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PREVALENCE AND TRENDS IN CHILD MARRIAGE IN GHANA

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW   Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women

GDP   Gross Domestic Product

GLSS   Ghana Living Standard Survey

GDHS   Ghana Demographic and Health Survey

GSS   Ghana Statistical Service

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While the issue of child marriage has received a lot of attention among both academia and the media in the last couple of years, much of the discussions often lack empirical statistical evidence. In order to strengthen effectiveness of policies based on these discussions, some scholars have used various econometric approaches to explain the incidence and depth of child marriage in some countries. This paper follows these analytical approaches to discuss incidence, trend and depth of child marriage among girls in the various geographical areas and among various groups in Ghana.

The paper employed the data set of the sixth round of the Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (GDHS VI). The survey was conducted in 2014 and covered 11,835 households in the ten administrative regions of the country. The data set of GDHS VI was considered appropriate for the paper because it contains information on the age at the time of first marriage or when the person started living with a partner. The incidence of child marriage was estimated as the proportion of women and girls in a particular age group who got married before they were 18 years while the concept of depth of child marriage was borrowed from the poverty literature to capture how early young women in Ghana marry.

The results of the stochastic dominance tests indicate that irrespective of the threshold for the age of marriage, women in urban areas and women who are Christians are less likely to marry at an early age. It was also found that the incidence of child marriage is relatively higher in the Northern Region, Upper East Region and Upper West Regions compared to the other regions. Again, the incidence of child marriage was found to be highest among Gurma and Mole-Dagbani ethnic groups. Additionally, the paper identified a declining trend in the incidence of child marriage and suggested the development could be due to modernization and the desire of the women to attain higher academic laurels.

It is recommended that Government and development partners should intensify campaigns against child marriage in the areas where its prevalence is high and among the groups with higher incidence in the country.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The marriage of girls and sometimes boys before the legal age of marriage has been a global phenomenon. This type of marriage, often called child marriage, is particularly widespread in some regions of the world especially in the sub-Saharan Africa. The latest comparable figure for the sub-Saharan Africa region suggests an incidence of 39 per cent (UNICEF, 2016). Child marriage poses both adverse health and socio-economic consequences for the victims and their societies. However, as a results of many campaigns in the last couple of years by some local and international organisations, the global incidence of child marriage has declined significantly (Nguyen and Wodon, 2015).

Child marriage is the outcome of the interplay of economic, structural and social factors (Karam, 2015). Child marriage could be an avenue for parents to reduce the economic burden of providing for their young daughters. In societies where bride prices are paid, parents may make some economic gain in the process. There is an incentive to marry girls off early in countries where dowries are paid as part of the marriage contract since the cost of the dowry increases with the age of the girl. The second causal factor identified by Karam (2015) is structural, that is the lack of educational opportunities. In a study on the causes of child marriage in Kenya and Zambia, Steinhaus et al. (2016) identified lack of educational opportunities as one of the direct causes of child marriage. There is pressure for girls to get married when parents cannot afford to pay for their daughters' education or when the girls do not get good grades to transition to the next level. Lack of job opportunities when girls end schooling could exacerbate the situation by pushing them into marriage especially if they enter into relationships with men for financial reasons.

Another set of drivers of child marriage is social factors which include, cultural norms and practices and religious perspectives. For example, in societies where a premium is placed on virginity prior to marriage and pre-marital pregnancy casts shame on girls' families, parents will marry off their daughters at an early age to avoid this. Pre-marital pregnancy can place girls in the difficult position of having no choice but to get married (Steinhaus et al., 2016). Inadequate sex education, ignorance about the use of contraceptives and difficulty in accessing contraceptives can

result in early pregnancy and marriage before girls attain the legal age. Girls thus become victims of child marriage not necessarily because parents make the decision to marry them off but because they find themselves in circumstances which require that they get married. These causes are not mutually exclusive.

Ghana is one of several countries that has translated international conventions and agreements that prohibit child marriage into national laws. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child takes a firm stand against child marriage. Article 21 (2) states that 'child marriage and the betrothal of girls and boys shall be prohibited'. Article 16 (2) of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) states that `the betrothal and marriage of a child should have no legal effect'. Ghana has ratified both these international instruments - CEDAW in 1986 and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in 2005. Article 14(2) of Ghana's Children's Act (560) of 1998 sets the minimum age for marriage at 18 years and Article 14 (1) explicitly states that a child should not be forced to be betrothed or married. Child marriage adversely impacts the well-being of the girl child and can have inter-generational dimensions.

The literature on child marriage is replete with evidence of the adverse effects of child marriage (Otoo-Oyortey 2003; Jensen & Thornton, 2003; Walker, 2012; Morhe, et al., 2012). While the adverse effects of child marriage mostly affect the victims, its ripple effects on the entire society are significant. According to UNICEF (2005), early marriage has profound physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional impacts, cutting off educational opportunity and chances of personal growth. The entire society is however affected when the victims are not able to contribute meaningfully to socio-economic development.

Studies on the harmful effects of early marriage on the health of the victims have revealed that girls who are married off before the age of 18 years often experience early sexual debut, give birth to more children and lose more children to neonatal and childhood disease (Jensen & Thornton, 2003; Walker, 2012; Morhe et al., 2012). According to Jensen and Thornton (2003), early marriage leads to early childbirth, which sometimes adversely affects the reproductive health of the victims. As a result of their physiology, most child brides often experience prolonged labour and difficult delivery, which sometimes lead to permanent injury.

