Stepmothers' Violence against Stepdaughters in Ashanti Region of Ghana: A Hindrance to Gender Equality

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ABSTRACT: *It is a known fact that gender inequality occur, more often than not, as men take offensive taste as they take certain pleasure in discriminating against women in enhancing their (men's) self-respect, as the men end up discriminating against womanhood and subjecting women into a lesser liberty. However, women also contribute to gender inequality as they take offensive taste. This paper looks at how stepmothers perpetrate violence against their stepdaughters in Ghana and how such act contribute to gender inequality. The study was a longitudinal study which took place between 2005 and 2016. Stepdaughters were selected from four schools conveniently and observed for at most a three-year period. The findings were that the most frequent physical violence meted out to stepdaughters includes waking them up early from the bed, denying them of food, slapping, shaking, pushing and pulling, punching, choking, canning, scratching, pulling hair, hitting with an object, and, threatening. Also,* stepmothers in the study area do not have mothering love for other people's daughters but subject stepdaughters to psychologically, emotionally and physically oppression. *The stepdaughters academic performances became affected thereby leading to majority of them dropped out of school. The study concluded that* stepmothers in the study area take offensive taste by subjecting their stepdaughters to hardship and end up *discriminate against womanhood and subject women to a lesser liberty thereby widen gender inequality.*

KEY WORKS: gender inequality, violence, stepmothers, stepdaughters, academic performance

INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to discuss how women contribute to the widening of gender inequality as they (women) subject their stepdaughters to various kinds of humiliations in the everyday lives. The non-biological daughter has been seen to go through a lot of gender violence in the hands of their stepmothers in Ghana. The discussion is also geared toward the effects of these brutalities on the lives of the stepdaughters. The paper also aimed at finding out the link between the oppressions of these children and the widening of the gap of gender inequality in Ghana.

The concept of equality is reviewed from egalitarians point of view. The understanding is that some social structures such as Ghanaian cultural element that establishes women superiority over

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men and children in the area of house management and the girl-child training gives women power over their girl children. If mothers attitude towards their daughters are hostile, it may harm them by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. Generally, stepchildren receive bitter treatment from their step parents. According to Kyei, (2010) the stepchild, especially, the daughter, receives various forms of abuses which include sexual harassment, forced labour, child trafficking and among others. Also, according to UNICEF, (1997) one third of children in Africa are engaged in some forms of economic activities, most commonly in family enterprises. Studies have shown that sexual harassment such as rape, defilement and incest are more pronounced in Ghana (Ganu,and Boateng, 2013). Freud has been quoted to have said that the root of adult personality lies in the first five years of her life (Kyei, 2010). Kyei, (2010) explained that the effects of the early experiences of a child are difficult to reverse and that adult functioning has been largely determined in the first few years of existence. This statement is in support of an assertion that irrespective of a child's background, the behaviour of the child's parents (step-parents) determines whether each stages of her life has a positive or negative impact on her interpersonal relationships in future (Lighten, 1998). Thus, if a girl child had had a bitter experience (during her childhood), its devastated effect is not only on her life but also on the family, community, society and the country as a whole. Hence, the widening of gender inequality. The age group this paper looks at is between the ages of ten and nineteen. The term stepdaughter is used to mean Maid-Servants and all girls who stays with other women rather than her biological daughter.

Stepdaughter is in focus because the girl-child has been the major topic for discussion in gender discourse in the 21st century and, as we are sure, the girl-child would continuously dominate in gender discourse in the next generation due to their vulnerability in the society. The girl-child experiences the most severe forms of violence in homes than the boys. And, it is well noted that girls were been recruited from Ghana to elsewhere as "slave wives" and allocated to soldiers in peace keeping (Thompson, 1999:80). It will interest you to note that all these forms of brutality brutalism have received no attention and that there is less information on it. Specifically, the study would be able to fill a valuable niche that exist in gender inequality which comes as a result of the stepmothers' cruelness often meted out to the stepdaughter. It is quite interesting to note that many studies on female gender brutalities are limited to male violence against women. Studies on how women perpetrate crime against women are not well documented in the literature. The main question that needs answer is that *as elite and market women in Ghana are calling for affirmative action laws to be enacted by the parliament of Ghana such that women emancipation can be realised and the same women are the perpetrators of cruelness against their stepdaughters, how could their wish for women emancipation be realised* as they themselves are widening equality of access to equal advantage?

