

LIVING AFAR FROM MARRIAGE: EXPERIENCES AMONG A SELECTED GHANAIAN FORMAL SECTOR COUPLES

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ABSTRACT

It is usually perceived that when couples marry, they live together to complement each other and keep each other's company. There have been changes in family behaviour at the global level. In both the Western world and Africa, mainly when people achieve material well-being, their family relationships become subsidiary to their needs and wants. This study examines married couples who live separately and the consequences of this arrangement on their social and economic lifestyles. It uses examples from formal sector workers, and largely based on a qualitative study conducted using virtual interviews. The study reveals that although the usual expectation is for married couples to live under the same roof, contemporary socio-economic conditions often prevent this. As a result, couples adapt as needed to maintain and sustain their marriages. The study adapts the Living Apart Together (LAT) concept to suit legally married couples who are separated based on economic activities. It concludes that LAT, as discussed in the literature, focuses on couples, usually unmarried, who decide to live apart because of reasons beyond their control.

Keywords: Living afar from marriage; formal sector workers; internal migration; Living apart together; Ghana

INTRODUCTION

Marriage and cohabitation thrive on sharing the same abode (Duncan et al., 2014). In addition to these two traditional social institutions of couples, a third has emerged with couples 'living apart together', LAT relationships (Levin, 2004). The three unions have an important impact on fertility, housing, and general well-being of couples (Wagner et al., 2019). However, research on African couples has concentrated on living apart across international borders such as couples in DR Congo, Ghana, and Senegal with their partners in Europe (Beauchemin, 2015). There is a pressing need for more research on these dynamics and their implications.

The pertinent question is whether two people can be considered a couple without sharing a common home? In recent times, the answer has become 'yes' and a new family form has appeared. To be a couple is no longer

dependent upon sharing a common household. It is no longer important for one to be married or to be living in the same household (Levin, 2004, 224).

The study looks at experiences of sampled Ghanaian public sector married couples who live separately from each other due to their jobs. Marriage is an intimate relationship between two individuals. It is usually perceived that when couples marry, they live together to complement each other. Family can be defined in various ways. Levin and Trost (1992) noted that traditional concepts of family and norms are increasingly challenged by diverse personal living arrangements. Changes have occurred in family behaviour at the global level, including in Africa. The Ghanaian culture still frowns on co-habitation, even though the practice is increasingly becoming common in the urban areas, most people prefer to marry at some point in their lives (Obeng-Hinne & Kpoor, 2021; Forkuor et al., 2015). In both the Western world and Africa, achieving material well-being often leads to prioritizing personal needs over family relationships. Such couple relationships are seen as weakly committed and transitory (Goldscheider, Bernhardt & Lappegård, 2015).

Common relationships include the Living Together Apart (LAT). LAT is a concept that describes long-term intimate relationships that do not include a shared home. It has an ontological status in Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands and Belgium. In Norway and Sweden, the expression 'sarbo or särbo', meaning 'to live apart' has been in common use for some time and describes long-term intimate relationships that do not include a shared home (Karlsson & Borell, 2002). LAT relationships, though started in Europe, have become an acceptable form of relationships in most developed countries (Romero, 2015; Strohm et al., 2009; Turcotte, 2013). It is, however, practiced in a limited form in Africa, where it is culturally not accepted but increasingly common among the youth in urban areas.

Legal marriages in Ghana include the traditional and Islamic/Mohammedan Ordinance (marriage in a court of law or in a registered religious building). While Customary Marriage and Mohammedan Marriage allow the man to marry more than one wife, Ordinance Marriage limits a man to one wife (Bond, 2008). In Ghana, it was normal in the past when polygamous marriages were common for the wives of a husband to live separately and visit their husband in turns. In those instances, the wives live in the same community or village/town (Caarls & Mazzucato, 2015a; Caarls & Mazzucato, 2016). This system still persists in the indigenous communities in most African countries. However, the advent of modernization and increasing ordinance marriage encouraged more married couples to live together in the same house. Nevertheless, more schooling is associated with changing economic activities, and many people migrate to other places within the country to work, especially those working in the formal sector. It is easier for the wife to follow the husband to where he works. This is usually the case because women mostly work in the informal sector (Ganu & Boateng, 2012; Adom, 2015). However, when the wife works in the formal sector like the husband, it becomes difficult to follow her husband. This situation has become common in Ghana, where many married couples live separately and visit each other over the weekends or bi-weekly or even only when one of the couples is on leave or vacation.

Traditional marriage arrangements were often characterized by situations where men and women specialized in different areas of household chores (Lappegård et al., 2014). However, such household division is changing with the changing living arrangements among married couples. The changing trends of couples living apart obviously bring new forms of challenges to the couple and also bring new meaning to marriage relationships and family behaviours. When children are involved, the children's upbringing becomes the sole responsibility of one of the couples. Such changes have made alternative forms of partnerships more acceptable in society, and couples who find themselves in relationships with partners who live elsewhere may not feel as great a social pressure as society demands to settle down together in a common residence (Reimondos et al., 2011).

In developed countries, there are several research work conducted on couples who are not married but are in sexual relationships and live apart (Stroh et al., 2009; Reimondos et al., 2011; Lappegård et al., 2014; Levin, 2004). Also, the extant literature looks at similar trends in economic migration in developing countries where spouses, especially wives, are left in the rural areas, and husbands move to cities to work and return home sometimes (Awumbila & Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2008; Jingzhong & Pan, 2011). In Ghana, studies have been conducted on Ghanaians living outside the country with their spouses in Ghana (Caarls & Mazzucato, 2015; Coe, 2011; Caarls et al., 2011). Given that many explanations for recent changes in family formation point to contextual factors, few such studies exist in Ghana (Boateng, 1996; Adai-Sundiata, 1996; Aboderin, 2003).