One of the problems currently debilitating against the economic fortunes of Ghana is youth unemployment. Even though the country in recent months has put together a number of strategies to address the unemployment problem, child marriage poses a potential threat to effectiveness of some of these strategies. Apart from usually being denied the chance of acquiring formal education (Walker, 2012), the victims tend to give birth to more children who are most likely to tread the path of their mothers. Eventually, there would be more youth ready and available to work but not physically and psychologically matured to be productive in the labour market.

Additionally, early marriage predisposes girls to abuse in their marriages. Walker (2012) identified child marriage as potentially affecting the physical well-being of the victims. Child brides are vulnerable to and experience physical, sexual and emotional abuse. They can be socially isolated because their husbands restrict their movements and who they can socialise with. As Otoo-Oyortey (2003) and Diop et al., (2002) noted, early marriage often isolates girls from their peers. Several studies have concluded that early marriage deprives children of their childhood.

Despite having national laws that prohibits child marriage and in spite of the numerous adverse consequences of early marriage on the victims and the entire society the practice persists in Ghana and is present in all the ten administrative regions of the country. It is therefore necessary to understand trends in the incidence of child marriage in Ghana in order to inform the design of effective policies to address the problem.

Objectives of the study

Child marriage is often discussed without much empirical statistical evidence. While this can affect effectiveness of policies designed to address the problem, it may also mislead the general public about realities on the ground. The main intention of the paper is to improve the availability and/or documentation on child marriage in Ghana in the last three decades. Specifically, the paper seeks to present information on the prevalence of child marriage in Ghana and trends in the incidence of child marriage over time. It identifies regions and locations where the practice of child marriage is most common. It also identifies population groups among whom the prevalence of child marriage is high.

The National Context

Ghana is a rapidly urbanising low middle-income country with about 51 per cent of its population residing in urban communities in 2010 compared to 43.8 per cent in 2000. Despite this, some parts of the country remain quite rural. For example, the Northern Region, Upper West Region and Upper East Region have rural population shares of 69.7 per cent, 83.7 per cent and 79 per cent respectively.

The country has nine major ethnic groups. The Akan, concentrated largely in the southern sector of the country, comprise about 47.5 per cent of the total population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). The next largest ethnic group is the Mole-Dagbani (16.3%) found predominantly in the Northern Region, Upper East Region and Upper West Region, followed by the Ewe (13.9%). The next largest ethnic group after the Ewe is Ga-Dangme (7.4%) found in the Greater Accra Region, with Mande forming the smallest ethnic group (1.1%) in the country. Ghana has two main dominant religions – Christianity and Islam which made up 71 per cent and 17.6 per cent respectively of the total population in 2010.

Real gross domestic product (GDP) has tended to grow at a faster rate than population, thus translating into positive growth in per capita incomes. Some amount of economic structural change has occurred in the last two decades. Agriculture no longer dominates the economy. In 2010 the sector employed about 42 per cent of the working population aged 15 years and above (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). It accounted for about 22 per cent of GDP in 2014 (World Bank, 2016). The services sector now employs the largest share of the working population (42.3%) and its share of GDP in 2014 was about 50 per cent. Women are concentrated in this sector where about 49 per cent of working women find employment, most of whom may be described as being in vulnerable employment.

Poverty rates have declined in the past two decades with the national headcount ratio estimated at 24.2 per cent in 2012/13 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). The national average masks spatial differences in the poverty incidence. The incidence of urban poverty is lower than rural and some administrative regions such as the Northern Region (50.4%), Upper East Region (44.4%) and Upper West Region (70.7%) have poverty headcounts far in excess of the national average (24.2 %.).

There has been improvement in some social indicators in the last decade. Indicators of child malnutrition have improved considerably with the share of children who are stunted declining by 14 percentage points between 2003 and 2014. Gender parity in primary and junior high schools has almost been achieved. The gender parity index at the primary and junior high school levels stood at 0.99 and 0.95 in 2013/14 respectively (National Development Planning Commission, 2015). There are some exceptions with the Northern Region standing out with a gender parity index much lower than the national average. Improvements in social indicators have not been the same across all wealth groups. Child mortality rates have fallen but are twice as high among households in the lowest wealth quintile compared to households in the highest wealth quintile (National Development Planning Commission, 2015).

Both monogamy and polygyny are practised in Ghana. In 2010 about 43 per cent of the population above 12 years old was married (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). Apart from getting married, some couples do live together without performing or completing the required marital rites. About 5 per cent of the population aged 12 years and over were in consensual unions in 2010. Consensual unions are highest in the Ashanti Region, Eastern Region and Brong Ahafo Region. Very young boys and girls in Ghana get married, however, the incidence is higher among girls (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). In 2010, about 5.6 per cent of boys and 5.2 per cent of girls aged 12-14 years were married (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). The incidence almost doubled to 9.2 per cent among girls aged 15-19 years and was slightly lower at 4.8 per cent for boys in the same age category. Among this older age group about 1 per cent of girls were either divorced, widowed or separated. In the ten-year period between 2000 and 2010 the proportion of 15-19 year old girls who had ever been married declined from 19.5 per cent to 13.2 per cent. Child marriage is higher in rural areas where in 2010 17.5 per cent of girls aged 15-19 years were married compared to 9.6 per cent of urban girls (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013).

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The paper relies on the data set of the Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (GDHS) which was conducted in 2014. This survey was principally designed to provide data to monitor demographic and health situations in Ghana. It (GDHS) is a nationally representative household survey that collected data from 11,835 households where a total of 9,396 women aged 15-49 years and 4,388 men aged 15-59 years were interviewed. It provides reliable information on several issues including reproductive, child and maternal health, marriage and sexual activity. The survey obtained information on the age at the time of first marriage or when the person started living with a partner for persons aged 15-49 years.

