

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

**LIVED EXPERIENCES AND COPING MECHANISMS OF UNMARRIED
FEMALE PROFESSIONALS IN NEW JUABEN SOUTH MUNICIPALITY,
KOFORIDUA, GHANA**



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**A Thesis in the Department of Counselling Psychology,
Faculty of Educational Studies submitted to the School of
Graduate Studies, in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the Degree of
Master of Philosophy
(Counselling Psychology)
in the University of Education, Winneba**

JULY, 2021

DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

I, Deborah Ofosua Eduah, declare that this thesis, except for quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my original work and have not been submitted either in part or whole, for another degree in this University or elsewhere.

Signature:

Date:



Supervisor's Declaration

I declare that the preparation and presentation of this thesis was supervised by me in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Education, Winneba

Name: Theresa Antwi (PhD)

Signature:

Date:

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the glory of the highest God from whom the strength, and steadfastness to complete this work successfully were drawn. I also, dedicate the success of this work to the memory of my late father (Mr John Kwesi Acheampong), whom I'm so grateful to for the values he nurtured in me before his departure to eternity.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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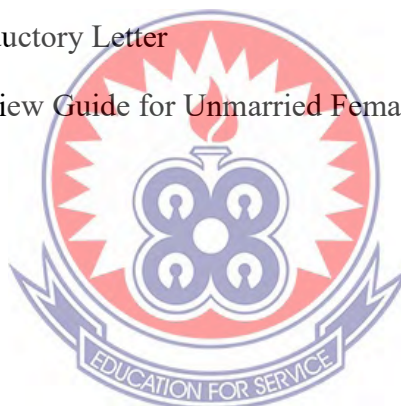
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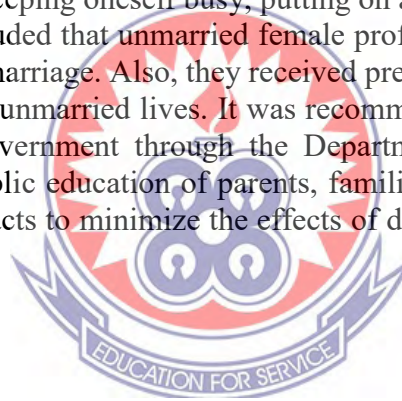
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ABSTRACT

The study explored the lived experiences and coping mechanisms of unmarried female professionals in New Juaben South Municipality, Koforidua, Ghana. The study adopted a phenomenological design. Fifteen unmarried female professionals were selected using the snowball technique. An interview guide was used to collect data. Data were analysed in themes. The study found that attaining a high level of education, setting a high standard in life, fear of being disappointed and enjoyment of singlehood were reasons why unmarried female professionals remained single. Also, acts such as ostracisation, shows of lack of respect, and comments of ridicule from the community, were the main discriminatory acts from the society against the unmarried female professionals. The findings also revealed nervousness, loneliness, unhappiness and burden feelings, and pressure by family, peers, co-workers, and community members were the effects of acts of discrimination against unmarried female professionals within the community. The findings revealed verbal and non-verbal comments/reactions from the society which adversely affected the emotions and social life of unmarried female professionals. Such discussions, comments, and reactions which showed a lack of respect, acts of discrimination, and comments depicting mockery affected unmarried female professionals. Finally, coping mechanisms adopted comprised clearing off unpleasant thoughts, keeping oneself busy, putting on a ring, and engaging in self-care practices. It was concluded that unmarried female professionals were not happy about their current status in marriage. Also, they received pressure from family members and peers concerning their unmarried lives. It was recommended among others that in the bigger picture, the government through the Department of Social Welfare should engage in rigorous public education of parents, families, and the entire society about the psychological impacts to minimize the effects of discrimination against unmarried female professionals.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Beliefs about relationship status serve to support social hierarchies (Day, Kay, Holmes & Napier, 2011). Each society expects its members to adhere to particular social norms derived from modal behaviours and labels those who fail or refuse to conform as deviants (Rimal & Lapinski, 2015). For example, historically, society expects individuals to form intimate relationships with people of the opposite gender and to formalise and legalise those relationships via unions called marriage. The significance of marriage has evolved from a moral behaviour into a status symbol of lifetime achievement, the virtual capstone of adulthood (Cherlin, 2010), with singles even being labelled as emerging adults (Jamison & Proulx, 2013; Reifman, Arnett & Colwell, 2016).

Social hierarchies have the highest regard for those who have chosen to marry and are still married, followed by those who were formerly married, and finally by those who never married. Negative stereotypes, independent of any actual personality differences, are applied to single individuals, with singles stereotyped as inferior to partnered adults and treated differently (DePaulo & Morris, 2006; Greitmeyer, 2009; Morris, Sinclair & DePaulo, 2007; Pignotti & Abell, 2009).

In a society that idealises marriage, females who are not married are called single, which is a deficit term because it means “not married.” The word single has become synonymous with the absence of marriage, and singlehood is considered a temporary phase of life during which an individual is waiting to get married (Barr, 2015; Eck, 2013; Lahad, 2016). Though singlehood is often posited as a choice for women today,

that choice is often viewed as unhealthy, and single women are negatively framed as failures of womanhood (Barak, 2014; Lahad, 2016).

