Impact of Christianity on Customary Marriage among the Akans in Ghana: A Study at Yeji in the Brong Ahafo Region, Ghana

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ABSTRACT
Changing trend in marriages can be found in almost every society in the world. This has prompted various studies to this effect. The study elaborates on the impact of Christianity on customary marriage among the residents of Yeji in the Brong-Ahafo region of Ghana. Data was collected using well-structured self-administered questionnaires to 103 respondents, thus married couples and also an interview was conducted on five clergies, one queen mother, one chief and twenty family heads. This brought the total number of respondents to 130, with most of them being female. The study revealed that as a consequence of Christianity and formal education, parents no longer played an active role in the selection of marital spouses for their children. In addition, men now preferred career women to housewives. It is also interesting to note that the wedding ring has been adapted into customary marriage practices but the Bible however remained peripheral to customary marriage proceedings. As a consequence of formal education, late marriages have become the order of the day. To a greater extent, infant betrothal marital practices have gradually been phased out of Ghanaian society. Worth of emphasis is the little attention that modern day marriages give to the extended family. Lastly, as a result of formal education and the emergence of Christianity, couples no longer screened for infectious diseases before marriage. As a consequence, the researchers recommend that the extended family should as a matter of urgency be re-introduced and serve as a vital player in modern day marriages. Also, the researchers highlighted the need for would-be marital partners to screen for contagious diseases and infections such as HIV/AIDS before entering into marriage.

1.0 INTRODUCTION
Elbridge (2002:15) defines marriage as “an exclusive and intimate union of a man and a woman that is established when they make a covenant to leave their parents and form a new family unit. The definition of marriage varies according to different cultures, but it's usually an institution in which interpersonal relationships, usually intimate and sexual, are acknowledged. Such a union is often formalized via a wedding ceremony (Havil, et al, 2011). In terms of legal recognition, most sovereign states and other jurisdictions limit marriage to two persons of opposite sex or gender in the gender binary, and some of these allow polygamous marriage. Marriage is considered as a basic institution in every human society. People marry for different reasons but most people marry because they want a lasting, intimate relationship that is legally binding. It is recognized as a social institution, not only for establishing and maintaining the family, but also for creating and sustaining the ties of kinship. Without the institution of marriage there would be no family, nuclear or extended and therefore no kinship ties. In Genesis 2: 18 of the Bible, it is written" And the Lord God said: it is not good for a man to be alone. Let us make him a helper like unto himself" (Good News Bible, 2005).
In Ghana, marriages differ among societies. Despite the differences, drinks and cash are widely used. Although cash is involved in the northern part of Ghana, drinks and cola are also used (Wreh and Kofitse, 2012). Initially women had some particular roles they played in marriage, such as bathing their children, doing house chores and cooking for the family (Dzobo, 1975). Men also played their roles, they provided basic needs for the family, but now it’s vice versa, men can take women’s roles likewise women. One characteristic of traditional marriage is that it allows polygamy thus it allows the
man to marry more than one woman (ibid). However, Christians who complete a religious marriage usually abide by the biblical principle of "one man one wife". Usually violent behaviour, immorality, witchcraft, incurable or contagious diseases, and insanity in a family are not approved. The traditional rites or marriage ceremony, as practiced by the woman's ethnic group, are performed by the man's head of family, by the father or uncle or any member of the family who is recognized by the community as honourable. Today, there has been a greater change in traditional marriage in both advanced and developing countries to the extent that, men are even marrying men. This study seeks to examine the extent to which Christianity or formal education has impacted on traditional marriage.