The Ghana Statistical Service and the Ghana Health Service carry out the GDHS with technical support from the ICF Macro through the MEASURE DHS programme. The GDHS follows a two-stage sample design. The first stage involves selecting sample points or clusters from a sampling frame constructed from population and housing censuses. A number of clusters are selected from the sampling frame using systematic sampling with probability proportional to size. A complete household listing is conducted in all the selected clusters to provide a sampling frame for the second stage selection of households. The second stage of the selection process involves a systematic sampling of the households listed in each cluster. The objective of the second stage selection is to ensure an adequate number of completed individual interviews to provide estimates for acceptable precision.

GDHS data set is considered appropriate for this study because information on the year of first marriage and consensual sexual relations is obtained directly from each respondent aged 15-49 years and is therefore less likely to be subject to error.

Measures of child marriage

The indicators of child marriage employed in this paper relies on the concepts of the depth and severity of child marriage borrowed from the poverty literature and applied by Nyugen and Wodon (2012) in measuring child marriage in Nigeria.

The incidence of child marriage is measured as the proportion of women and girls in a particular age group who got married before they were 18 years. The critical age threshold of 18 years is chosen because it is the legal age for marriage in Ghana. If the total population of women is represented by n and q is the number that married before the age of 18 years, the incidence of child marriage, H, is given by:

$$H = \frac{q}{n} \quad\text{...} \quad (1)$$

The depth of child marriage or the child marriage gap is a measure of how early girls get married. It is the product of the incidence of child marriage and the average number of years below the threshold age of 18 years that girls marry. Thus the younger girls are when they get married, the higher is the estimated child marriage gap. If z is the critical age threshold and y_i is the age at which the ith girl got married, the child marriage gap, PG, is calculated as:

$$PG = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^{q} \left[\frac{z - y_i}{z} \right] \quad\text{...} \quad (2)$$

The last measure of child marriage is the squared child marriage gap. This measure puts greater weight on girls who marry very young. The squared child marriage gap, P^2, is measured as:

$$P^2 = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^{q} \left[\frac{z - y_i}{z} \right]^2 \quad\text{...} \quad (3)$$

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section discusses both the prevalence of and trends in child marriage in Ghana. In the case of incidence, the paper seeks to find out which part of Ghana has the highest incidence of child marriage while the trend seeks to map changes in the incidence over time.

Incidence of Child Marriage[1]

There is no specific reference age category in the literature for measuring the incidence of child marriage. Some studies provide incidence measures based on the age category of 18-49 years as the denominator (for example, Nguyen and Wodon, 2015) while others employ a reference age category of 20-24 years (UNICEF, 2015). Figure 1 presents information on the incidence of child marriage for five different age categories of women. Among women and girls aged 15-49 years, the national incidence of child marriage is estimated at 23.6 per cent compared to 27.7 per cent for the age category 18-49 years and 20.7 per cent for women aged 20-24 years.

Figure 1: Incidence of child marriage, by age categories of women and girls (%)
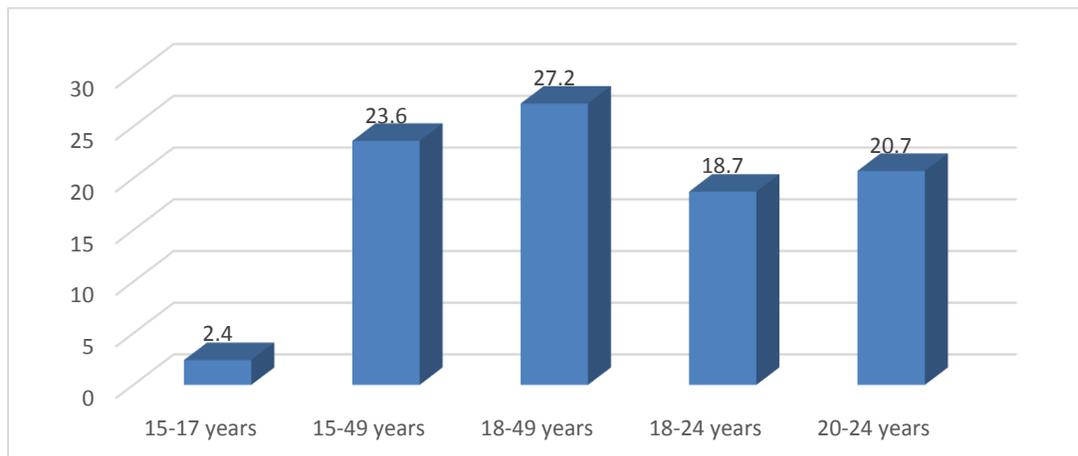
Source: Authors' computation based on GDHS 2014

Table 1 presents the incidence of child marriage for the age category 18–49 years at the national level, regional level and for urban and rural locations. The headcount national incidence of child

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[1] The estimates were obtained using the household weights.

marriage in 2014 was 27.2 per cent with a rural incidence of 34.3 per cent which is significantly higher than the urban incidence of 19.4 per cent (Table 1).

An examination of the incidence of child marriage by region reveals a substantial amount of variation. Northern Region recorded the highest incidence of 38.0 per cent. This is followed by the Upper West Region and Upper East Region that recorded 35 per cent and 34 per cent respectively. The Greater Accra Region has the lowest incidence at 17.8 per cent (see Table 1).

Table 2 presents information on the incidence of child marriage by ethnicity and religious affiliation. Ghana has several ethnic groups and for the purpose of this analysis, they have been categorised into nine major groups.[2] The category "other ethnic group" refers to ethnic groups originating from outside Ghana, including the Fulani.

The different measures of child marriage confirm the ethnic differences in the practice of child marriage in Ghana (see Table 2). The incidence of child marriage is highest among the Gurma at 35.4 per cent. Next, with an incidence of 35.1 per cent, are other ethnic groups not indigenous to Ghana. The ethnic group with the third highest incidence is the Mole-Dagbani (32.9%), with Ewe being the ethnic group with the lowest incidence of child marriage (19.7%) in the country.