Even when singlehood is discussed as being viable for women, it is often described as an alternative to coupledness, as opposed to just one of many lifestyles which convey the message that it is not the normal way of doing things (Evertsson & Nyman, 2013). Many women believe that other people expect them to marry, that something is wrong with them if they remain single, and that there is pressure from family, friends, and the media to marry (Piatkowski, 2012). Therapists have reported that distress related to being single is a common problem of female clients aged 30-45 (Schachar & Evetts, 2013).

The experience of being unmarried has mostly been excluded from research and literature (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Yet, the study of the female unmarried could provide valid information regarding interpersonal relationships (Kaiser & Kashy, 2005) and the personal realm (Budgeon, 2008). The formation of a long-term partnership or romantic relationship during emerging adulthood was long deemed an important developmental task (Meier, Hull & Ortyl, 2009). It is still a commonly held belief that falling in love allows us to overcome a dull, solitary existence and that entering into a matrimonial relationship allows us to become self-actualised (Kile, 1992).

The overwhelming emphasis on studying dating couples and married individuals in research suggests that relationship experts consider these types of relationships to be particularly significant and essential for people's overall well-being (Clark & Graham, 2005). In contrast, the lack of studies that focus specifically on unmarried people as a designated group further reinforces the hierarchical importance of heterosexual, romantic relationships (Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004). The significance of romantic

relationships is specifically emphasised in terms of their role in human development, life satisfaction, and general well-being.

The concept of marriage has been explained differently by different scholars. However, generally common notions of marriage are that it is a legal, social, political, and economic union between a man and a woman who have agreed to live together as a couple and their union has been recognised and approved by their societies through culturally accepted procedures (Nowbi, 1997). According to Gallagher (2004), at least since the beginning of recorded history marriage has been the most important human institution that regulates the production of children, family and society. Marriage across society is publicly acknowledged and supported by sexual union. Almost all adult men and women seek to marry or form a permanent and stable relationship with another person for the sake of bearing children and raising a family in a secure, loving, and fulfilling environment (Pan, 2004).

According to Coontz (2005), marriage is a universal phenomenon because many societies in the world allow heterosexual relationships and forbid people to marry family members. Gyekye (2002) argued that in African culture marriage is looked upon as a holy duty that every normal adult is expected to perform. Like many societies marriage in Ethiopia is also seen as a requirement stage in life, rather than an option and it remains to be the most important social institution that people should strive for (Pankhurst, 2017).

The 2017 Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) indicate that 27% of women aged 15-49 have never been married, 58% are currently married, 4% are living together with a man, and 11% are divorced, separated, or widowed. Less than 1% of women aged 45-49 have never been married (Central Statistical Agency [CSA],

Ethiopia, 2017). The 2018 mini-DHS report shows that twenty-six per cent of women aged 15-49 have never been married, 60 per cent are currently married, 4 per cent are living together with a man, and 11 per cent are divorced, separated, or widowed. Less than 1 per cent of women aged 45-49 who have never been married indicate that marriage is nearly universal in Ethiopia (CSA, 2018). According to the 2019 Ethiopian DHS report, One-fourth of women (26 percent) and two-fifths of men (42 percent) have never married. Females are more often married or living together with a partner (thus, in the union) than men (65 percent and 56 percent, respectively). Women are also more likely than men to report that they are divorced or separated (6 percent and 2 percent, respectively). Three percent of women report they are widowed, as compared with less than 1 percent of men (CSA, 2019).



According to DePaulo and Morris (2005), despite the significance attached to marriage, some people remain unmarried due to different reasons such as personal choice, external circumstances, or willingness to express individual autonomy and independence from traditions and institutions. Nimisha (2013) argued that nowadays in many societies around the world singlehood is becoming more common among young adults. Modern women see life with many possibilities and opportunities. While they are not against marriage, they learned to create a comfortable environment for themselves, they know how to feel good about themselves and manage their lives without the presence of men.

Allen (1989) and Gordon (1994) indicated that the state of being unmarried is a result of a complex interaction between structural, cultural and biographical aspects of life. Stein (1981) categorized the state of being unmarried based on an element of choice (voluntary and involuntary) and permanence (temporary and stable). Voluntary

temporary unmarried are single, who are open to marriage but place a lower priority on searching for a mate than on other activities, such as education, career, politics, and self-development. Voluntary stable unmarried are single and satisfied with that choice and do not intend to marry. Involuntary temporary unmarried are those who would like to be married and are actively seeking mates. Involuntary stable singles are primarily older singles who wanted to marry but did not find a mate and now accept their single status.

According to Carga and Melko (2012), when marriage is the social norm, remaining unmarried or choosing against marriage leads to negative stereotypes, biases, and discrimination against unmarried people whilst this applies to both sexes it is more significant for females who are less powerful in terms of social status, control over economic resources, and normative expectations in the society. This social stigma attached to unmarried female professionals makes their lives more difficult, unmarried females may feel personally inadequate because they have not formed a partnership.