1.1 Statement of the Problem
Historically, traditional marriages are the oldest form of marriage known to Ghanaians. In Ghana today, they are still the most common and surpass Christian/ordinance and Islamic marriages in number. Again, the evidence is that, Christian/ordinance marriages are almost always preceded by a traditional marriage referred to as the "engagement", but in essence it's a traditional marriage. Nowadays, most of the customs connected with traditional marriages are disappearing. Christianity, Islam, and other religions have influenced the marriage ceremony. For instance, most parents no longer wait for the husband to provide a trunk full of the wife’s clothing before they allow her to join her husband. Also in the Northern and upper regions where more than one cow is demanded, the number has now reduced to enable young men to marry. The marital roles of men and women has also changed, men used to provide basic needs for the family, while women took care of house chores, bath their children and cooked for the family. But now men can take the roles of women and vice versa. This study is centred on whether Christianity or formal education is the major cause of changes in traditional marriage. It also seeks to find out why traditional marriage serves as a prelude to or intertwined with, or overshadowed by some other new forms of marriage.

1.2 Objectives of the study
Specifically, this study sought to:
1. Identify the changes in marriage caused by formal education and Christianity
2. Explore the extent to which Christianity has impacted traditional marriage

1.4 Research Questions
i. Are changes in marriages caused by formal education and Christianity?
ii. To what extent has Christianity impacted on traditional marriage?

METHODOLOGY
This study explores the overall impact of formal education on customary marriage. It therefore sampled opinions from especially the custodians of our land. For this reason, the unit of analysis of the study were Queen mothers, Chiefs, Clergies, Traditional heads and Married couples. Using the social survey design, the researcher conducted the study in a natural environment with the use of questionnaire and interviews. Descriptive analysis and interpretation of the information collected were employed alongside the use of quantitative approach to the study.

First, a cluster sampling technique was used for the first stage of sampling of this research, considering the heterogeneous nature of the population of the study area. This technique was used in order to obtain adequate representation of the various homogenous subsets within the various units of analysis. Based on this, purposive, snowball and stratified random sampling technique were employed to select the number of married couples needed. The snowballing method helped to locate exactly where to find the married couples and family heads without going through the whole town in search of them. In total, a sample size of 103 was used for the study. This has been presented in the table below.

Table 3.1: Breakdown of Sample Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Units of Analysis</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Sample Technique</th>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
<th>Sources of Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Queen mothers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Purposive</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>First hand</td>
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Data Collection

According to Bryman and Bell (2007) data collection, whether primary or secondary, may be achieved in a number of ways. It can include a precise instrument, such as a self-completion questionnaire or a structured interview schedule, or participant observation whereby the researcher pays attention to and observes others (Bryman and Bell, 2007). There are several data generation and collection methods. Some of them are mail (post or electronic), telephone and face-to-face interview. Of all these methods, face-to-face interview is perhaps the most common method especially for gathering survey data on more sensitive topics. However, it is also most expensive and time consuming, although face-to-face interaction does minimize misinterpretation and encourages high response rates and this can be used to obtain a lot of information. Besides, the household questionnaire is rather complicated. Given it to respondents to answer on their own can bring about low response rate and also wrong judgments. Comparing the pros and cons of all the methods, it was realized that interviewer-administered (face-to-face interview) was the best for this study and thus used for gathering data on both the households and the institutions. Face-to-face interview was best because of the advantages it has over mail questionnaire as a result of low literacy rate of respondents. Even in situation where literacy rate is assumed to be high the postal system is not effective and people have low interest in using the post office unlike the UK and the U.S.A for example where the postal system is vibrant. Interviews also eliminate the potential difficulties that respondents may come across if they were to respond to the questionnaire on their own.

Primary data was gathered through self-administered interviews. The researchers trained field assistants to collect the data randomly from the identified samples. A combination of closed-and open-ended questions will be used to collect primary data from decision-makers who have good knowledge about marriage ceremonies and its practice in Christianity. In addition, it further helps to clarify those issues where the researcher had little or no information or understanding about the issues under consideration.

2.1 What is Marriage?

Elbridge (2002:15) defines marriage as “an exclusive and intimate union of a man and a woman that is established when they make a covenant to leave their parents and form a new family unit. It is a pure and holy union that is similar to the eternal union of Jesus Christ and His church. Ferraro (2004: 194) says that it is an establishment of a legitimate relationship between men and women is marriage. He tends to assume that all marriages are heterosexual.

