling[s] in everyday social interaction solely on the basis of age" (GSS, 2013, p. 87). They are seen as infallible and as repositories of higher education information. In explaining how older siblings influence their younger ones, a boy narrated that:

*They [older siblings] have gone higher in education and know more about school. Because of this, they can sit with me down and tell me what is best for me or what I can easily pursue after secondary school (Kimi).*

Given this position of older siblings in the family structure, their influence on adolescents' expectations is powerful. This should be expected because, sometimes, what a person thinks he or she can become could be "rooted in what important others believe one should become" (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006, p. 19). Dafulka, for example, reported that he would do general arts in secondary school so that he could become a journalist in the future. When asked why he wants to be a journalist, he said, "A brother of mine told me to become a journalist. He went to their school [school of journalism] and did that programme. He said it is good and that I should do the same thing after secondary school". This paralleled with a previous study that shows that older, same-sex siblings are important for the identity of "later-born counterparts" and they do not "differentiate from one" another but rather identify with each other (Wong, Branje, VanderValk, Hawk & Meeus, 2010, pp. 680-81). When Dafulka was asked what his aspirations were before his brother suggested journalism to him, he said, "I have always thought of doing science in secondary school and later go to the nursing training college or become a soldier. I have always thought about these two".

On the contrary, as the narratives of girls show, there are no attempts to change their preferences by their siblings. This probably stems from the fact that the choices of girls in this study (nursing, in most cases), apparently was gendered- in Ghana, females are more represented in tutorial colleges, outstripping boys in nursing training colleges in particular (NCTE, 2014). Because of this, family members probably do not bother to offer alternatives, as long as girls' expectations are in keeping with this gendered standard. Consequently, the role of siblings, like their mothers, is limited to the offering of advice and encouragement. Advice and encouragement are important. They suggest approval of the choices of girls. It is not known what the nature of advice would be if girls report university aspirations to their siblings. But if siblings have different aspirations for their younger ones who are girls, one would expect them to communicate such aspirations to them equally. Laat for example said:

*I would go to nursing training college after secondary school. When we were in primary school, whenever they asked us to write letters, to describe the work we want to do in the future, I usually wrote about nursing. I have told my brother about this. For one of my brothers, they said he should be a soldier because he is a boy. But my brother have always told me that since I said I want to be a nurse, I should work hard and go to Bawku or Bolga nursing training college. Aside from this, he doesn't say any other thing.*

### **5.3. Childbearing, domestic roles and adolescents' educational expectations**

It is within the social environment that people are provided with "...advice and direction with respect to 'how to be' and 'how not to be'..." (Oyserman & Markus, 1993, p. 192). It could be added that young people do not only receive advice on 'how to be', but they practically learn 'how to be'. However, being a boy or a girl means learning what is appropriate for your gender because society usually conditions the roles of boys and girls differently; and also, it assigns different values to them with those to be performed by boys having the highest value (Nurmi, 2004). The performance of these roles in Ghana is said to partly "correspond to the right to maintenance", where a child is obligated to perform some duties for the parents, who in turn reciprocate by meeting the child's needs (Mensa-Bonsu & Dowuona-Hammond, 1996, p. 15). But as boys and girls take part in domestic chores as a way of learning the roles associated with their genders, it affects their participation in school and consequently their educational expectations. The processes involved in this are diverse.

Boys reported being less involved in domestic activities because, in comparison with girls, there are fewer chores that they are expected to carry out. What boys reported doing at home were helping their parents on the farm during farming seasons, attending to animals, and running errands. They, therefore, participated in school more than girls and thus expected different outcomes in school. This is expected in part because, inequalities in opportunities to learn transform into inequalities in performance which in turn leads to inequalities in expectations (OECD, 2012).