This study looks at internal migration and its structural effects on selected couples working in the formal sector in Ghana. Formal sector workers in this study are workers employed in the public or private sectors who have secured jobs, work under specific regulated conditions, and have regular wages. The article looks at married couples who live separately from each other for reasons beyond their immediate control, and its consequences on the couple's social and economic lifestyles. This study describes such an arrangement as 'living afar from marriage'. The study focuses on public sector workers because they have little control on their migration. The study adapts the Living Apart Together (LAT) concept to suit legally married couples who are separated based on job transfers and acquisition and the consequences thereof on family behaviour. Similar research has been conducted by Feldhaus and Schlegel (2015) in Germany and Herwitz (2018) in South Africa. While these research works are not solely restricted to married couples and those working in the formal sector, this study solely focused on married couples who involuntarily live separately because of formal jobs. LAT has been employed to study married couples who live across international borders in Ghana and Europe (Caarls & Mazzucato, 2015). This study, however, focuses on married couples who live apart due to internal migration.

For this study, a migrant moves from their home of origin to any place within Ghana's geographical boundaries in search of jobs, schooling or marriage. This movement can be rural-rural, rural-urban, urban-rural and urban-urban. There is dynamism in the patterns of internal migration from rural areas in Ghana. A household survey collected in 2013 and 2015 shows that many households have multiple migrants moving at different points in time and for various reasons (Eager, 2018).

In Ghana, like any other country, the formal sector economy has its own well-defined systems of employment with clear written rules of recruitment, agreement and job responsibilities, which are maintained through a formal contract (Adapted from Assan & Kharisma, 2019). Internal migration among formal sector workers in Ghana is widespread. This is because formal sector jobs are mostly concentrated in urban areas. Therefore, formal employment opportunities are limited in rural areas. Upon completing their formal education, many youths leave the rural areas for the urban centres in search of formal sector jobs. There are also instances where formal sector workers are transferred from one geographical location to another as it is a routine in their employment contracts. It is, therefore, not surprising that UNDP (2009) reported that most migration and sending remittances occur within national borders and not across international borders, as is believed. A study by Castaldo, Deshingkar and McKay (2012) indicates that over 35% of males and 11% of females in Ghana migrate within the country because of their jobs. The same research revealed that inter-regional movement is Ghana's most important type of migration, even more important than inter-district migration.

Reasons for migration from the census data in Ghana indicate gender differences in migration within the country. The information provided shows that women move for marriage more often than men, while men move for work reasons such as job transfer, business, or to seek employment (Assan & Kharisma, 2019). Where both couples are formal sector workers, and therefore, each couple is restricted in movement by the conditions of their work. In such instances, the couple live separately and visit each other in turns or by any agreement made by the couple. These are some of the reasons why living far from marriage seems to become an acceptable norm in Ghanaian society or a coping mechanism among married couples in Ghana.

LIVING APART TOGETHER CONCEPT AND LIVING AFAR FROM MARRIAGE

LAT is defined as a monogamous intimate partnership between unmarried individuals who live in separate homes but identify themselves as a committed couple (Benson and Coleman, 2016: 797). They define themselves as a couple and perceive that their close, personal network also does so. The term Living Apart Together (LAT) was first used in the Netherlands, where a Dutch journalist, Michel Berkiel, wrote an article in the *Haagse Post* in 1978 (Levin, 2004). In its original context, to be in a LAT relationship, each partner must have their own home, meaning they live apart in two separate residences (Levin, 2004). In this case, it could be within the same town. The success of LAT requires three conditions, according to Levin (2004): the couple has to agree that they are a couple; others have to see them as such; and they must live in separate homes (Levin 2004).

There are various forms of LAT studied in the Western world. Research showed that LAT is common among certain categories of people. Regnier-Loilier et al. (2009) indicate that LAT in France is usually determined by age and the presence or absence in the home of children born before the union. The system is common to young adults under 25 years old and those without children. This kind of relationship is also common in other countries, including Ghana. In the case of Ghana, it is usually, the period the couple court to learn more about themselves and also to introduce their relationships to their families. Regnier-Loilier et al. (2009) also identify a second group comprised of people between the ages of 25 and 54,

who are financially independent and do not have children. They also identify parents' families, mostly comprised of females aged 25–54, often divorced, with (small) children in the house, and not interested in entering any form of formal marital union.

LAT relationship is either voluntary or involuntary (Levin, 2004). Voluntary LAT partners make a deliberate choice to live apart. By contrast, involuntary LAT partners would like to live together but are prevented mainly due to practical obstacles. This study adapts the LAT concept to mean formally married couples who are separated to live in different residential accommodations in separate geographical areas involuntarily because of formal sector job engagements. It, therefore, agrees with Levin (2004) on the involuntary LAT partners who are prevented from living together, mainly by practical obstacles, and in this research as a result of jobs or for economic reasons but adapts Levin's assertion to focus on married couples. These studies distinguish between LAT relationships that exist because of economic constraints and those that exist because both partners choose this particular lifestyle (Levin 2004). Caarls and Mazzucato (2016) used the LAT concept to study migrant couples in Europe and Ghana. National surveys cannot address the LAT phenomenon in Ghana; therefore, this study makes a unique contribution to the literature in adapting the concept to study a segment of married couples living apart in Ghana. As stated earlier, although motivations for being in LAT relationships vary between countries and throughout a person's life, they tend to occur more frequently among young or the higher-educated people (Strohm et al., 2009). These features also characterized the study population.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative research, purposively targeting legally married participants in Ghana, but some information was also quantitatively analysed descriptively. The researcher mainly concentrated on formal sector workers on various social group platforms. The focus was on various WhatsApp groups known to the researcher of which most of the members are formal sector workers. These include professional groups such as Ghana Geographers Association, University Teachers Association of Ghana-UTAG (University of Education, Winneba branch) and other informal ones.

The researcher designed a semi-structured interview guide on Google, which allowed respondents to give reasons for their selected answers. The link was sent to over 600 people in different groups, purposively requesting that marital couples living separately from their spouses complete the form. One hundred and eighty-six people completed the semi-structured interview guides and returned them. The selection process means only formal sector workers living separately from their spouses were allowed to participate in the study. Those who completed the forms are largely classified as middle-class income groups with high educational levels.