Christensen (1985:66) claims to correctly define marriage as a religious wedding service that recognizes God’s lifelong commitment. It is not a mere contract or bargain that has certain contingencies and escape clauses. The two participants in marriage pledge themselves for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health. It frankly recognizes in advance the possibilities of economic difficulties, illness, sterility, and other dangers and pitfalls (Christensen, 1985:66).

2.2 Customary Marriages

The definition of a customary marriage is one that is "negotiated, celebrated or concluded according to any of the systems of indigenous African customary law ". This does not include marriages concluded in accordance with Christian, Hindu, Muslim or other religious rites (westerncape.gov.za, 2012). The word “customary” is part of ordinary linguistic usage. According to Yuhe (1998), its general meaning connotes something that is old system, archaic or naïve (ibid). Customary marriage is
practiced by people in much of Africa and in such places as Hong Kong, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands as well as among the Goajiro Indians in north-eastern Colombia and north-western Venezuela, to mention a few (ibid). In Ghana the most common form of marriage is what is called customary marriage. This involves payment of a bride-price by the bridegroom’s family to the bride’s family (cultrad.blogspot, 2010). Gthinji (2008) viewpoint about customary marriage is a marriage between a man and woman which is the most acceptable form of marriage in the society.

2.3 Change and Marriage
Change has a qualitative reference and it refers to a difference in the character of whatever that one has decided to be the subject of change” (Barnie, 2012). Change is something that presses us out of our comfort zone (scribd.com, 2012). Customary marriage process has undergone many changes for better or worst (Mayglothling, 2012). Long established thoughts and practices in marriage institutions are being challenged by political, philosophical and religious views. The ease of travel, information sharing and options available to 'would-be' partners adds up to the controversy and change in marriage. Such controversies include issues relating to the suitability of partners of different denominations, faiths, tribes or races, the acceptable number and minimum age of wives, the rights of partners, especially wives, and wider family obligations and same sex-marriages (Rabbinical Council of America, 2004).

2.4 Marriage in Ghana
According to Wreh and Kofitse, (2012) marriage in Ghana is a religious ceremony and a civic registration ceremony commonly known as a wedding. In Ghana, marriage is constructed according to the custom of ethnic group of which the couple live. Amoo (1994) in another breadth explain Ghanaian marriage as usually a group affair which involves not only the immediate relatives of the couple but more distant kin folks. Members of each family are screened for incurable or contagious diseases, criminal backgrounds, violent behaviour, respectfulness, employment status or standard of living, and religious background (Amoo, 1994).

However, conversions from one religion to another are preferable prior to marriage (ibid). Dzobo (1975) synonymously espouses that marriage is one of the supreme aims of life in the traditional Akan society and as a union between man and woman to perpetuate the lineage through procreation. Salm et al., (1996) in a different context states that unlike marriage in many other parts of the world, marriage in Ghana in seen as a requisite stage in life, rather than an option, and remains the most important social institution. Children are signs of status and wealth (ibid).

2.5 Marriage among the Akans
Marriage among the Akans is a contract between two groups, the woman’s and the man’s clan, and for the security of both parties, it is surrounded by definite customs and laws. But marriage delivers one of its members to be the others for the purpose of the propagation of the group (Amoo, 1946). Among the Akans, drinks and cash are widely used. Although cash is involved in the northern part of Ghana, drinks and cola are also used. One characteristic of customary marriage is that it allows polygamy thus it allows the man to marry more than one woman (Wreh and Kofitse, 2012). However Rasing (2010) articulates that Christians who complete a religious marriage usually abide by the biblical principle of “one man one wife”. In a different realm Amoo, (1946) expounds that, Akan marriage does not result from love, its entire foundation lying in the desire for children, every child has a place in the “abusua” (Clan) even though it may be born out of wedlock, i.e. without the transference of aseda”. It is cared for and legal rights of inheritance. The unmarried mother loses social status but not the child (Amoo, 1946).