In the case of the religious affiliation, the incidence of child marriage is high among people of the African traditional faiths (42.6 %). The incidence is lower (24%) among people who profess the Christian faith compared to the people of Islamic faith who recorded 33.7 per cent.

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[2] This classification follows that used by the Ghana Statistical Service in the classification of ethnic groups in the 2010 Census report.

Table 1: Measures of Child Marriage by Location in Ghana, 2014

	Measures of child marriage			Age at first marriage	
	Headcount (%)	Gap (%)	Squared Gap (%)	Median	Mean
Area of residence					
Urban	19.4	2.8	0.6	21	21.8
	(0.0107)	(0.0017)	(0.0004)		
Rural	34.3	5.1	1.0	19	19.5
	(0.0099)	(0.0019)	(0.0005)		
Region					
Western	31.1	4.8	1.0	19	20.2
	(0.0246)	(0.0044)	(0.0012)		
Central	28.6	4.1	0.7	19	20.6
	(0.0253)	(0.0040)	(0.0008)		
Greater Accra	17.8	2.6	0.5	22	22.4
	(0.0186)	(0.0029)	(0.0007)		
Volta	25.3	3.9	0.8	20	20.8
	(0.0211)	(0.0042)	(0.0012)		
Eastern	26.0	3.8	0.7	20	20.7
	(0.0202)	(0.0037)	(0.0009)		
Ashanti	25.1	3.7	0.7	20	21.0
	(0.0233)	(0.0042)	(0.0011)		
Brong-Ahafo	23.3	3.6	0.8	20	20.9
	(0.0245)	(0.0043)	(0.0010)		
Northern	38.0	5.7	1.1	18	18.9
	(0.0215)	(0.0037)	(0.0009)		
Upper East	34.2	5.0	1.0	18	18.9
	(0.0261)	(0.0047)	(0.0012)		
Upper West	35.0	5.5	1.2	18	18.8
	(0.0337)	(0.0054)	(0.0014)		
National	26.2	3.9	0.8	20	21
	(0.0084)	(0.0014)	(0.0004)		

Standard errors are in parentheses.
Source: Authors' computation based on GDHS 2014.

The Child Marriage Gap and the Child Marriage Squared Gap

As earlier explained, child marriage gap measures how early girls get married while the squared child marriage gap places emphasis on girls who marry very young. Discussions in this section concentrate on these two measures of child marriage.

Girls in rural areas who marry before 18 years old do so at much earlier age than their counterparts in the urban communities. The child marriage gap is higher among rural women than it is among urban women (Table 1). The higher child marriage squared gap for rural women implies that girls in rural communities of Ghana who marry before 18 years usually do so at a much younger age than do urban girls. Therefore young girls in rural communities are much more vulnerable to child marriage. This difference may be attributed to cultural practices which appears to support child marriage and common in the rural communities in Ghana. Apart from recording the highest incidence of child marriage in the country, Northern Region, Upper East Region and Upper West Region also recorded the highest child marriage gap indices. This means that not only are girls in these regions more likely to marry before the legal age of 18 years, they are also more likely to marry at a much younger age compared to girls in other parts of the country. Both the median and the mean age at first marriage in these three regions are also lower than the national average.

Table 2: Measures of Child Marriage by Ethnicity and Religion in Ghana, 2014

|	Measures of child marriage			Age at first marriage	
	Headcount (%)	Gap (%)	Squared Gap (%)	Median	Mean
Ethnicity					
Akan	25.1	3.7	0.7	20	21.1
	(0.0121)	(0.0020)	(0.0005)		
Ga	21.5	3.4	0.7	21	21.7
	(0.0242)	(0.0043)	(0.0010)		
Ewe	19.7	2.8	0.6	21	21.6
	(0.0152)	(0.0025)	(0.0007)		
Guan	27.0	4.3	0.9	19	20.5
	(0.0369)	(0.0066)	(0.0016)		
Mole-Dagbani	32.9	5.1	1.1	19	19.4
	(0.0186)	(0.0030)	(0.0009)		
Grusi	29.1	4.1	0.8	19	20.3
	(0.0340)	(0.0050)	(0.0012)		
Gurma	35.4	5.5	1.1	18	19.1
	(0.0204)	(0.0045)	(0.0013)		
Mande	28.0	4.0	0.7	19	20.3
	(0.0720)	(0.0118)	(0.0026)		
Other Tribes	35.1	4.9	1.0	20	20.4
	(0.0543)	(0.0079)	(0.0022)		
Religion					
Christian	24.0	3.5	0.7	20	21.1
	(0.0088)	(0.0015)	(0.0004)		
Islam	32.7	4.9	1.0	19	19.8
	(0.0183)	(0.0032)	(0.0010)		
Traditional	42.5	7.3	1.7	18	18.7
	(0.0329)	(0.0087)	(0.0030)		
No/Other	42.1	6.4	1.3	18	19.2
	(0.0383)	(0.0068)	(0.0017)		

Standard errors are in parentheses.

The child marriage gap and squared child marriage gap are higher for the Grusi, Mole-Dagbani and the 'other ethnic group' (see Table 2). This means that the young girls of Grusi and Mole-Dagbani ethnic groups usually marry much earlier before approaching the legal marriage age of 18 years. The child marriage gap of 7.3 per cent recorded by the traditional religion adherents is highest. This also means that girls of traditional faith marry much earlier before the age of 18 years.