It is against this background that this paper looks at the various forms of humiliations stepdaughters receive from their stepmothers and how such behaviours affects the widening of gender inequality gaps. The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To ascertain various forms of oppressions/violence meted out to stepdaughters by the stepmothers in the study area
2. To ascertain how such oppression affects the stepdaughter's education
3. To establish how the behaviour of stepmothers contribute to gender inequalities

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is an aspect of gender and social conflict. It is based on the theory that there exist social structural stratification such that there are those occupying the bottom rungs of society and those in above. There is a strong interface between the *bottom occupants'* distress and the oppression of the "*above occupants*". The study mirrors on (a) how oppression is used as a tool to create social stratification between the oppressed and the oppressor (b) how oppression is viewed as a powerful tool to explain the worldview and philosophy of gender inequality. Using the oppression as a microscopic lens, one can study and understand inequality in a social phenomenon such as gender. Thus, the framework gives better understanding in how women create gender inequality to their own disadvantage. This is to say, women use oppression which they meted out to young girls to widen an already existing gender inequality. Thus, the study associated itself with Galtung (1969) idea of *structural violence theory* which operates on the basic understanding that some social structures and institutions may harm people by *preventing* them from meeting their basic needs. Galtung (1969) gave examples of social structures that can be institutionalized to harm people to include adult, (adultism) aged, (ageism), class (classism), elite (elitism), ethnic (ethnocentrism), and race (racism).

Gilligan, (1997) defines structural violence as "the increased rates of death and disability suffered by those who occupy the bottom rungs of society, as contrasted with the relatively lower death rates experienced by those who are above them". Gilligan (1997) description suggested that those at the bottom of the societal status experience "*excess deaths*" due to other peoples' actions or inactions that push the bottom occupants into such states as stress, shame, discrimination, and unfair accusation or denigration. As a microscope, the oppression lens is used to look into how far violence travels beyond physical, psychological and emotional to suppress stepdaughters to widen gender inequality in the society.

Violence

It is important to define violence in order to ascertain its scope. WHO (1996) defines violence as follows:

> *The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal -development or deprivation.*

WHO (1996) proposed three broad categories of violence according to characteristics of those committing the violent act. These were *self-directed violence* – when one harms his or herself; *interpersonal violence* - violence inflicted by another individual or by a small group of individuals; and *collective violence* - violence inflicted by larger groups such as states or organized political groups. Interpersonal violence is divided into two subcategories: first, family and intimate partner violence – that is, violence largely between family members and intimate partners. Second, community violence – violence between individuals who are unrelated, and who may or may not know each other (WHO, 1996). child abuse, (Step daughter abuse) as defined by WHO (1999:15), is "physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power."

According to cusack (1999) the meaning of violence is not limited to physical oppression, but also it goes beyond psychological tremor. She argued that violence takes many forms and it varies from culture to culture. Kyei, (2009) listed various forms of violence often meted out to girls as follows:

(a)   Physical violence, which includes inflicting pain or causing harm by using cane, belt, rope, hand, knife etc.
(b)   Psychological violence, which includes humiliations like insults, objectification, etc.
(c)   Sexual violence, (Incest) which includes rape, defilement and sexual harassment.
(d)   Socio-Economic violence, which includes denial of food and shelter, education; and forces the child to work hard throughout the day; and child trafficking

Research has shown that while perpetrators and victims of violent, especially, domestic violence can be of either male or female gender, the majority of cases have a male perpetrator and a female victim (Casey et al 2012 cited in Mantey, 2019). Mantey, (2019) in her work stated that it has been estimated that 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical or sexual intimate partner violence at some point in their lives. More often than not parents use punishment to correct wrong doings. Punishment to correct wrong doing is not meant to destroy or damage the images and physical stature of a person. Thus, some violent perpetrators such as '*elite modern women*' and male perpetrators do the act and justify it. One social worker has been quoted to have said "children can be beaten by anybody in society …. There is nothing wrong with spending, caning, and banging their heads together when they misbehave; a child is your property to correct in any way that you wants" (CUSACK: 1999:18)**.** This assertion clearly shows that the said social worker does not respect human dignity and would not hesitate to oppress stepchildren hostilely. The assertion that perpetrators may not have intended their acts to be violent as asserted by Iadicola and Shupe (1998) suggest that male commits no crime because there is always justification that male do so to enforcing a natural rule that allow men to direct the activities of their wives and children.

According to Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service reports cited by Adjay and Agbemafle (2016), Ghanaians do experience various forms of violence. Among the list in the various DOVVSU's reports between 211 and 2016 (not in any order) as cited by Adey and Agbemafie (2016) were physical assault, sexual harassment and assault, murder inflicted by intimate partners, child marriage, female genital mutilation, widowhood rite cruelness, defilement, childhood betrothals, and trokosi. A critical look at said reports suggests that most of the violence against women were perpetuated, in most cases, by men. Going through the literature, there are only few instances where violence against women perpetrators are traced to women. Kyei (2017) in his study reported that there are insufficient accounts on women violence against men and children neither because men and children are not assaulted by women nor women are peace lovely people but it is due to the fact that their victims do not want to report their ordeal due to cultural elements that paint women to be harmless and peace loving people which put women under the protection of societal court of justice.

The Concept of Equality

When inequality gaps that exist between man and woman are bridged, there will be gender equality. According to Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) gender equality is achieved through gender neutrality or androgyny and it requires the differences between men and women to be recognized and women to be treated the *same* as men. This definition suggests that there should not be a society that attributes certain roles to women or to men, both women and men should have neutral roles – men can perform any kind of role and women also do the same. It also implies that the fundamental difference between men and women must be taken into consideration to achieve gender equality. This assertion is fundamentally wrong since society does comprise different parts and each part plays different role for the perfection of that society. Also, another difficulty I have with this definition is that one can be socially *constructed androgynous* but the differences in natural characteristic properties between women and men still create inequality among them.