RESULTS*Table 1: Details of Respondents*

Respondents Details	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	131	70.4
	Female	55	29.6
	Total	186	100
Level of Education	Bachelors Degree	69	37.1
	Masters Degree	44	23.6
	PHD	27	14.5
	Non-graduates	46	24.7
	Total	186	100
Age group	21-30	13	6.5
	31-40	77	41.9
	41+50	79	43.5
	50+	17	8.1
	Total	186	100
Number of years in marriage	0-5 Years	47	25.3
	6-10 years	51	27.4
	11-15 years	33	17.7
	16-20 years	28	15.1
	21+	27	14.5
	Total	186	100
Region of Residence	Ashanti	34	19.4
	Greater Accra	24	14.5
	Central	49	25.8
	Western	12	6.5
	Eastern	36	19.4
	Volta	8	3.2
	Upper East	6	3.2
	Upper West	5	1.6
	Bono	4	1.6
	Bono East	5	3.2
	Western North	3	1.6
	Total	186	100

Reasons Respondents Live Separately

Generally, in Africa, the perceived aim of every married couple is to live together so they can complement each other in their everyday endeavours. Among such benefits include: finances, accommodation, food and household entertainments expenses. Another important reason couples are perceived to live together is to support themselves emotionally and raise their children together. Despite these perceived benefits some couples are not able to live together largely because of their work and schooling. Table 1 shows that, out of the 186 persons who took part in the study, only 46 (24.7%) of them have levels of Education below first degree. Figure 1 shows a list of dominant professions of the respondents and their spouses. This section therefore assessed respondents’ reasons for living separately. The study also examines the number of years respondents have lived separately from each other after marriage. The results from Figure 2 shows that most of the respondents have separated from their spouses for up to five years and that as the number of years they live apart increases, the number of respondents who live apart reduces drastically as shown in Figure 2. Baizán et al (2014) and Coe (2014) discussed in the literature that married migrants would want to reunite with their families when they get to their preferred destinations as soon as possible. An excerpt from an interview is stated as such:

Due to where I work, I had to rent a place to live here in Kade so that I will be closer to my work and spend less on daily transportation cost. My wife was also living with me here before she was posted to Suhum. This year (2020), I am making every effort to get a transfer to where my family is, to minimize the risk and the cost of travel every weekend. It will also help us to manage the double expenditure (A husband respondent, Teacher).