Stochastic Dominance Analysis

In the literature on poverty, stochastic dominance techniques have been used to examine the sensitivity of poverty rankings to different definitions of the poverty line (Atkinson, 1987; Duclos & Araar 2003). Nguyen and Wodon (2012) used this approach to examine the robustness of child marriage rankings to the choice of minimum age threshold for marriage. There is first order stochastic dominance when the cumulative distribution function of an indicator – in this case the share of women that have married below a certain age – of one group of women does not intersect the cumulative distribution function of another group of women. If the curves do not cross then comparisons between the two groups will yield consistent rankings irrespective of the minimum age threshold that is used. This part of the study employs these techniques to find out which group or period has higher measures of child marriage.

Tests for stochastic dominance were used to examine the robustness of the associations between child marriage and the following variables of interest: location (rural or urban), region, religious affiliation and ethnic groups. First order stochastic dominance was tested for by relying on simple cumulative distribution functions. The results are presented in Figures 2-5. The cumulative distribution of child marriage for rural women lies above that of the distribution for urban women (Figure 2). These curves do not intersect, indicating that irrespective of the threshold for the marriage age, women in rural areas are more likely to marry at an earlier age than women in urban areas.
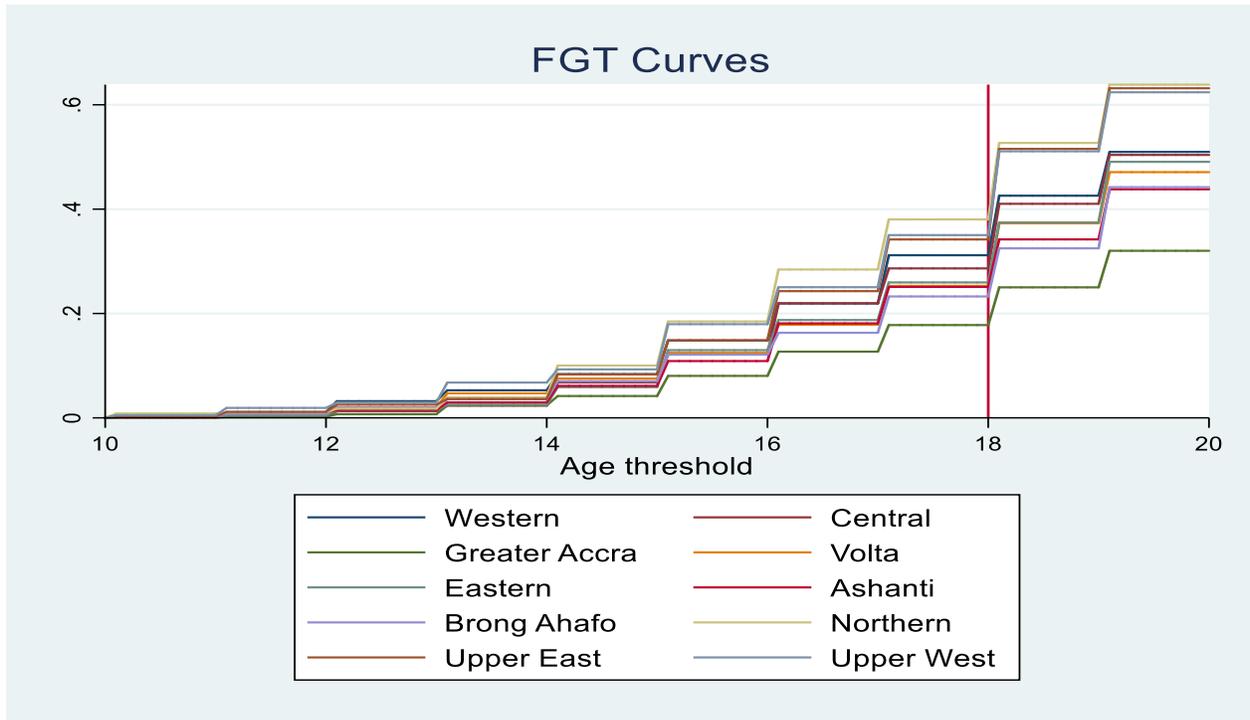
Figure 2: Cumulative distribution of age at first marriage by location (rural-urban)
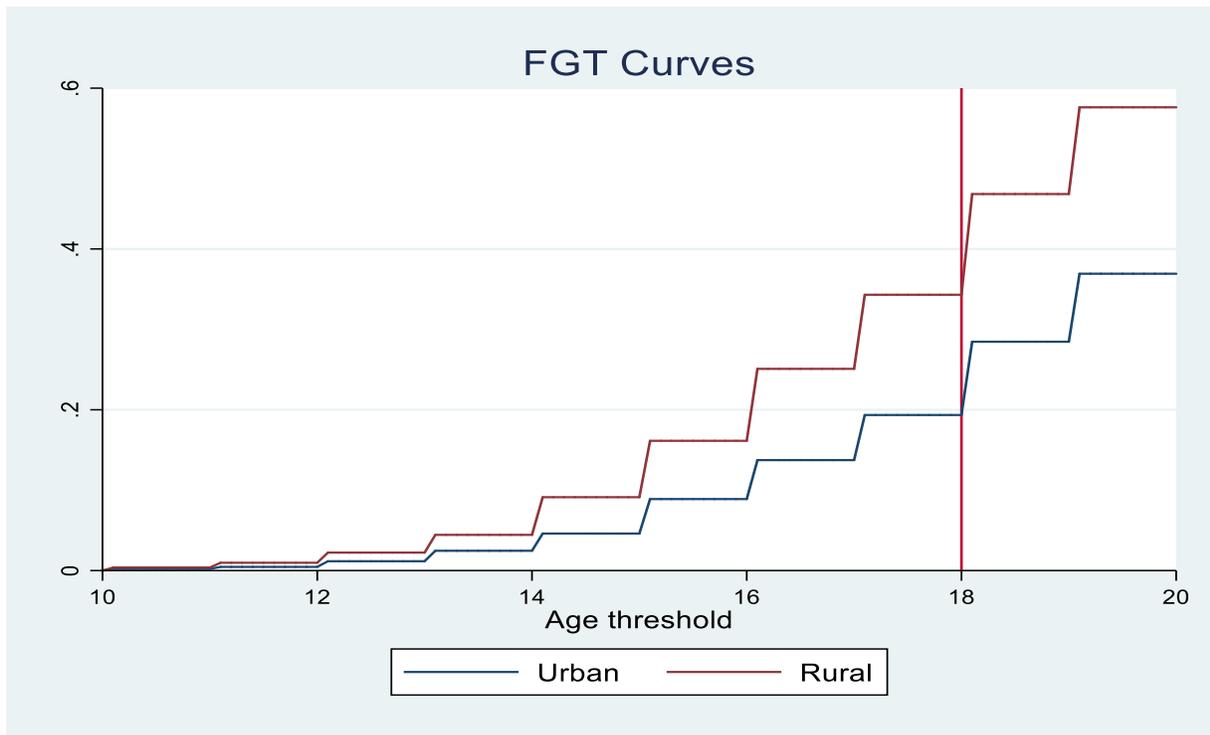
Source: Authors' computation based on GDHS 2014.