Whether legally or culturally sanctioned, the narratives show that girls compared with boys are more involved in the activities that are assigned to their gender. Though there is an emphasis on girls to go to school like boys, they are still expected to stick to their roles. They therefore daily have to combine the demands of the classroom and the home. Because of this, most of them said they sometimes come to school late and in some cases skip classes to either assist their mothers or attend to domestic activities as if they were adults. Joy, for example, said that,

*I know that I am a girl, so I have to learn how to do household chores. If I don't learn how to do them and I eventually get married, I may not be able to cook or even do the dishes. Because of this, I now know how to keep the dishes clean. I cook, and I sweep the compound. There is no work in the house that I cannot do now.*

As girls get more involved in domestic activities, some of them see themselves as having little prospects in attaining similar qualifications as boys. Talata, whose expectation was a diploma, like many girls, did not see herself making it to the university. She attributed a bachelor's degree and higher, to boys and not to girls, because, like other girls, she does not have enough time to dedicate to studies and to prepare herself for university education. She said,

*A boy is supposed to go higher in education than a girl. They have time for books, but girls do not have time for books. Why I said this is that a girl can do a boy's work when the boy is not around. But a boy cannot do a girl's work. They would not even want to do it. But for us, we do a lot of work in the house*

What Talata said represents how the performance of the roles which are not traditionally associated with a given gender is perceived in the Ghanaian society. For example, girls assist their



parents on the farm in weeding and harvesting, but boys seldom cook for the family or take grains to the mill for grinding. In practice, the distinction in gender roles is strictly followed by boys than by girls. When girls even perform what is traditionally considered as boys' work, they are praised and admired. But when a boy performs girls' work, like going to the mill with grains, he could be ridiculed. This has led to an increase in the daily workloads of girls, and for a girl like Talata, it affects her studies and consequently how far she thinks she can go into education.

More is also expected of boys in school because of their lesser engagement in domestic activities. They feel they have to account for their relatively minor engagement in domestic chores educationally. Baba, for example, was sure that he would go higher in education than his other siblings who are girls. The reason, according to him, was that,

*A girl doesn't get the chance to study because she cooks for the house, goes for water and washes the dishes. It is only once in a while that we go for water. But for them, they go for water every day, wash dishes, and cook for us. But for us boys, what is our work? Ours is to study. If a girl ends up achieving more in school than you as a boy, you have not done well.*

An expected domestic role that came in the way of the expectations of girls and boys was that of childrearing (parenting). It was not seen as having effects on boys' future occupational and educational endeavours since they were (and are) even not considered as their duty. This is not a recent phenomenon, and it has for a long time been attributed to the role of socio-cultural forces. Archer (1989) for example, showed that boys do not perceive a conflict between family and career, and do not even see parenting role as their problem. This makes it possible for them to forge higher expectations. Duut, for example, said he would be a "degree teacher" (a teacher with a bachelor's degree) by the time he is like his older brother whom I knew. It suggested that he would not go to university straight after secondary school. So I asked him whether he expects to be hindered in any way, since he has to go to the college, teach for some time and enrol again. He replied that,

*Look at master [referring to one of the male teachers]. He is still going to school at his age. People say education has no end. So he still goes to school in Tamale. It is only women who cannot do that. So, for me, I know I would still go to school again after I have completed teacher training college, and taught for some time.*

Unlike Duut who plans to go to school in stages- tutorial college first and later university- it was found that not all girls see themselves as capable of doing the same and that contributed to their lower expectations. They attributed it partly to childbearing. It has long been observed that girls who chose to marry early before continuing their education had "lower odds of earning a bachelor's degree" (McClelland, 1990, p. 116). Some girls showed the tendency to complete school early and give birth. They, therefore, tended to see two or three-year colleges as favourable for this reproductive function. Some of them said:

*A girl is supposed to stop somewhere in education. You know, we have a time that a woman will not be able to give birth. So a girl has to stop somewhere and look for a man and marry. I would want to stop somewhere, but the man I would marry in the future can continue going to school. I would not be happy if I am the one continuing education and not him (Rukaya). My mother got married and gave birth to me. I would also try and give birth to make her happy. My father told us a story that, God created human beings to give birth before they die...If you refuse your mother's wish, she can curse you. So as a girl you should end at where you can get a job and get a man to marry and look after children (Teni).*