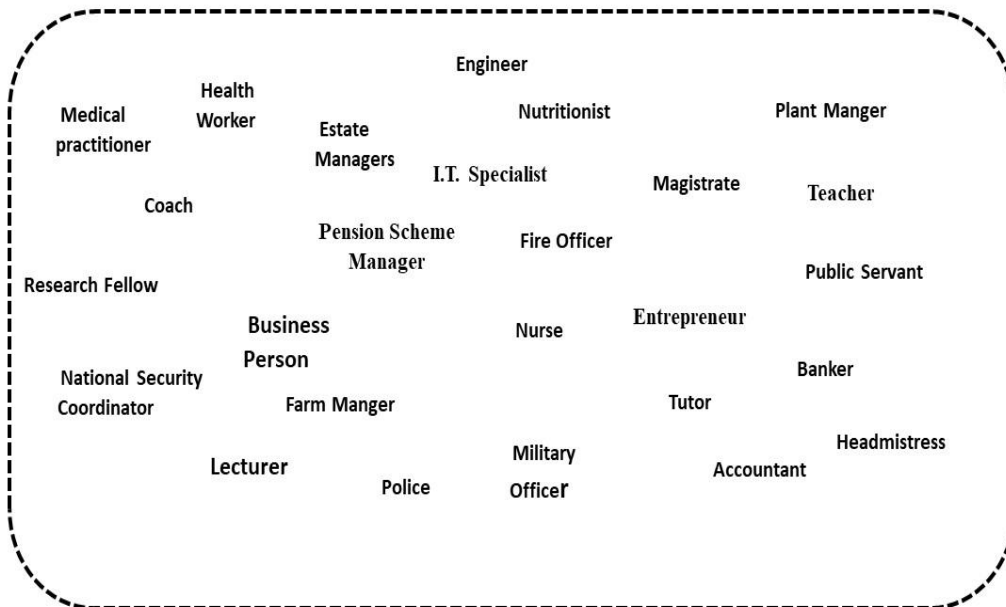


Figure 1: Different Professions of Respondents and their Spouses

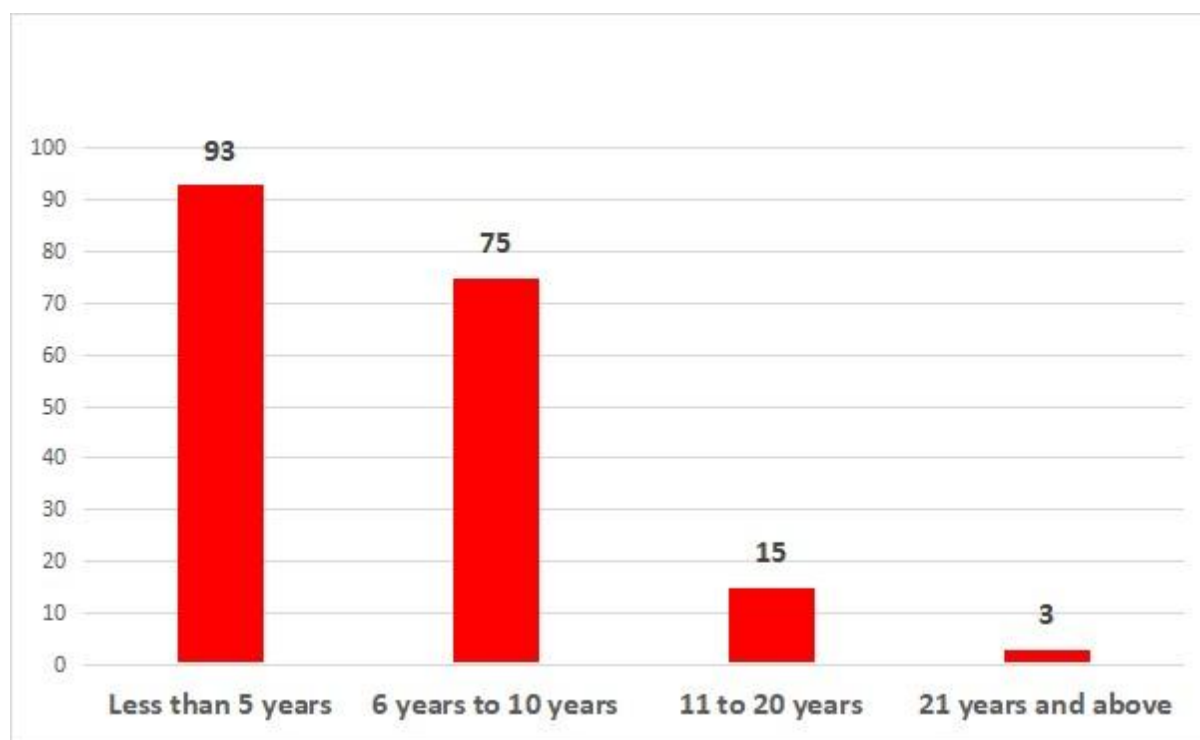


Figure 2: Number of Years Respondents have lived separately from their Spouses

The above response shows that some of the respondents are sometimes faced with constraints of making difficult choice to live separately from their family because of their jobs. This is confirmed in the literature by Hardill and Green (2003), Caarls and de Valk (2017) that migrant couples have to live separately from their spouses in their search for greener pastures.

The interviews results show that distances cover by the couples to visit each other differ. The examples shown on Table 2 indicate that a respondent who lives at *Bolgatanga* in the Epper East region of Ghana needs to cover over 665km for a one-way trip to visit the spouse at *Obo* in the Eastern region. Unfortunately, rail transportation is also not well developed in the country. It is therefore difficult for such a person to undertake regular travels given the fact that the commonest means of transport in Ghana is by road with a high rate of road accidents, as well as high traffic congestion in cities and towns. Some of the distances are extremely too long to warrant regular visits by the couples.

Accommodation and Double Expenses

The study sought to analyse respondent's experiences on accommodation cost. This is because tenants spend a lot of money on accommodation and even those in their own accommodation spend on maintenance and renovations of their houses. It was therefore necessary to the views of the respondents on double expenditure made by couples who live

separately. The research revealed from figure 3a that there are instances both couples rent accommodations in their respective areas and such respondents are stressed on the challenge this arrangement puts on their finances. Respondents were again asked of the means of payments of their rents and the responses from Figure 3b show that most couples pay their own rents for their respective accommodations. There are also situations where one or both couples do not pay for accommodation on commercial level. Such instances include the fact that 15 respondents said they live rent-free in their family compounds or live with friends. In this study, those who live in accommodation paid by their employers are also included in such categories because their houses are highly subsidized and therefore, such beneficiaries see themselves as also living rent-free. Some respondents' comments on their accommodation arrangements are shown below:

Table 2: Examples of Routine Distances Respondents Undertake to visit each other

From	To	Distance Covers
Sunyani	Accra	371km
Takoradi	Cape Coast	81.9km
Somanya	Ho	95.6km
Accra	Twifo Praso	216km
Suhum	Accra	66km
Juaboso	Kumasi	197km
Bogoso	Accra	300.9km
Kumasi	Akwatia	181.5km
Bolgatanga	Obo	665.1km
Tema	Winneba	92.1km
Takoradi	Oboasi	230.5km
Ho	Accra	159.0km
Tamale	Kumasi	392km
Jirapa	Asamankese	723.5km
Techiman	Atebubu	143.5km
Sandema	Accra	808.4km

Source: Distance Calculation base on Google Map of respondents' information

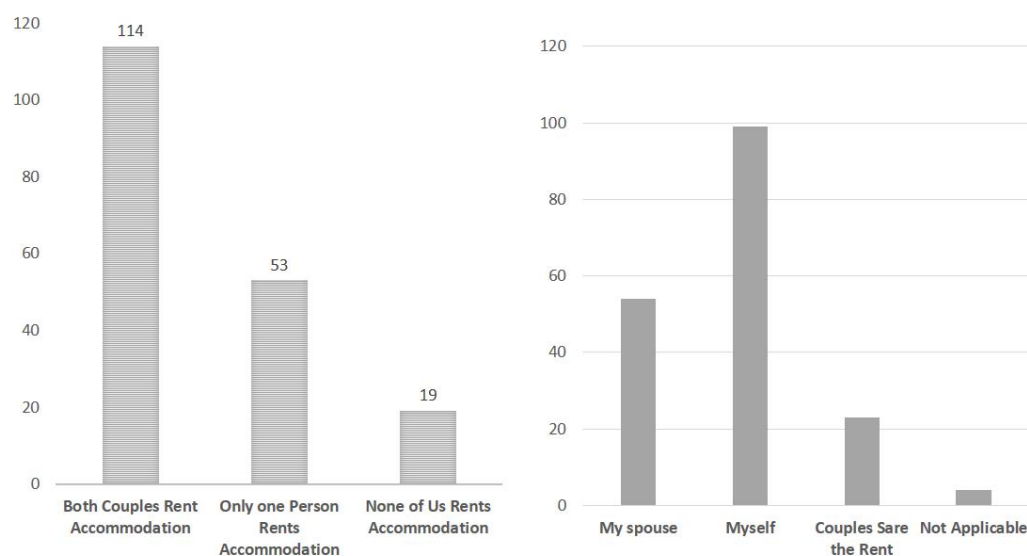


Figure 3: Respondents Means of Accommodation and rent payments

At the moment my wife stays in a state bungalow in Bogoso whilst I rent a place here in Takoradi. In effect, she pays just something small on rent, I rather pay the full cost on my rent and even, that it is not easy for me at all (A husband respondent, Doctor).