While the cumulative distribution curves of several regions intersect at different age thresholds (Figure 3), that of Greater Accra Region intersects only that of the Central Region. This suggests that irrespective of the age threshold, the likelihood of early marriage is lower in the Greater Accra Region compared to all other regions with the exception of the Central Region. Compared to the Upper East Region, Upper West Region, Northern Region and Western Region the incidence of child marriage is lower in the Eastern Region at all age thresholds.
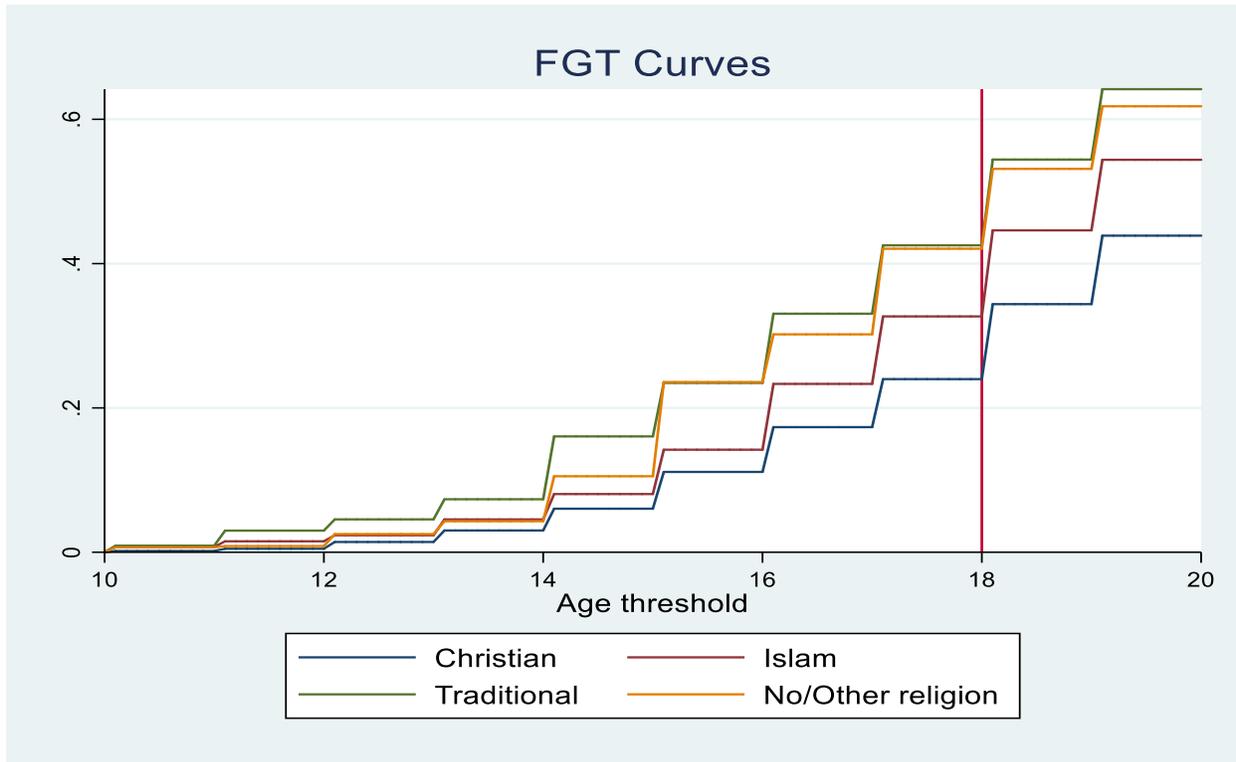
Figure 3: Cumulative distribution of age at first marriage by Region

Source: Authors' computation based on GDHS 2014.

Figure 4 compares the cumulative distribution functions of age at marriage for women with different religious affiliations. The intersection of the curves at different age thresholds suggests that the ranking of religious groups based on the incidence of child marriage depends on what value the age threshold takes. Despite this, the cumulative distribution curve for Christian women does not intersect any of the other curves. This implies that whichever measure of child marriages is used, child marriage is less prevalent among Christians compared to the other religious categories.

Figure 4: Cumulative distribution of age at first marriage by religion

Source: Authors' computation based on GDHS 2014.