To be able to ascertain gender inequality and the principle upon which gender equality is to be granted, it is important to understand the problem of gender inequality. The problem to explain under gender inequality *is why men consistently do better than women in all spheres of life*. Conflict theorists believe that those who perform vital social role (in this case, men) are not necessarily the best and brightest, but the societal construct has given them the opportunities and the stages to pursue and fully develop their aspirations. The traditionalists argued that women lack good qualities that put men on the top. The feminists on the other hand counter that women lack bad qualities that let the men take the top (Huber, 2008; Jackson, 1998; Smith, 1997). The implication of these two statements is that the weak aspects of women form the wicked aspect of men. It is argued that men have advantages over women because they are stronger and do not bear children, have greater desire to dominate, and are more prone to violence whilst women are emotional and morally sensitive and these mark the difference that create inequalities among the women and men (Jackson, 1998).

Equality can be looked from different angles. Numerical equality can only be justifiable under the condition that persons are only equal in the relevant respects so that the *relevant proportions* are equal (Hinsch, 2003; Sen, 1980; Nagel, 1979). The critics of numerical equality believe that numerical equality rests its shoulders on the principles of *proportional equality*. This principle states that, a form of treatment or distribution to others is *proportional* or relatively equal when it treats all relevant persons in relation to their due. It can be established from this principle that similar strength due for similar reward and similar weaknesses attract similar reduction in reward. .In order to apply structural violence theory in the analysis of women violence against women, inequality is looked at from the egalitarians perspective. Egalitarians believe that people ought to be treated equally because they hold the view that all people possess fundamental worth and dignity. However, utilitarian group of people are also found in the society and their action must also be considered.

What specifically should an egalitarian wish to equalize? Thus, engaging question turns to be, as Sen, (1980) put it, "equality of what?" According to Farrelly (2004) apart from Rawls' social goods, the main candidates for equalisation are welfare, resources, access to advantage (opportunity for welfare), and capability. It stands therefore to reason that any measure that intends to bridge the gender inequality gap must be based on, as a principle, the purposes and qualities of equalities.

Welfare equality

Welfare egalitarians hold the view that it is desirable that the amount of human good (well-being, welfare or utility) gained by a person over the course of the person's life should be the same (Arneson, 2013). In other words, the well-being of a person should be judged entirely by the satisfactions of the person's preferences (Sen, 1980).

In support of their views, those who do not agree with welfare egalitarianism such as Dworkin, (1981a, and 1981b) and Rawls (1971) often hold on to their wide held views that it is plausible to cater for welfare deficits due to dubious preferences. Cohen (1989) called these criticisms as *offensive taste* and *expensive taste* criticisms. On *offensive taste*, Rawls (1971) assertion suggested that if women take a certain pleasure in discriminating against one another, or subjecting others to a lesser liberty as a means of enhancing their (women's) self-respect, then the satisfaction of these desires must be weighed in all related deliberations according to the intensity of these acts. Callinicos (2004) was with the view that Rawls assertion is very important and relevant because there should be difference in weight as far as the one's preference for torturing someone for satisfaction and homeless' person preference for satisfaction. If not, there is something profoundly wrong with a conception of justice that treats the two, in principle, as the same worthy of satisfaction. Thus, it can be concluded that all preferences cannot be equal in value so satisfying some of the preferences will be costly than satisfying others. This was the exact position of Dworkin (1981a:228) in responding to the second criticism. "Equality of welfare seems to recommend that those with champagne tastes, who need more income simply to achieve the same

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level of welfare as those with less expensive tastes, should have more income on that account". The question that came into the mind of Callinicos (2004) in support of Dworkin's observation was "*what of those who deliberately cultivate expensive tastes*?" With this question, Calllinicos was with the view that, unlike satisfying those people who have remained content with more modest tastes, if it is unreasonable to satisfy those who cultivate the habit of expensive taste, then we need to select a different *focal variable to equalize* hence, supporting the rejection of *welfare equality*. Callinicos (2004) again raised a third objection which to him, arises as one starts the process of forming one's preferences. He agreed with Sen (1992) that preferences are often adapted to suit circumstances therefore, it may be particularly dangerous in situations of acute inequality and poverty to go by the preferences of the *worse off* if they (the worse off) have given up hope of any improvement in their conditions. This is what Sen (1992:55) stated "*thoroughly deprived person, leading a very reduced life, might not appear too badly off in terms of the mental metric of desire and its fulfilment, if the hardship is accepted with non-grumbling resignation*".

It is well noted here that there are a lot of factors that come into play to determine one's preference. As all the authors cited and quoted above assertions are suggesting, these factors include the circumstances one finds oneself, whether one will have champagne or beer taste can be as a result of the environmental factors such as weather and climate, genetic, sex role, how the person was brought up; socio-cultural factors such as norms, economic powers and many more. Hence, I agree with these authors that there is the need to look for other variables of equality.