The excerpt from the interviews shown above indicates that double expenditure on accommodation is a challenge to the couples. The literature on migrations, especially across border migration (Wang et al., 2010; Tonah & Cudjoe, 2020; Arthur, 2016) discusses the burden of usually the emigrants to remit their left-behind families regularly to pay for their rents.

Visiting Arrangements

Married couples sometimes have other complimentary obligations apart from the sex. It is therefore important that such couples have regular physical contact as much as possible. The study therefore found out from respondents how often they meet their partners. The study revealed that nearly 55% of the respondents see their spouses every weekend or every other weekend. This notwithstanding the long distances some of them need to travel to see their spouses. The study however, shows that most of those who undertake the regular visit are those who don't travel too far to meet their spouses. And from Table 2 above, they are those who travel for usually not more than 160km (76.8% of respondents). For example, they are those who travel within the same region or across regions which are not far from each other like Eastern or Central Regions to Greater Accra Region. The study again inquired from the respondents, who usually commute and the results indicate that husbands usually commute, the main reason is that children are mostly with the wives, so it is easier, less expensive and less risky for the husbands to commute. However, of the 47 (25%) newly married couples (those married for not more than 5 years in this study), some

of whom are yet to have children, any of them commutes. Information of travel arrangements of the respondents are shown in Figure 4 and some of their comments on the details of their visits are also shown in Figure 4.

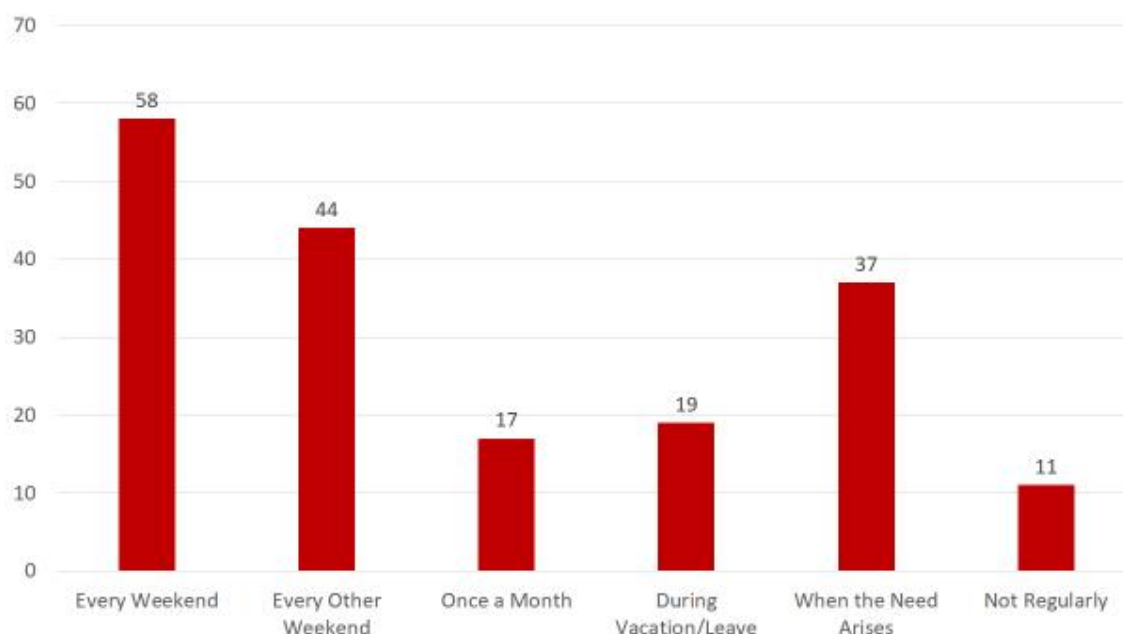


Figure 4: Visiting Arrangements by Respondents

Every three months, I am due for medical check-ups down south, so I take advantage to visit; we are all tight in our various workplaces, which is why she has to accept this arrangement, we all have fixed schedules, so fixed visiting arrangements is not possible, at times, I go to Accra and sometimes she comes here (A husband respondent, Accountant).

The results from the study revealed that respondents recognize the need for physical contact often, and therefore, they make an effort to meet. Coe (2011), for instance, discusses that married couples who live separately have to battle with the fact that distance may generate conflicts and suspicions that can destroy a marriage if both sides are not careful, and Adiku (2017) also alluded to the fact that geographical presence is necessary for and constituent of love relationships. These studies, therefore, suggest that regular visiting is one of the means to reduce such conflicts and enhance love in couples who live afar from marriage.

Managing Children in Living Afar from Marriage

Training and caring for children are necessary responsibilities in marriage, and usually, most couples would like to train their children together. Research has shown that children brought up by both parents are generally better off than those brought up by single parents (Booth et al., 2010; Sobolewski & Amato, 2007). Children born to married couples who live

separately live with one of the couples at some point in their lives. The study, therefore, inquired from respondents who have children about which of the couples live with their children. The results show that the wives mostly train the children. This is a routine in Ghana and most African countries because it is believed that one of the primary responsibilities of a wife in the gender division of labour in the house is caring for children. Hence, 'children are best kept with their mothers' is a regular saying in Ghana. Their responses on who trains the children are shown in Figure 5. The study further asked respondents if they were satisfied with the arrangement that their children are trained by one of the spouses. The responses are mixed, with 54% satisfied with their current arrangement. Some excerpts from the interviews are found below:

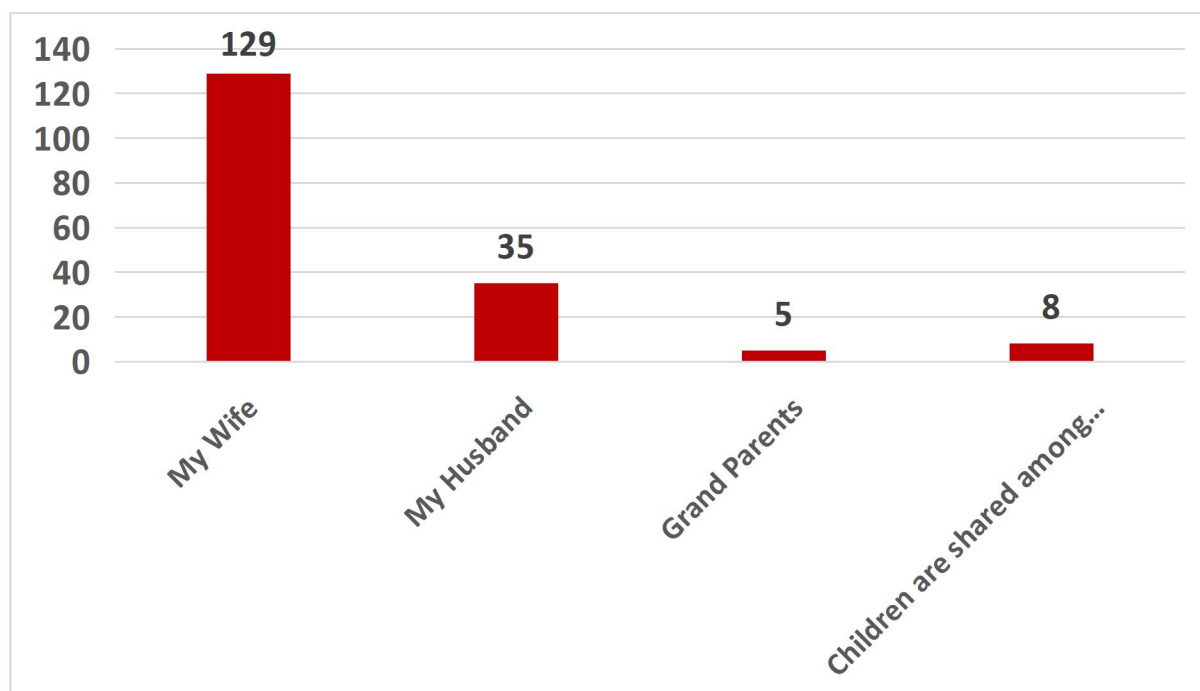


Figure 5: Children Training Arrangements

The children are with my wife and I have issues with that. I think parents training their children together bring out the best in the children. You know, two heads are better than one, and unity of command as well as communication is the best, they say. African child will naturally misbehave when the father is not around. For example, when I am around, I help them with their studies, they eat healthy and I am able to monitor what they watch on Television. Children brought up in our kind of arrangement can get used to their mother more and this can create some disaffection from a father who feels disliked. (A husband respondent, Plant manager).

The excerpts from the interviews and the findings from the study generally indicated that children are left in the hands on the wives. This is also confirmed in the literature by studies

conducted on who trains children born to parents where one of them lives outside the home. Cooke (2007), conducted similar research on Chinese husbands who had travelled to UK, and revealed that their children are left behind to be taken care by their wives. In Ghana, usually the care of children in a traditional community is born by every member of the community, so Coe (2011) research on transnational migration among Ghanaians and revealed that usually children are left in the care of their mothers and the extended families while the husbands travelled to seek for greener pastures.

Living Afar from Marriage and Divorce Rates in Ghana

In 2019, there was almost four thousand divorces formally recorded in Ghana, which means the divorce rate in Ghana is around 10% average, if not slightly more. That is obviously higher than the average rate in 1960 (6.2), and 2010 (3.4%) (Ghana News, 2019). This statement shows that there is an increase in divorce in Ghana in recent times. Research has shown that divorce is more common in the urban areas and among the elites' population, attributing the occurrence to several factors of which migration is keen (Caarls & Mazzucato, 2015; Oppong Asante et al., 2014; Takyi, 2001). The study therefore found out from the respondents whether this kind of marital arrangement is a contributing factor to the divorce rate in the country, and again their responses show mixed reactions as seen in Figure 6. There are varying reasons for the mixed responses given. Respondents who believe living afar from marriage can lead to divorce identified reasons such as high levels of infidelity and mistrust in such arrangement, and, such relationships are fluid in intimacies so any conflicts can trigger divorce. Respondents who think marrying from afar cannot be the cause of divorce also argued that if there is love, trust and mutual understanding, living separately does not matter, communication is not inhibited in such arrangements, thanks to technology, and so the couples can talk always and therefore, can sustain their marriages. There are also others who were undecided on the topic. Some excerpts from the comments on respondents' views are explained below:

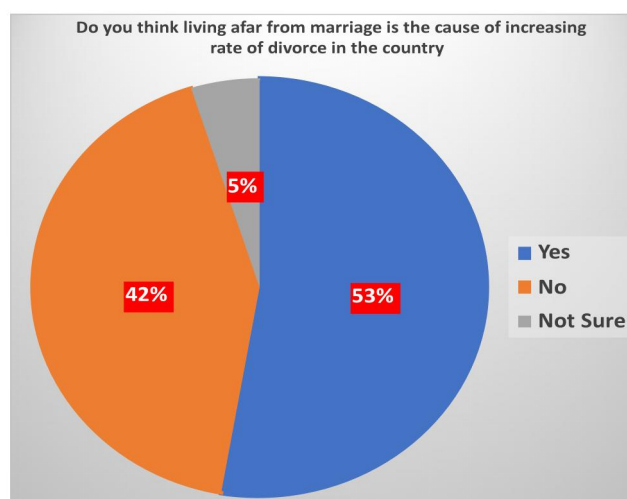


Figure 6: Marrying afar from marriage can lead to divorce in Ghana?

If yes, why?

This arrangement is a contributing factor to the increasing divorce rate in Ghana. When one spouse is uncomfortable with the arrangement, they may quit easily because some (especially the men) take advantage of the situation and enter into other relationships because you hardly get intimate in our kind of relationship. For instance, because of our current arrangement, my husband is constantly arguing with me and keeps saying that he wants a divorce. A very young family could have challenges with this arrangement and can easily divorce (A wife respondent, Magistrate).