Several of the cumulative distribution curves for different ethnic groups intersect one another and no clear pattern emerges based on first order stochastic dominance (see Figure 5). For example, the Ewe are consistently ranked lower compared to the Grusi, Mole-Dagbani and the Gurma but cannot be consistently ranked compared to the Akan, Mande and the Guan. The Mole-Dagbani cannot be consistently ranked as having a higher incidence of child marriage compared to the Guan and Gurma. However the Mole-Dagabani are more likely to have a higher incidence of child marriage compared to the Akan, Ewe, Ga, Gurma and Mande. The Akan have a lower likelihood of child marriage than the Gurma and the Mole-Dagabani.

Figure 5: Cumulative distribution of age at first marriage by ethnic group

FGT Curves
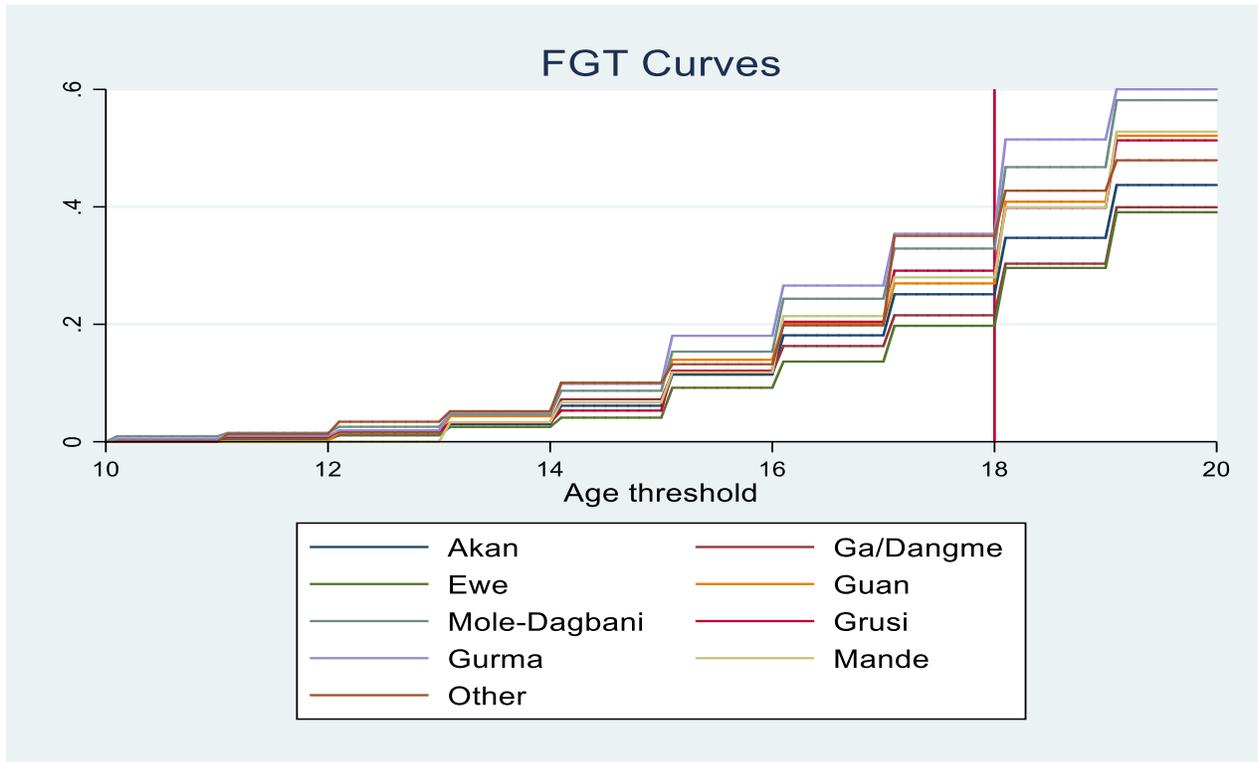
Source: Authors' computation based on GDHS 2014.

Trends in the Prevalence of Child Marriage

In order to examine the trends in the prevalence of child marriage, the measures of child marriage are calculated for different age categories and decade of birth of women in the sample. The results presented in Table 3 indicate a declining trend in the incidence of child marriage in Ghana. The incidence of child marriage appears to decline from the oldest age category of 45-49 years (34.6%) to the youngest age category of 18-19 years (13.5%). In the 30 year period there has been a significant decline in the incidence of child marriage. A similar pattern could be observed when women are classified according to their decade of birth.

The child marriage gap and the squared child marriage gap have declined over time suggesting that there has been a decline in the proportion of girls who get married at very early ages in Ghana.