Effects of Christianity on Customary Marriage
When Christianity was brought to Africa, it was well received by many ethnic groups. This was due, surely, to the rich cultural soil it found there. But when it comes to marriage, African culture and
Christianity clashed almost at the outset (Wanjohi, 1999). One of the differences in these teachings is that in a traditional wedding ceremony the couple is counseled separately, the girl for a long time, usually 2-4 weeks and the man usually about one evening. In a Christian wedding, the couples are then counselled together, according to Rasing (2010).

Dating and courtship are growing in popularity. At an appropriate point in courtship, the couple inform the parents of their intentions. After interaction between their parents and after the parents satisfy themselves that it is a good match, the families go ahead with the formal ceremony commonly known in various Ghanaian languages as knocking on the door, the marriage door. The boy’s parents consider such factors as the personality of the girl; her reputation and that of her family; hereditary disease that may run in the family; and in the case of Jehovah’s Witnesses, her spirituality. If satisfied, the parents formally approach the girl’s parent and make the marriage proposal. This background investigation usually by the parents has reduced and ignored in some parts of Africa due to the influence of formal education and Christianity (customary-marriage-in-Asante-land, 2012).

Rasing (2010) again adds that, female initiation rites and marriage ceremonies in town have been adapted to urban areas and to a more modern way of life. This means that certain aspects are left out. These are in particular those aspects that taught a young woman about equality about husband and wife, and how to negotiate, avoid quarrels and solve problems in such a way that both the husband and she would be happy with solutions and decisions the couple would make. Of course, this gender equality has been disrupted and altered due to Christianity. They emphasized the role of the man as head of the household, thereby lowering the position of women, for instance as housewives, whose tasks was to stay at home, do household chores, and look after children. This division housewife and mother versus breadwinner and head of the household, implies a hierarchy. If a mother is not educated formally and stays home to do house chores and take care of children, she is not respected by her husband and her husband’s friends as compared to how it used to be in our villages and traditional settings.

3.1 Changes in Marriages Are Caused By Christianity
This section of data analysis sought the views of married couple (90), the Chief of the community, some Clergies (5), traditional heads (20) and the Queen Mother on whether changes in marriages are caused by Christianity.

![Graph showing the percentages of agreement and strong agreement.]

Source: Field Data, 2013.
The pie chart above illustrates respondents’ views on whether more credence is given to the Bible in modern marriages. From the chart above, 59.22% of total valid responses agreed and were of the view that more credence is given to the Bible in modern marriages. A further 40.78% of respondents strongly agreed to the assertion that more credence is given to the Bible in modern marriages. In effect, respondents hold the view that due to the introduction of formal education as well as Christianity, there has been a paradigm shift from the customary way of marriage. Most people try to go according to the bible in order to put their marriage in the right place, which shows that more credence is now given to the Bible in our modern marriages. Interviews conducted indicate that the community chief and queen mother believed that more credence is given to the bible in modern marriages. This to them could lead to thechieftaincy institution being undermined.

3.2 The Extent to Which Christianity Has Impacted On Traditional Marriage
In this section, the researcher sought to elicit information from respondents on the extent to which Christianity has impacted on traditional marriages in the modern era.

4.1 Christianity Has Impacted On Traditional Marriage
The study revealed that generally women who are above their husbands in education or finance do not give them due respect. According to 84.46% of respondents, formal education has therefore elevated the social status and role of women. This comes with the added consequence of women not according their husbands due respect in their marital union. The study also revealed that the pursuit of educational laurels in the modern era, greatly explains the upsurge in late marriages in the modern day. This sentiment was also echoed by the Queen mother of Yeji who attributed late marriages by young ladies of her community to the pursuit of formal education.

In addition, most respondents were of the view that couples generally experience role conflict in being students and staying married concurrently. Hence, to a very large extent, the advent of Christianity and institution of formal education in Ghanaian society has impacted on the traditional marriage institution. This study rather painted a mixed picture on the current state of infant betrothal marriages in Ghanaian society. Responses gathered indicate that to a greater extent, betrothal marriages still exist in Ghanaian society, with minimal percentage of respondents holding the view that such form of marriage no longer exists in Yeji, and for that matter in Ghanaian society.