Girls equally perceived a conflict between their roles in the home and the demands of occupations outside the home. According to Bussey and Bandura (1999, p. 703), "the effects of juggling dual roles are typically framed negatively on how competing inter-role demands breed distress and discordance". This has led to a situation where women who engage in formal careers face the

challenge of reconciling their roles as mothers and workers because the two have conflicting demands (Brown, 1996). Also, when faced with inter-role demands, individuals would have to make choices. One of the reasons is that it is difficult to be effective simultaneously in all domains of life because “the activities involved in different selves conflict” (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006, p. 18). Girls believed that the more education one has, the more likely they would be engaged in jobs that require much of their time which would negatively affect their performances of domestic responsibilities. Other previous studies support this finding. Teachman and Polonko (1988), for example, found that women more than men were more likely to enrol in two-year colleges and such colleges were preferred because they lower the “barriers that inhibit enrolment for individuals with family responsibilities” (p. 521). Inter-role conflict was vividly summed in the narratives of Kamitu. She described her future expected responsibilities which she said would work against her future educational pursuits and hence her reported expectations, as:

*My duties are: by 5:30 am or 4:30 am, I should be out of bed to prepare food. If there are children of school going age, I will prepare them for school. So by 6:30, let's say I have a motorbike or a car, I would drop them at school and then go to work. Maybe if I am to go for lunch at around 2 or 4 pm and it is time for the children to go for a second break, if I had prepared their food, I would go for it for them. After work, I would pass by and pick them.*

In comparison with boys, Oyserman and Fryberg (2006) posited that at mid-adolescence, it is girls who often are pre-occupied with the challenge of making a choice between possible selves in education and possible selves in family-related domains. This, they attributed to their faster development on self-awareness, self-reflection and abstract reasoning. This manifested in this study, as girls demonstrated more understanding of their expected future domestic roles, which unfortunately affects their educational expectations.

Some girls also had lower expectations because some higher educational attainments were considered as simply not necessary for girls. When Suguru whose expectation was a diploma, was told about master's and doctorate degrees, and whether she could attain any of them in the future, she said she was not interested in pursuing any of them, and that it was not even necessary that girls are educated to such levels. According to her,

*There is no problem with a girl having a lower qualification. There is nothing wrong with that. In the end, you could be a good supporter to the man you would marry. I know that a girl can go higher in education like a boy, but for me, that is not good. To have a qualification that is higher than that of boys? No!”*

#### **5.4. The marriage market returns in education and adolescents' educational expectations**

Knowledge of marriage market conditions plays a vital role in informing the educational decisions of adolescents because education could affect marriage- both the quality and the chances. For example, Attanasio and Kaufmann (2016) in their study in Mexico found that girls' educational expectations were high because they perceived that by going higher in education, they could increase their chances of becoming more attractive to potential partners. The images of educated and uneducated people who are in marriage are therefore important in informing the educational choices of adolescents and hence their expectations. In Ghana also, it is reported in Takyi (2001) that, women with more higher education are more likely to report divorce than women with lower and no education; and marriages that end in divorce are higher among women who work in professional settings than those who work in non-professional settings. Girls in this current study also said similar things about women whom they termed ‘highly educated women.’ They expressed that they are incapable of making good homes: “They don't usually have stable homes. They don't

live well” (Ajara).

Unlike the findings in the study in Mexico, the marriage market returns in education work differently for girls in Ghana. According to most girls, they have seen that ‘highly educated women’ have difficulty in getting married. This perception made it hard for some of them to foster higher expectations. This was in keeping with the proposition that some adolescents may find it hard to foster positive, realistic possible selves that are focused on school as the conduit to “adulthood unless these possible selves are fostered in a social context that creates local norms highlighting the relevance of academic achievement” (Oyserman, Terry & Bybee, 2002, p. 314).