Equality of Resources.

To avoid the problem of dubious preference satisfaction as raised by Dworkin (1981a and 1981b) and Rawls (1971), they proposed *equality of resources*. This concept of resource equality, according to Gosepath (2011) holds individuals responsible for their decisions and actions. On the responsibility of individual, Dworkin (1981b), argued that *equality of resources* produces a certain view of the distinction between a person and his circumstances in terms of physical and mental powers, as well as assigning tastes and ambitions to 'his person'. He then argued, that a person can be held responsible for her tastes and ambitions, but not for her physical and mental powers as he related a person's tastes and ambitions to what he termed 'option luck' and that of his physical and mental powers to 'brute luck'. Cohen, (1989:931) opined that the prime objective of fundamental egalitarian is to extinguish the influence of brute luck on distribution. Dworkin (1981b) explained the 'option luck' to mean a deliberate and calculated gambles turn out', and 'brute luck', to mean a matter of how risks fall out that are not in that sense deliberate gambles. Hence, a victim of brute luck cannot be held responsible. Thus, the distribution of natural talent and one's natural state of being – born poor, male, female, rich, white, black, among others, are relevant examples of brute luck which in effect, account for great deal of equality of resources. As Callinicos (2004:37) puts it, "*One of Rawls's most important contributions to egalitarian thought has been to argue that the distributions of natural talents among individuals represents, in effect, another case of brute luck, from which those advantaged are only entitled to benefit if allowing them to do so will improve the condition of the worst off*".

Callinicos' assertion must be read together with feelings of egalitarian as he felt, and that of utilitarian who are also present in every society. To the utilitarian, what is at stake is the maximum benefit to be derived from any decision. Hence, if the 'brute luck' falls on them, then the inequality gap could be widened. From Cohen's (2000) book entitled, *"if you're an Egalitarian, How Come you're so Rich*?" an egalitarian does not keep the rich talent to himself to be better off but, a utilitarian does.

Equality of Access to Advantage

We could pick from the idea of *equality of resources* that individuals are responsible for their preferences as long as those preferences are identified with these individuals. This is what Roemer (1998) objected to, that it is wrong to hold people accountable for their choices, even if those preferences follow from preferences which were in part or entirely formed under influences beyond their control. This is because situations force people to take preferences and adjust to what they falsely deem to be necessity. But, as Callinicos (2004) puts it, the society does no one favour by accepting the consequences that follow from these '*force preferences'*. Sen (1980) suggested that two individuals for reasons outside their control may still benefit differently from the same share of resources. Therefore, both Rawls's *difference principle* and Dworkin's *equality of resources* cannot take care of the 'utility disadvantage' that results from the same share of resource to the extent that it would be absurd to hold the *worse off* responsible (Callinicos, 2004:38). These cases, according to Sen (1980) indicate that the conversion of goods to capabilities varies substantially from person to person.

According to Callinicos (2004) Sen's illustration – '*person A as a cripple gets half the utility that the pleasure-wizard B does from a given level of income*' shows that all needs are not equal and that to give Mr. A the same income as given Mr. B is not fair. It is against all these backgrounds that Cohen (1989) proposed *equality of access to advantage.* In his proposal, he summarized the idea of equality of welfare and that of resources and try to iron out the gap he identified. He wrote:

> *For Dworkin it is not choice but preference which excuses what would otherwise be an unjustly unequal distribution. He proposes compensation for power deficiencies, but not for expensive tastes, whereas I believe that we should compensate for disadvantage beyond a person's control, as such, and that we should not, accordingly, draw a line between unfortunate resource endowment and unfortunate utility functions. A person with **wantonly** expensive tastes has no claim on us, but neither does a person whose powers are feeble because he has recklessly failed to develop them. There is no moral difference, from an egalitarian point of view, between a person who irresponsibly acquires (or blamelessly chooses to develop) an expensive taste and a person who irresponsibly loses (or blamelessly chooses to consume) a valuable resource. The right cut is between responsibility and bad luck, not between preferences and resources (p. 922).*

I agree with Cohen on the ground that both the careless '*talent developer*' and careless '*taste developer*' are all guilty in the creation of inequality in the society. It will be difficult for one to

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deny the fact that '*we should compensate for disadvantage beyond a person's control'.* One important question is, what parameter, or a bench mark should we set to accept what is beyond one's control if we do believe that the '*poor talent developer'* needs to be held responsible? I take note from this assertion and with the view that the *environment* – one's culture, educational background, intelligence level, parental 'advantage and disadvantage', socialization processes as well as biological differences and sex roles must be considered in the creation of bench mark to measure disadvantage beyond one's control. Hence, stepdaughters cannot be held responsible for the situation they find themselves in the gender inequality web but, whoever pushes them into their situation has contributed to these girls' predicaments.