As a consequence of the advent of Christianity and formal education in Ghanaian society, couples now assist each other in performing roles and responsibilities. Formal education has equipped both men and women with vital knowledge and skills to be able to handle family responsibilities together. The study discovered that the family, in the modern era no longer screen for incurable diseases such as epilepsy, HIV/AIDS before one of their members enter into marriage. This view was held by 92.24% of total respondents sourced for the purpose of this study.

4.2 Traditional Marriage Elements That Have Experienced Changes
The study revealed that modern marriages are expensive as compared to the traditional form of marriage. In addition, interviews conducted with the chief and Queen mother of Yeji revealed that traditional marriages represented the most cost effective form of marriage, considering their simplicity and absence of modern forms of marital rituals and practices. It therefore comes as no surprise that polygamous marriages are on the decline in Ghanaian society. The findings confirm Nukunya (1992) assertion that the three forms of polygamous marriages have declined in Ghana. All respondents too were of the view that traditional marriages had taken a facelift with the introduction of wedding rings to the marital ceremony. The Bible was however not introduced in traditional marriages in the traditional era.

4.3 Modern Forms of Marriage Has Impacted On Customary Marriages.
The study brings to the fore the significant ways in which modern forms of marriage have impacted on customary marriages. In the modern era, information that would help strengthen the marital union of couples is now readily available to them. This goes in line with Raising (2010) assertion that, usually a
couple who wants to get married see a priest or leader of the church, who then takes them through 'counselling' (teachings on marriage). Sometimes an experienced married couples or Christian may be consulted for preparation and training. Respondents too generally agreed that divorce rates had reduced in Yeji society due to the Bible’s position on divorce as well as the cumbersome processes involved in seeking divorce.

The study also revealed that the extended family is given little attention in modern marriages. This view was echoed by members of the clergy, the Chief and Queen mother of the community, who were all interviewed as part of this study. The findings of this study therefore confirm Raising (2010) assertion that due to formal education most people have waned away from the extended family.

4.4 Conclusion
The impact of Christianity on customary marriages among the Akans in Ghana is a dynamic and interesting subject because it is intertwined with the human being in his everyday interaction with his or her environment, education, socialization, and religion, societal and family organizational structures. Different authors have given their different findings from researches and different views on the said topic. This study has been interesting, demanding, enlightening and revealing as well. Marriage, whether in its traditional or modern form remains a vital aspect to the survival of every society. It is the institution that is directly responsible for the perpetuation of society. This study put marriage on the spotlight. Indeed, the institution of marriage has undergone several changes with the onset of formal education and Christianity in Ghanaian society. It is now infused with modern Christian practices. Education too plays a major role in tuning the mind-set of a people in the choice of marital partners and has successfully delayed the period of marriage for young adults. Hence, to a greater extent, formal education and Christianity have impacted significantly on customary marriage practices among the Akans of Ghana, per the findings of this study.

4.5 Recommendations
Based on findings on the field, the researcher made the following recommendations;
First of all, due to the high expectation for children right after marriage, couples who are unable to meet this societal expectation often experienced increased frustration and ridicule from members of society. Hence, the researcher recommended that the clergy should counsel married couples and the entire communal members on the processes involved in conception and child birth. The high value placed on children in Yeji should therefore be defused. In addition, the fact that parents do not screen for incurable diseases before their children get married may serve as fertile grounds for the spread of contagious disease. The researcher recommends that as a matter of urgency, the Chief and/or Queen mother of the community in collaboration with family heads of would-be partners should ensure that they are screened for diseases.
Furthermore, the little attention that is given to the extended family, in modern society may serve as a recipe for the collapse of the much favoured nuclear family. Hence, family heads should ensure that the extended family, which could serve as an agent of social control should be made a pivotal part of modern marriages.
In a nutshell, measures should be put in place to reduce the rising costs of modern forms of marriages. The Chief of the community should ensure that mechanisms such as cost sharing between the spouses, and fund raising should be adopted as well to help couples cope with the financial drain that accompanies modern marriages.
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