Various reasons were given accounting for why ‘highly educated women’ may find it difficult to get married and that consequently regulated girls’ expectations. Teni, for example, said she has never thought of going to the university. She expressed that as long as what she hopes for (diploma in nursing) can get her employed, she is content. One of the advantages of having a diploma qualification, according to her, was that “boys [men] would not fear you like if you have a big degree” [a bachelor’s degree and higher]. Laat whose expectation was a diploma in nursing, also had similar reservations and said that if a girl is pursuing a master’s degree, it would become difficult for a prospective man to marry her because that person would need a similar or higher qualification before he can marry her. According to her, “by the time the boy would reach you [have similar qualification as the girl], he would say that you are old and he would not marry you. So you can wait for him, and he would get a different girl and marry and you would be left without a man to marry”.

Adolescent boys did not expect a negative feedback from their social environment concerning higher educational attainments and one’s chances of marriage. They were therefore not restrained from having higher educational ambitions. Indeed, most boys expressed that a proper relationship is the one where a man is more educated than a woman. This confirmed what girls equally expressed. A similar finding is reported in Kurzban and Weeden (2005). They found that in dating, though the education of a woman is not the most important thing for men, men who go for highly educated women were still usually slightly more educated than the women. This observation could be partly attributed to the fact that “male self-concepts are associated to a significant degree with their individuating achievements and their independence from others” (Josephs, Markus & Tafarodi, 1992, p. 399). This may be important to boys partly because they come with emotional benefits. For example, Markus and Kitayama (1991) contended that the act of “standing out are often intrinsically rewarding because they elicit pleasant, ego-focused emotions such as pride” (p. 246). This means that boys tended to have higher educational ambitions in part because of some sense of good feeling it would accord them in the future. Tommy, for example, said, “you yourself [referring to the researcher] know that a boy is supposed to be more educated than a girl”. According to him, this was important because,

*Your salary and her salary would not be the same. She would go for a smaller salary while you go for a bigger one. When you are more educated than a woman, you would speak English and use words which she would not know their meaning. Because of this, she would respect you. That is why I said it is good for a boy to go higher in education than a girl.*

## **6.0. Conclusion and recommendation**

This study sought to understand the role that parents, siblings, and some gender norms play in the educational expectations that young boys and girls in Ghana hold about themselves. Conducted in a rural community in northern Ghana, it reveals how parents and young people themselves attach importance to higher education. It equally shows that adherence to socially constructed roles for boys and girls still persist and are emphasised. To find a balance between going forward in education and being proficient in some of the expected socially-determined roles, girls more than

boys, are expected to make sacrifices in their academic journey. As young as girls in particular may be, they have a vivid understanding that some educational pursuits are to be subordinated to some of the tailor-made functions that they are expected to play in the near future. This, unfortunately, is not the case for boys, and as a result, they tend to hold expectations that differ from girls, even when they both have similar academic abilities. Based on this, it is important that families and institutions in Ghana focus on promoting values that emphasise the significance of higher education for adolescents irrespective of their gender.

The study shows that the social environment of adolescents is deluged with imageries and models that reinforce the different expectations for boys and girls in most social domains, thereby affecting their educational expectations. Within the family, parents provide the first templates for the various trajectories that children contemplate. In addition, they have access to vital resources- financial and information about higher education and vocations- that affect these trajectories. How the 'templates' are fashioned, as well as how these resources are controlled between fathers and mothers, and how they choose to deploy them for the education of children- advertently or inadvertently- have taken a gendered pattern. Consequently, the expectations of boys and girls follow this pattern, as each of them either tries to emulate parent of the same sex, or they benefit differently from the resources that parents have. The role of older siblings is not different from that of parents, and boys tend to benefit the more through interactions with them.