Equality of Opportunity

According to Roemer and Trannoy (2013) once one begins to assign a value to the parameter I ascribed to above, then one has a particular theory of equality of opportunity, because one then knows for what to hold persons responsible. Since each society has a concept of what its citizens should be held responsible for, equality of opportunity is political (Roemer and Trannoy, 2013). Generally, the background assumption, according to Arneson (2010) is that equality of opportunity opposes to *caste hierarchy* (not hierarchy itself) society where there is a hierarchy of more and less desirable, superior and inferior positions or, there may be several such hierarchies and, the assignment of individuals to places in the social hierarchy is fixed by birth. Arneson noted however that where there is *equality of opportunity,* "the assignment of individuals to places in the social hierarchy is determined by some form of competitive process, and all members of society are eligible to compete on equal terms" (p.1). There are Different conceptions of equality of opportunity that construe this idea of competing on equal terms. For the purposes of this study, I will limit the discussion to *level play field (LPF).*

Roemer (1995 and 1998) sees the idea of equality of opportunity to mean that society should put things in place to help achieve what he termed as "*level playing field".* Explaining the level playing field, some of the authors noted that the central point of it answers the main question of distributive justice. It has been noted that equality of distribution is *just* only if it satisfies the norm of *equality of opportunity*. This central norm of equality of opportunity demands that *unchosen inequalities* (inequality that occurs out of no one's fault) should be eliminated but, the inequalities that arise from the choices of individuals who have been given '*equal initial conditions and fair frameworks for interactions'*, should not be eliminated or reduced. This conception of equal opportunity (central norm of equality) which has also been proposed as the central element of distributive justice is what is termed as *level playing field* ideal – LPF (Arneson, 2010; Roemer 1995 and 1998). To these LPF equality of opportunity theorists, unchosen circumstances are matters imposed on individuals such that these persons will not have any control or influence; 'these matters are just given'(Arneson, 2010). Anerson (2010) suggested the following:

> *Fair conditions for interaction may be taken to be an environment in which individuals are free to make deals on mutually agreeable terms and contracts are enforced, individuals are prohibited from deliberately harming each other by physical assault, extortion,*

coercion, fraud, theft of property and the like. Also, individuals are either prevented from imposing the costs of their activities on others who do not consent to be so involved or they are required to pay appropriate compensation for harm done that is tortious in this way. Fair conditions of interaction also include an initial equality of circumstances (p.16).

Reomer and Trannoy (2013) wrote: "if a person who grows up poor develops a 'taste' against education, induced by the difficulty of succeeding in school due to lack of adequate resources – a taste with which he even comes to 'identify' – then Cohen would not hold him responsible for the low income due to his consequently low wage, while Dworkin presumably would hold him responsible" (p.14).

Violence Against women and Gender Inequality Nexus

Good education has positive relationship with gender equality. Therefore, any attempt by any form of violence to hinder the progress of girls education must been treat as an attempt to widening gender inequality. It must however be noted that there is Ghanaian cultural elements that protect women against public ridicule on their domestic violence against themselves. Thus, attention are always on the men's violence against women leaving the very canker that thwart the progress of achieving gender equality untouched. According to Huberty (n.d), as people become victims of social injustice, they struggle to get a good education, the right job opportunities, and access to resources that can lift them out of poverty.

UNICEF (2019) had it that any form of child abuse cuts children off from schooling and health care, restricting their fundamental rights and threatening their futures. Therefore, as women hide behind cultural goodwill they enjoy on the face of violence and perpetuate many forms of violence against stepdaughters, these mothers use oppression to create social stratification between the oppressed and the oppressor. Hence, what Galtung (1969) actually opined in *structural violence theory* reflect women who perpetuate violence against fellow women are creating social structures and preventing women from meeting their basic needs thereby widening gender inequality. Thus, the idea that the oppressor being the men and the oppressed being the women is not always the truth.

From the equality of welfare argument, the well-being of a person should be judged entirely by the satisfactions of the person's preferences (Sen, 1980). Hence, the entire lives of stepdaughters, whether or not they would be able to develop their natural talent depends on what influences their preferences. However, equality of *access to advantage* summarised its argument that some situations such as maltreatment and various forms of violence force people to take preferences and adjust to what they falsely deem to be necessity. Every individual who lack fair condition for interaction at her early stage in life is likely to adjust herself to '*evil necessities'* since physical assault, extortion, and coercion deny people level play field and have capability to create so many forms of inequality.

The literature read has established men's *offensive taste*, as Rawls (1971) stated, lead to discriminating against women or subjecting women to a lesser liberty as a means of enhancing their (men's) self-gender inequality. What is not known is the consequences – with regards to gender inequality, of women who take a certain pleasure in discriminating against one another, or subjecting other women to a lesser liberty as a means of enhancing their (women's) self-respect. This is what this paper seek to address.