If no, why?

No, no, no, no, there is no way living separately from your spouse can lead to divorce. This is because living separately increases the love for each other. For instance, lack of communication is usually the cause of many divorces, and distance is no barrier to communication in this information age. In my case, we see each other regularly for days and weeks in turns. It takes more deep-seated issues to cause divorce and not merely not living together in the same house. The primary reason for divorce is incompatibility, which has nothing to do with living arrangements (A husband respondent, Entrepreneur).

The study results show inconclusive linkage between divorce rate and living afar from marriage, and the content of the two interview excerpts runs through the comments made by respondents. Caarls and Mazzucato (2015) explained that there are other unobserved and unexplained reasons which can cause divorce in such marriages apart from distance. The respondents who gave the second excerpt mentioned technology as one factor which enhances communication and closeness in such relationship. His argument is supported in the literature by Adiku (2017) who also argues that the internet allows a constant flow of communication that can enhance intimacy among such couples.

The experiences discussed above reveals mixed feelings of people's behaviours on living afar from marriage. This section looks at the benefits and challenges of such marital arrangement to the couples. The quotations below show how respondents describe the benefits as well as the challenges associated with this kind of marital arrangements. The benefits derived according to the respondents are basically in the area of optimum privacy to undertake tasks, especially work-related ones, efficiency in the outcome of such tasks because of full concentration, a lot of time to ponder about other issues privately including their marriages and renewal of their sexual intimacies anytime they reunite with their spouses. Some of the challenges are expressed as loneliness, double expenditure on accommodation and utility bills, raising of children by one of the parents and mistrust which can lead to cheating and divorce. Though the comments are listed as they are, there are some gender connotations in some of them, popularly among them is the husbands stressing on their inability to cook and eat nutritious foods. This is because, cooking in most Ghanaian homes is the duty of the wife, hence, married men who live separately from their wives believe they have been denied of such opportunity to be cooked for and be served by their wives. The wives also stress on the issue of loneliness and the tendency for their

husbands to cheat on them. Some of the specific comments on the benefits and the challenges are summarized below:

The good thing about our arrangement is that I get the privacy, concentration, and independence to think about what I do. I tell you, it keeps our marriage refreshing, and, in my case, where my wife is the nagging type, there are fewer conflicts and a briefing space. More so, I have the latitude to concentrate on my publications and a quiet environment to focus on research work and other private discussions with my colleagues online. Actually, we don't get fed up with each other and always long for each other. She constantly updates me on new things she has seen, that element of quarrelling or in fighting is minimal, the re-union is always tight and the love is deepened when we meet (A husband respondent, Lecturer).

The literature discusses among other benefits to especially those left behind is regular remittances which reduces their financial burdens (Hugo, 2002; Dito et al., 2017; Coe, 2011). Respondents also acknowledged the fact that there are challenges associated with living afar from marriage among such challenges being suspicion and infidelity. These findings are also confirmed in the literature that trust reduces if there are reductions in physical contact, both couples become suspicious of each other (Adiko, 2017), which in the end leads some husbands and wives to engage in extra marital affairs (Caarls & Mazzucato, 2015).

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

The current career/job environment is such that couples would have to really talk it through before going into it, especially if the woman has to move out because of her career and leave the man with the children in another region/district. Personally, I do not support living separately as a family life advisor, but that is how the world is turning out to be. Financial security for the home is also essential and needs to be considered. Living together with insufficient income can be an issue in marriage, so couples must make choices and take responsibility for their choices (A husband respondent, public servant).

The above quote depicts the dilemma and the frustration of a husband who lives separately from a career wife. This scenario is echoed in most homes of career couples because of the quest for both couples to work. In recent times, because of the equity measures put in place to encourage more women to attain higher educational levels in Ghana, many couples work in the formal sector. This sometimes makes it difficult for couples to live together in the same place always. Unfortunately, the usual regular commuting which is available in most western countries is not possible in Ghana because of the poor transportation network. In most western countries, people commute daily covering several kilometers by train but this is not possible in Ghana. Also, unlike the

usual understanding of LAT in the literature where couples (usually not married) agree to live separately, sometimes even in the same town or community, this study looked at the LAT concept in a slightly different way, using a selected married couples in Ghana who are forced to live separately because they work in different geographical areas. This research also included those who are separated, usually on temporary basis because one of the spouses lives in a bigger town or city in order to get good education for the children as well as those pursuing further education.

The study revealed that the phenomenon of “distant marriage” as some respondents term it, is common among formal sector workers as more women aspire to explore their potentials and to have higher education. The question is, could this soon become the norm in the country? Absolute avoidance of such type of marriage seems impossible among working couples until the rail system is fully developed in the country to enhance daily commuting within the country with ease. What then are the issues discussed in this study? The study focused on internal migration as a result of job acquisition, transfers or educational attainments. The questions asked include: are we still a married couple when we live separately? Are there acceptable visiting arrangements among such couples? How are children in such marriages managed? Does this arrangement have an implication on divorce rates? And what are the social and economic challenges and benefits associated with such marital arrangement?

It was found that married couples who live afar from their marriages do not in any way doubt that they are still legally married couple. The study findings show that majority of those interviewed visit their spouses regularly. The study shows that, most respondents (more than 60%) visit their spouses every weekend or every other weekend. This arrangement is common among those who do not travel too far to see their spouses. And with improvement in ICT, it partly solves the couples’ problem of negotiating their intimacy. In their case, but, for reliable rail system, such couples could as well live together and commute to work on daily basis. The study shows that most respondents hope to reunite with their families within first five years of their separations, this usually happens when one of the spouses work out job transfers to work in the same place the spouse works. It is possible for transfers to take place on the basis of marriage within the formal sector in Ghana, it is however, based on availability of vacancies. The couple who does the visit depends on many factors but the study revealed that husbands commute frequently than wives especially, when the distance is far and there are children who live with the wives.