Beyond the immediate family, the external environment within which adolescents' lives are embedded exerts a similarly powerful influence on their choices. They are confronted with standards and demands that are modelled on the basis of gender. It must be pointed out that attachments to some of these standards and demands have lessened in recent years. However, they still play roles in the self-concepts of boys and girls. Household chores still have gendered elements, and affects girls participation in school disproportionately, leading to them having comparatively lower expectations. Girls envisage conflict between future productive and reproductive roles, but this does not apply in the case of boys. For girls, this conflict means them moderating the education they could attain. Also, one would expect education to enlarge individuals' opportunities in almost all domains. But this study shows that some educational attainments could be counter-productive for girls, especially in the 'marriage market'. Girls do not lack images and imaginations of how some higher attainments could impede their chances of getting married or staying in the same for long. Since people tend to work towards avoiding the 'possible selves' they are afraid of becoming (Markus & Nurius, 1986), the strategies of some girls, therefore, include amongst others, limiting the education could attain.

### References

- Archer, S. L. (1989). Gender differences in identity development: Issues of process, domain and timing. *Journal of Adolescence*, 12(2), 117-138.
- Attanasio, O. P., & Kaufmann, K. M. (2014). Education choices and returns to schooling: Mothers' and youths' subjective expectations and their role by gender. *Journal of Development Economics*, 109, 203-216.
- Attanasio, O., & Kaufmann, K. (2016). Education choices and returns on the labour and marriage markets: Evidence from data on subjective expectations. *Work. Pap., Bocconi Univ., Milan*.
- Azmat, F., Osborne, A., Le Rossignol, K., Jogulu, U., Rentschler, R., Robotom, I., & Malathy, V. (2013). Understanding aspirations and expectations of international students in Australian higher education. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 33(1), 97-111.

- Bofah, E. A. T., & Hannula, M. S. (2015). TIMSS data in an African comparative perspective: Investigating the factors influencing achievement in mathematics and their psychometric properties. *Large-Scale Assessments in Education*, 3(1), 1-35.
- Brown, B. B., Eicher, S. A., & Petrie, S. (1986). The importance of peer group ("crowd") affiliation in adolescence. *Journal of adolescence*, 9(1), 73-96.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bussey, K., & Bandura, A. (1999). Social cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation. *Psychological Review*, 106(4), 676-713.
- Caelli, K., Ray, L., & Mill, J. (2003). 'Clear as Mud': Toward greater clarity in generic qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2(2), 1-13.
- Davis, S. N., & Pearce, L. D. (2007). Adolescents' work-family gender ideologies and educational expectations. *Sociological Perspectives*, 50(2), 249-271.
- Dunkel, C. S., & Anthis, K. S. (2001). The role of possible selves in identity formation: A short-term longitudinal study. *Journal of Adolescence*, 24(6), 765-776.
- Erikson, M. G. (2007). The meaning of the future: Toward a more specific definition of possible selves. *Review of General Psychology*, 11(4), 348-358.
- Favara, M. (2012). The Cost of Acting "Girly": Gender Stereotypes and Educational Choices. *Discussion Paper No. 7037*.
- GSS (2013). *2010 Population and housing census report: Women and men in Ghana*. Accra.
- Josephs, R. A., Markus, H. R., & Tafarodi, R. W. (1992). Gender and self-esteem. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63(3), 391-402.
- Kerpelman, J. L., & Pittman, J. F. (2001). The instability of possible selves: Identity processes within late adolescents' close peer relationships. *Journal of adolescence*, 24(4), 491-512.
- Kleinjans, K. J. (2010). Family background and gender differences in educational expectations. *Economics Letters*, 107(2), 125-127.
- Kurzban, R., & Weeden, J. (2005). HurryDate: Mate preferences in action. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 26(3), 227-244.
- Leondari, A., Syngollitou, E., & Kiosseoglou, G. (1998). Brief report: Academic achievement, motivation and possible selves. *Journal of Adolescence*, 21(2), 219-222.
- Lloyd, C. B., & Gage-Brandon, A. J. (1993). Women's role in maintaining households: family welfare and sexual inequality in Ghana. *Population Studies*, 47(1), 115-131.
- McClelland, K. (1990). Cumulative disadvantage among the highly ambitious. *Sociology of Education*, 102-121.
- Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). Possible Selves. *American Psychologist*, 41(9), 954-969.
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review*, 98(2), 224-253.
- Mello, Z. R. (2009). Racial/Ethnic group and socioeconomic status variation in educational and occupational expectations from adolescence to adulthood. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 30(4), 494-504.
- Mensa-Bonsu, H. J. A. N., & Dowuona-Hammond, C. (1996). The child within the Ghanaian family. In E. Ardayfio-Schandorf (Ed.), *The changing family in Ghana*. (5-20).
- NCTE (2014). *Basic statistics on tertiary education institutions in Ghana 2012/13*. Retrieved: 18/04/2017. From <http://www.ncte.edu.gh/images/pdf/tertiary%20education%20institutions.pdf>