DATA COLLECTING METHODOLOGY

The study is a longitudinal study that started from 2005 till 2016. It studied the behavours of the stepdaughters towards their education in the selected junior high schools through observations and interactions. The data for this paper was collected from primary source. I started collecting the data as far back as 2004. A purposive sampling was used as the school selected were the schools I have ever taught as a teacher and head teacher between the year 2004 and 2016, a period of over ten academic years. The students were selected conveniently. Students who were selected from those schools I taught were those who were staying with their stepmothers during the time of selection. The schools involved were Kofiase Methodist Junior High School in Ashanti Manpong District – 2004 and 2005 academic year; Manso Nkwanta Methodist Junior High School in Manso Nkwanta District – 2005 to 2008 academic years; Yaa Achiaa Girls Junior High School – Kumasi Metropolis – 2008 to 2015 and Amankwatia Junior High School – Kumasi Metropolis – 2015 to 2016. All these schools are in Ashanti region of Ghana. As a teacher, I was able to identify those students who fell onto the hands of stepmothers. In all, a total of 103 students were talked to and observed between the year 2004 and 2016.

Some of these mothers were visited for direct interactions. They were interviewed on students' behaviour and academic performance. I used what I termed '*Teacher-Parent Participatory Appraisal'* (TPPA). In this approach, teachers visit parents at homes and incorporate the knowledge and opinions of the parents in managing the academic performance of the students. As teacher probe students' behaviour at home, the teacher also share with the parents the students' attitudes and academic performance. Through this opportunity, the real relation between the parents and their daughters were established. In all, 65 parents were able to reach out to during the period of the study. These stepmothers include, teachers, head teachers, peasant farmers, market women, politicians, and house wives. The educational background of the parent respondents showed that 36 (55%) of them were holding certificate between first degree and master's degree. Out of this number of elite stepmothers, only 8 of them were found in Manso Nkwanta and Kofiase – rural communities. The other 29 stepmothers did not have formal education and all were found in the rural communities selected. See appendix A for the table showing students' respondents

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The discussion highlights various violence that stepdaughters went through. Observations, facts finding and inferences were made to establish the relationships between the treatments these girls

went through and their academic performance. Stepmothers' behaviours were juxtaposed the principles of equality to assess how their behaviour contribute to gender inequalities.

Stepmothers Violence against Stepdaughters

This section deals with the women violence against their stepdaughters in Ashanti Region of Ghana. It is a sociocultural descriptive study of women behaviours towards their non-biological daughters. It considers the physical, psychological and economic violence stepdaughters as children experience in their homes. How such experiences affect the academic performances of these students are also traced. Some of these women who were involved in perpetrating physical, psychological and economic violence against these school girls were both elite and illiterate. The elite women include female teachers who do teach moral standards in subjects like social studies and religious and moral education in junior high schools.

Forms of Stepmothers Violence against Stepdaughter in the Study Area

The student-respondents were interviewed on the various forms of bitter experiences they had ever had. Almost all the 103 students talked to over the years, did report on physical, social, psychological and economic violence they have ever suffered from.

Physical and Social Violence:

Physical violence against children do happen in our society every day. Both educated elite women and illiterate women do punish children they live with severely. These punishment ranges from severe beating, inserting pepper and ginger into their genitals, locking them up, force them to work throughout the day and wake them up early in the morning and so on. Sometimes some of these children are forced to steal before they can eat (Cusack, 1999).

It is a known fact that children (girl) who are living with other parents, especially, the orphans, and the maidservant receive more punishment from their mothers and they are the most vulnerable group of children in relation to these and other abuses. Cusack (1999:20) points it out that girls whom I called, "alien daughters" are brutalized and denied of their wages as house help. The physical acts meted to these stepdaughters in the study area include wake them up early, denying of food, slapping, shaking, pushing and pulling, punching, choking, canning, scratching, pulling hair, hitting with an object, and, threatening. The most frequent physically assaulted act these girls experience is canning and pulling of hair. Stepmothers use their hands, objects and canes to beat their stepdaughters. Below are some of the *excerpts* of the accounts of the stepdaughters:

> *This woman won't tell you to stop whatever you are doing wrong. She will just hit you with whatever she is holding in her hand. I sometimes feel insecure in her hand as I do think that one day she can kill me (A 16-year old stepdaughter in Kofiase).*

> *I do not understand why my mother treats me differently from the rest of her biological daughters. I am the one who cook, wash, clean and do most of the house chores. However,*

any little provocative act results in beatings. She has canes which she uses on me. If I fall sick, she sometimes care for me. I know that she takes me to hospital for treatment because she always needs me to work for her. I have once attempted to poison her and her stubborn daughters who do not like me. What stopped me was the fact that my stepfather is a good man so I decided not to kill the daughters and his wife. After my JHS education, I will go back to North, my hometown (15 years old girl in Kumasi).

About 56% of the Girls who had experienced physical assault from their stepmothers did indicate that they had ever transferred their anger into the family, babies and children of these mothers. Below are two most outrageous ones I recorded during the period.

I believe that God will not forgive me for doing such a thing. But, I did it out of frustrations. Sir, could you believe that this woman asked me to eat row "Banku" continuously for one month simply because I could not cook rice to her desire. I also put faeces into the rice I used to cook for the family throughout the month. God forgive me (a JHS two stepdaughter's account, Kumasi, 2016).