On the issue of the relationship between living afar from marriage and divorce, the study could not draw any conclusion on it since the views of the respondents were divided on it. The researcher can say that, it might be a contributing factor to many other factors of which a much deeper study needs to be conducted in future. The study findings revealed that the experiences with this marital arrangement come with it benefits as well as challenges involved. The benefits according to the respondents come in forms of privacy and work efficiency as well as rekindle of love and sexual activities whenever there is a re-union. The challenges however, come in forms of double expenses on accommodations, training of children by usually one of the parents, infidelity, perceived linkage with divorce and lack of trust. From the results of the study, the challenges are

more pronounced and emotionally expressed by the respondents. This is because, the everyday understanding of marriage is the perception that the couple live together and therefore, any adjustment to this perceived norm is difficult to embrace. Those who are not in support of such arrangement, argue that marriage is not about privacy, everything has to be in the open to encourage marriage couples to know themselves better. Such respondents therefore, express their frustration that living afar from marriage among Ghanaian married couples is not the best and is very disturbing, but since they do not have options, they can only adjust. The issues discussed are summarized in Figure 7.

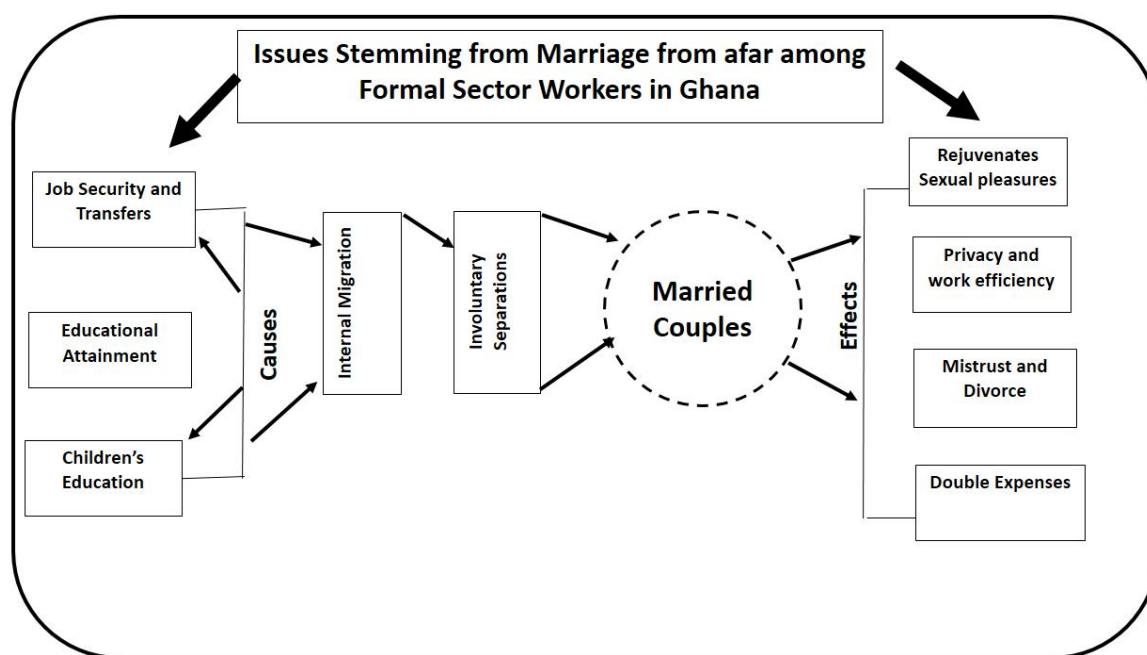


Figure 7: Running Issues in Marrying from Afar in Ghana

CONCLUSION

The literature shows that since the 1970s, various dimensions of family behavior, household structure, and composition have changed globally, and these changes have persisted to date. The changes have led to a significant increase in divorces, individuals marrying at increasingly later ages, with couples having fewer children and children outside marriage. These changes, which originated in developed countries, have not directly translated to Ghana. But there are obviously changes in family structure such as women marrying late and having fewer children as well as a reduction in polygamous marriages (Levin et al., 1999; Oliver, 1999; Fenske, 2015). People's perception on marriage has not changed much compared to what prevails in the western countries. It is perceived that every Ghanaian youth believes he or she will marry at some point in their lives. So, in the midst of increasing rate of co-habitation in the urban areas, is also a strong perception, especially among the women that, they will marry in future.

This study aimed to investigate the experiences of selected Ghanaian couples working in the formal sector and living separately due to their jobs. The study revealed that respondents are faced with constraints to live together because of their jobs. Although the usual expectation is for married couples to live under the same roof, contemporary socio-

economic conditions often prevent this. As a result, couples adapt as needed to maintain and sustain their marriages, each affected couple makes adaptations deemed fit and suitable to keep their marriages.

The study reveals that respondents have internally migrated mainly because they work in the formal sector, in addition to work, education among couples and better education for married couples also lead to couples living separately. The consequences of respondents living separately from their spouses are mixed. While some see it as positive and that it has no ill-effects, others see things differently, especially, the economic and emotional negative effects it has on their marriages.

The outcome of the research affirms the literature that family composition among the public sector workers interviewed has changed. The study applied the Living Together Apart concept among a selected formal sector workers in Ghana. Unlike LAT, where individuals voluntarily choose to live apart in recognized relationships (often unmarried), this study reveals that legally married couples are involuntarily separated due to job demands. Hence, the couples in such marriages are separated due to structural involuntary factors.

Implication of this study for the broader literature in family behaviour and Ghanaian literature on family behaviour is that LAT as discussed in the literature focuses on couples, usually unmarried, who decide to voluntarily live apart, but in this research, the study proves that job seeking can involuntarily make married couples live afar from their marriages. As per the responses of those who took part in this study, most of them believe this kind of marriage is not healthy for the youth working in the formal sector. The study therefore recommends that, in the long run, the state assists in the reduction of this kind of arranged marriage by developing swift and safe transportation systems which will encourage couples to live together and commute to their places of work. In the short-run, the study recommends that, the state enhances the processes of transfer of married couples who want to reunite with their families.

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