- Nurmi, J. E. (2004). Socialisation and self-development: Channelling, selection, adjustment, and reflection: In R. M., Lerner & L., Steinberg (eds). *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology* (2 eds). Pp. 85-123. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. New Jersey.
- OECD (2012). *Grade expectations: How marks and education policies shape students' Ambitions*. PISA, OECD Publishing.
- Oyserman, D., & Fryberg, S. (2006). The possible selves of diverse adolescents: Content and function across gender, race and national origin. In D. Curtis & K. Jennifer (Eds.), *Possible Selves: Theory, Research and Applications*, (pp. 17-39). New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc.
- Oyserman, D., & Markus, H. R. (1993). The sociocultural self. *Psychological Perspectives on the Self*, 4, 187-220.
- Oyserman, D., Terry, K., & Bybee, D. (2002). A possible selves intervention to enhance school involvement. *Journal of Adolescence*, 25(3), 313-326.
- Percy, W. H., Kostere, K., and Kostere, S. (2015). Generic Qualitative Research in Psychology. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(2), 76-85.
- Perez-Felkner, L. (2013). Socialization in childhood and adolescence. In J. DeLamater, & B. A. Ward (eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology*, (pp. 119-149). Springer: Netherlands.
- Reynolds, J. R., & Burge, S. W. (2008). Educational expectations and the rise in women's post-secondary attainments. *Social Science Research*, 37(2), 485-499.
- Rutchick, A. M., Smyth, J. M., Lopoo, L. M., & Dusek, J. B. (2009). Great expectations: The biasing effects of reported child behaviour problems on educational expectancies and subsequent academic achievement. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 28(3), 392-413.
- Scabini, E., Marta, E., & Lanz, M. (2007). *The transition to adulthood and family relations: An intergenerational approach*. Psychology Press.
- Takyi, B. K. (2001). Marital instability in an African society: Exploring the factors that influence divorce processes in Ghana. *Sociological focus*, 34(1), 77-96.
- Teachman, J. D., & Polonko, K. A. (1988). Marriage, parenthood, and the college enrolment of men and women. *Social Forces*, 67(2), 512-523.
- Tzanakis, M. (2015). Does Longitudinal Change in Adolescent Educational Expectations for University Study Vary by Ethnic Group? *CLS Working Paper 2015/04*.
- Trusty, J. (1998). Family influences on educational expectations of late adolescents. *The Journal of educational research*, 91(5), 260-271.
- Twum-Danso, A. (2009). Reciprocity, respect and responsibility: The 3Rs underlying parent-child relationships in Ghana and the implications for children's rights. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 17(3), 415-432.
- Vincent-Lancrin, S. (2008). The reversal of gender inequalities in higher education: An on-going trend. *Higher education to*, 2030(1), 265-298.
- Wong, T. M., Branje, S. J., VanderValk, I. E., Hawk, S. T., & Meeus, W. H. (2010). The role of siblings in identity development in adolescence and emerging adulthood. *Journal of Adolescence*, 33(5), 673-682.
- Yuping, Z. H. A. N. G. (2014). Educational expectations, school experiences and academic achievements: a longitudinal examination. *China: An International Journal*, 12(1), 43-65.