As my stepmother maltreats me, I began to find favour in the eyes of my stepfather. As I speak, it has reach a point a go out with the father. He treats me nicely. Now I do decide what he should give to the wife, my stepmother, my rival. Sir do you believe that I am slave at home but a queen when I go out with my father? I have ever attempted to poison her, but I stopped because of my father.

It can be concluded from the above accounts that physical violence meted to these stepdaughters do bounce back to the culprit. This revelation support the assertion made by Galtung (1969) as reflects in *structural violence theory* that women who perpetuate violence against fellow women are creating social structures and preventing women from meeting their basic needs thereby widening gender inequality.

On the social violence, this study looked at how these girls' educational opportunities were sacrificed at the expense of their mothers' social status and comforts. It came to light that some appreciable number of the girls – 20 of them representing 22%, who received severe physical assaults have stepmothers whose educational qualifications ranges between first degree and Master's degree. These women (stepmothers with higher academic qualification) believe that there is prestige attached to hiring the services of a house help. It is believed that one attains higher social status if one has several house-maids and maid-servants whom could be used as one pleases. It appears all the elite stepmothers did have this notion. A case in point is what one stepmother who happens to be university graduate teacher teaching at a senior high school had to say in the year 2012 at Kumasi.

If you say you are a woman of substance and you and your children do all house chores without the help of a house girl, you belong to low class women. Today's women with higher social class status do have someone whose job is to take care of house chores and

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such person must be responsible for the up keeping of the house. You can't earn societal respect if you have no house help.

City women also have the same mind set as in the educated elite. However, the city stepmothers really do not suggest any fame from keeping stepdaughters but rather used them for economic gains. Below are two excerpts.

I don't think it is wise for anyone to have a girl of 15 years at home and cannot make very good use of her for monetary gains all in the name of school (a market woman at Kumasi)

As for me, I cannot allow that girl to stay in school after 2pm. She has to come to market to help. Her responsibilities are many (an angry woman from Kumasi who stormed the school compound somewhere in 2011 as the final years students were holding extra class lessons).

According to Burra (1995) every child's work is exploitative if it denies the child her right to education. Stepdaughters who found themselves in the rural schools like Manso Nkwanta and Kofiase Basic Schools parents hardly allow them to participate in extra classes organised by teachers, both after school and on Saturdays. These stepdaughters work in their parents' farms at the expense of their education. About 68% of the reasons why stepdaughters in Kofiase Methodist Junior High School absent themselves from school in the year 2005 was due to their mothers' interruptions. Similar checks in Manso Nkwanta Methodist Junior High schools between 2006 and 2007 revealed that almost all the students studied were truant and 81% of the reason why they did absent themselves from school was due to helping their parents either in farms or in activities relating to small scale mining. Below is one of women whom I spoke to when her stepdaughter academic performance was identified to be coming down and therefore needed *Teacher-Parent Participatory Appraisal'* (TPPA). Transcribing the woman's side of the story, I recorded her as follows:

Box 1

Teachers think that they love my children more than I do. Even my own biological children do work in the farm. Your work as a teacher is to teach in your school. Has it come to a point of sending school to girls' home? My friend, mind your business. You don't love her more than I do. Her academic performance is coming down because your teachers are lazy. Go and talk to your teachers to teach well.

Economic Violence

The study looked at the skills these stepdaughters could not attain during their three-year period due to fatigue and absenteeism that resulted from treatment from their stepmothers. Their Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) was used as a measure to determine their chances of gaining admission to Senior High. Also, their ability to read and write, ability to use mathematical tools to access everyday life were used to interpret the skills needed. The Basic Education

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Certificate Examination results from Manso Nkwanta Methodist JHS in 2006, and 2007 showed that all the candidates came from stepmothers' home failed with aggregate between 36 and 54 while the pass aggregate was 30. The results in Yaa Achiaa Girls JHS in 2010 and Amankwatia JHS in 2011 were also in the same situation. Students from stepmothers' home found it difficult to read and comprehend. Out of 103 students who were involved in the study, only 6 students were able to read and understand what they read at various classes they found themselves. About 83% (85 students) also lacked the skills of using basic mathematical tools to access everyday life such as using money for transaction with no difficulties, using measurement like volume and density in areas like cooking; having difficulty to tell time, among others.

 At Manso Nkwanta in 2006, all the two candidates whose background are from stepmother homes failed to gain admission into SHS. I was able to observe 52 out 103 students for three years in different schools (*see Table which indicates students studied - those marked with asterisk)*. These students' academic performances were monitored for three years. Almost all of them (49 out of 52) academic performances kept on reducing till they completed school. In the final BECE, 45 out 53 candidates from these home failed and could not gain admissions to SHS.

Psychological Violence

The study looked at forms of violence that affected these girl psychologically. Verbal insult, body language to look down upon them which necessitate the creation of inferiority complex were the major issues. Cusack, (1999) in her contribution, stated "violence against women and children" points it out that psychological violence is even more dangerous than the physical violence". Some psychological violence these daughters did go through includes insult such as "you call yourself a human being; you will never prosper; uncivilized nonentity, '*aboabi ba'* meaning, an offspring of animal etc." Some appreciable number of the girls (45 of them) did complain that they hardly receive a smile from their stepmothers.