Table 3: Measures of Child Marriage by Age Groups and Decade of Birth in Ghana, 2014
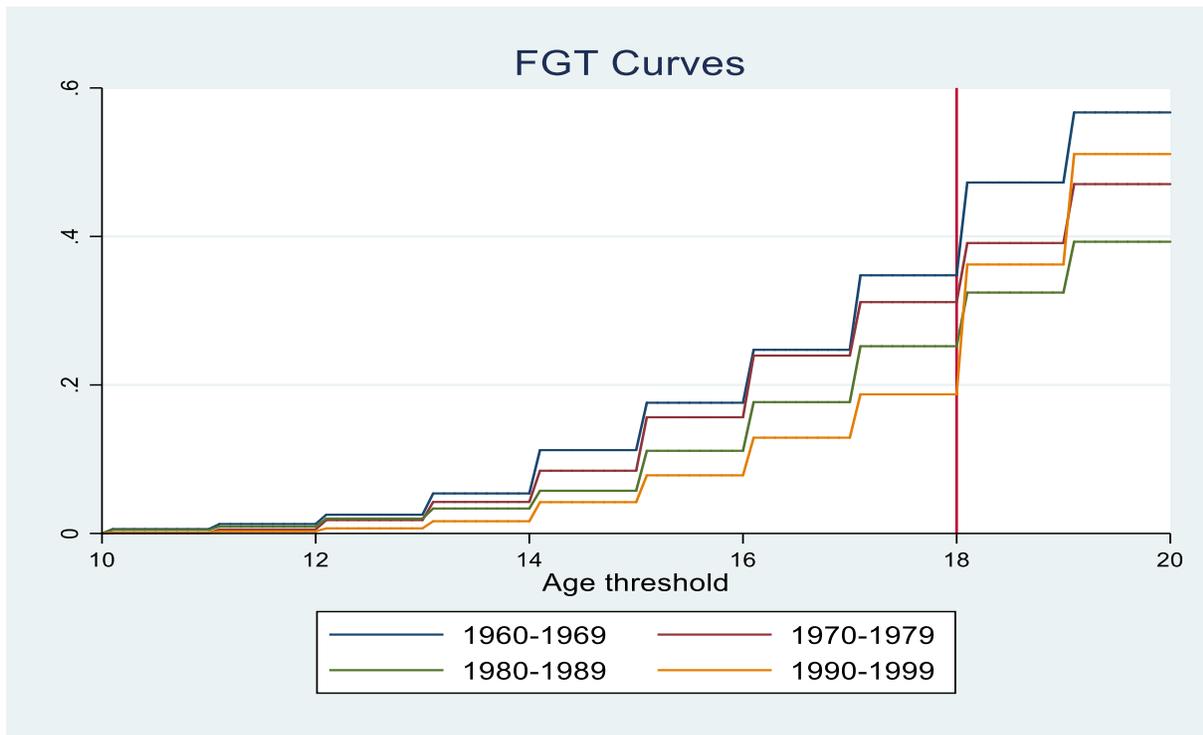
	Measures of child marriage		
	Headcount (%)	Gap (%)	Squared Gap (%)
Age Groups			
18-19 Years	13.5	1.7	0.3
	(0.0163)	(0.0024)	(0.0005)
20-24 Years	20.7	2.9	0.5
	(0.0123)	(0.0020)	(0.0005)
25-29 Years	23.9	3.5	0.7
	(0.0158)	(0.0028)	(0.0007)
30-34 Years	26.9	4.0	0.8
	(0.0167)	(0.0028)	(0.0008)
35-39 Years	28.3	4.5	0.9
	(0.0166)	(0.0030)	(0.0008)
40-44 Years	35.2	5.2	1.0
	(0.0213)	(0.0036)	(0.0009)
45-49 Years	34.6	5.4	1.1
	(0.0206)	(0.0043)	(0.0013)
Decade of birth			
1990-1999	18.7	2.6	0.5
	(0.0111)	(0.0017)	(0.0004)
1980-1989	25.2	3.7	0.8
	(0.0126)	(0.0022)	(0.0006)
1970-1979	31.2	4.8	0.9
	(0.0147)	(0.0025)	(0.0006)
1960-1969	34.8	5.4	1.1
	(0.020)	(0.0042)	(0.0013)

Standard errors are in parentheses.

Source: Authors' computation based on GDHS 2014.

Figure 6 presents the cumulative distribution curves for women born in the different decades. The curves for the 1960-1969 and 1970-1970 decades intersect suggesting that it is difficult to state there was a decline in the incidence of child marriage among women born in those decades. However the cumulative distribution functions for the decades 1960-1969 and 1990-1999 do not intersect any other curves. This suggests that there has been a decline in the incidence of child marriage since the 1960s compared to other decades and the rates of child marriage among girls of different age groups is lower in the 1990s compared to the other decades.

Figure 6: Cumulative distribution of age at first marriage by decade of birth

Source: Authors' computation based on GDHS 2014.

CONCLUSION

The focus of this paper was to identify patterns of and trends in child marriage in Ghana. Using the GDHS estimates of incidence of child marriage, the paper found that in 2014 about one out of every five women aged between 18 and 49 years in Ghana was married as a child. This outcome is consistent with studies by UNICEF and other researchers on the incidence of child marriage in sub-Saharan Africa. A trend analysis of child marriage indicates that the practice has been declining since the 1960s. However, child marriage is still prevalent in Ghana.

Just like many other countries, the practice of child marriage in Ghana was found to be common in certain geographical areas and also among some ethnic and religious groups. Child marriage is more likely to be practiced among rural communities than in urban communities. Apart from being more common in the Northern Region, Upper East Region and Upper West Region, the practice of child marriage was found out to be quite common among the Fulani, Mole-Dagbani and Gurma ethnic groups and relatively less common among the Ewe in Ghana. Moreover, the practice is also more common among Traditionalists and Muslims compared to Christians in Ghana.

It was found out that anywhere the practice is common, the girls marry at a very early age compared to where it is relatively less common. The paper therefore concludes that a girl who is either a Traditionalist, Muslim or practices a religion other than Christianity or lives in a rural community or in the Northern Region, Upper East Region or Upper West Region of Ghana is at a higher risk of being married off at a very tender age compared to other girls.

This paper's focus was not to identify specific reasons accounting for the patterns and trends it identified. We posit however that modernisation and increasing number of girls who are in school and spending longer time in school could be possibe reasons why the practice is gradually becoming less common. It therefore suggests that the ongoing efforts of campaigns against child marriage by the Government and its development partners should be intensified in the areas where it is found to be higher and also among the groups with higher rates of incidence. Since the practice of child marriage is not concentrated in particular locations or among specific groups this suggests that the design of interventions to reduce the incidence of child marriage should be tailored to the different contexts in which it is found.

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