It was revealed that about 69% of the stepmothers had ever accused their stepdaughters of been possessed by supernatural powers such as witchcraft. In 2008, three (3) of these students from different stepmothers' home in Yaa Achiaa Girls were asked to leave their homes because some 'modern' pastors had cited them as witches.

Box 2

My mother sent me to the church for the pastor to deliver me from my witchcraft. Even though I don't know what it take to be a witch. Eventually, I was pronounced a watch but the pastor said I have not availed myself for it to be uprooted. Thus, my mother said I should leave the house. I felt threatened and it came to my mind to commit suicide - A 17 – year old form three student, 2010.

We went to church and the pastor came to me and mentioned my name. He asked me to confirm if that was my name. I confirmed it. The pastor told the congregation that I was the one behind the predicaments of my father who has been taking care of me from infancy. When we returned

home, my stepmother forced my father to sack me from the house. Sir, this thing started when I was in JHS form one. As I speak, three years now, the fight is still on. I shall leave my father's house immediately after the BECE - A 15 – year old form three student, 2013.

Consultation of oracle has found its way into the Christianity in Ghana. Through the proliferations of churches in Ghana, many women consult oracles a lot. These stepdaughters and other vulnerable, are always the victims of such oracle consultations. The two accounts from the two stepdaughters above are few of many accounts received from these girls. They were blamed of being witches and are accused of any misfortunes that unfold in the house. Some of them were excessively beaten to tell the congregation what they don't know – which they (the so called pastors) called, the "truth". Meanwhile, these daughters who are ignorant about the alleged spiritual influences are soaked with what they termed "anointing oils "to say the truth".

The Impact of Violence against Stepdaughters on their Education and on Gender Inequality

The devastated effect of various forms of violence against the stepdaughter in general is not only on these children physical and emotional stress but also on their education and the gender inequality as well. From the discussion above, it was revealed that students who lived with their stepmothers do not perform well in their both internal and external examinations. Some of the reasons identified include the daughters' inability to have enough rest at home to revise their notes. Some of these individual were observed to be sleeping in class more often than not. I was able to observe 52 out 103 students for three years in different schools (*see Table which indicates students studied - those marked with asterisk*). These students' academic performances were monitored for three years. Almost all of them (49 out of 52) academic performances kept on reducing till they completed school. Some of the reasons identified also include mental traumas as a result of physical and psychological abuses which led to depression, fear, tension and distrust. These students were not able to afford balance breakfast and lunch leading to their inability to concentrate on their studies. They hardly returned to school with their homework correctly done. They were among the students who always came to school late and left for home immediately the closing bell went. In some instances, their parents pay for extra classes but they never get time to attend.

These girls are likely to fail to gain employment at the formal sectors. According to Huberty (n.d), as people become victims of social injustice, they struggle to get a good education, the right job opportunities, and access to resources that can lift them out of poverty. UNICEF (2019) had it that any form of child abuse cuts children off from schooling and health care, restricting their fundamental rights and threatening their futures. Therefore, as women hide behind cultural good will they enjoy on the face of violence and perpetuate many forms of violence against stepdaughters, these mothers use oppression to create social stratification between the oppressed and the oppressor. Hence, what Galtung (1969) actually opined in *structural violence theory* reflects what stepmother's in the study area actions. These women perpetuate violence against their fellow women to create social structures and preventing women from meeting their basic needs thereby widening gender inequality

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Stepmothers' violence against stepdaughters affects the wellbeing of the victim. As Sen, (1980) noted the entire lives of these stepdaughters would be affected as the physical and natural talents would be difficult to be developed. Thus, they would be lacking behind the equality of resources intellectual resources. They are likely to lack all forms of skills which they should have acquired through formal education. As the principle of equality of resources noted, the victims of the stepmothers' violence are likely to influence these girls' preferences in life throughout their life time. Women violence against fellow women also affects women access *to advantage.* Stepmothers through physical assault, extortion, and coercion deny stepdaughters level play field which, in total effect, widening the gender inequality.

CONCLUSION

This study looked at how women contribute to the widening of gender inequality. The plight of the stepdaughters in the study area is that they are been oppressed psychologically, emotionally, physically and economically. Women in the study area therefore do not have mothering love for other people's daughters. They cannot love children beyond their biological children. All forms of oppression meted out to these girls work together to thwart the efforts of girls to achieve their economic capabilities. It can therefore be concluded that stepmother's oppression is the form of structural violence in that step-motherhood is seen as a social structure that is characterised by normative act of harming non-biological daughters by preventing them from meeting their basic needs thus, has the tendency of widening socio-economic inequality. Specifically, equality of resource or wellbeing as well as equality of access to advantage are being widening by the women themselves. The study established that as women take *offensive taste* by *turning their step daughters into 'punching bags' they s*ubjects these poor girls to self-disrespect and inferiority complex. As Rawls (1971) stated, they end up discriminating against womanhood and subjecting women to a lesser liberty thereby widen gender inequality. It can be concluded that comparatively,

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