The importance of forming a romantic relationship is also heightened by hegemonic gendered perceptions that females should be in a relationship with a man and have a family to be seen as successfully feminine (Milestone & Meyer, 2012). Additionally, females are pressured to achieve the goal of marriage and having children within a certain timeframe with the threat of perpetual singlehood if the goals are not reached in time (Negra, 2009).

Following this emphasis on being in a romantic relationship, being unmarried has often resulted in female unmarried person's marginalization and stigmatization whilst heterosexual couples enjoy a privileged position (Budgeon, 2008; DePaulo & Morris, 2005). This is especially true for unmarried females who, according to hegemonic

femininity, fail to fulfil the most important requirement of femininity (Milestone & Meyer, 2012).

Unmarried female professionals frequently referred to as “singles” are presumed to lead sadder lives since they lack the transcendent experience of a romantic relationship. Furthermore, lay people often assume that unmarried female professionals have more problems with their mental and physical health (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Consequently, unmarried female professionals are often the victims of interpersonal discrimination and rejection (Greitemeyer, 2009).

Female professionals are viewed in some communities as intimidating figures to men and so unconsciously drive away prospective suitors. This belief or perception is linked to the assumption that female professionals develop an assertive, independent character that makes it impossible for them to love, honour and “obey” a man as “real” wives should do (Coontz, 2018). Some people even joke that when they meet female professionals with a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), they need not find out what her area of specialization is. This is because they assume that a PhD means “Putting Hubby Down” (Coontz, 2018). University education is considered a factor associated with later and fewer marriages for most women. Hence, there is the perception that higher education is negatively related to marriages (Raymo, 2013).

Kent (2016) also argued that education does not prevent female professionals from getting married or delay women’s marriages. In the past thirty years, various studies conducted on this same issue revealed varying outcomes. Kent’s (2016) study shows that women with at least a bachelor’s degree will be more likely and willing to get married than women with less education. Goldstein and Kenney (2017) stated that educational attainment reveals a new socioeconomic pattern of first marriages. They

pinpoint that whereas educated women in the past were less likely to be married, recent college graduates have higher levels of marriage rates even though most of them delay marriages.

This indicates that education does not prevent marriages but rather could delay marriages. It is believed that later marriages for highly educated women primarily reflect longer years spent in school. Goldstein and Kenney (2017) found evidence that a new pattern is emerging in which marriage will become more common for women with college degrees than those without college degrees. However, this forecast did not apply to black women. Goldstein and Kenney (2017) further gathered that black women have lower first marriage rates and there is going to be a steady decline in marriage rates for black women in the United States.

Another factor influencing singlehood as an option for female professionals is the availability of careers. Careers provide new roles for women. They bring women new aspirations; women are no longer confined to the house. There is also a continuing trend among women to gain professional and high-level qualifications. Some of them delay marriage or remain unmarried for the sake of career advancement. Social researchers associate single-career women with higher levels of intelligence, education, and occupation (Gordon, 1994). Unmarried female professionals are seen as financially independent and upwardly mobile. Very few researchers give reasons for working-class women remaining unmarried and the perspective of these females does not seem to have been recorded.

Based on previous observations and empirical evidence, ambiguity persists regarding the extent to which education and career influence the marriage preferences of female professionals. The existing literature offers scant insight into the lived experiences and

coping mechanisms of unmarried female professionals in Ghana. Moreover, there is a prevalent misunderstanding about the array of factors that inform the marital decision-making process for these educated women. Frequently, education and career are considered the primary determinants of their marital choices. This raises an important question: Does the focus on education and career implies that these are the sole influences on marital decisions, or do other factors, albeit less conspicuous, also play a significant role?

In light of these considerations, the present study seeks to explore the lived experiences and coping mechanisms of unmarried female professionals in New Juaben South Municipality, Koforidua, Ghana, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape their marital decision-making processes.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework serves as a sort of lens through which a phenomenon is viewed (Terre Blanch & Durrheim, 1999). In this subheading, the researcher presented two prominent theories. The first theory was Singlism which was used to show the negative perception, stigmatisation and discrimination unmarried females face. The second theory, Social Constructivism was used to show how dominant beliefs about marriage and singlehood in society influence people's perceptions about themselves.

1.2.1 Singlism

A major theory that has been used to study marriage and singleness is Singlism. The theory was used by Morris and DePaulo (2005) to study singles and their place in society and science. Morris and DePaulo (2005) concluded that singles are stigmatised. Singlism is an unchallenged and unquestioned set of beliefs, an ideology of marriage and family. Its premises include the assumption that the sexual partnership is the one

truly important peer relationship and that people who have such a partnership are happier and more fulfilled than those who do not. As a result of the ideology of marriage and family adult unmarried women face many negative perceptions, stigmatisation and discrimination.

This theory was used by Depaulo and Morris (2005) to study how marriage is valued so highly that people who seem to be unmarried are perceived negatively. They provide evidence of negative perceptions about unmarried women such as singlehood is a stigmatised identity. Singles are perceived as even more socially immature and maladjusted than married women, and singles were also consistently viewed as more self-centered and envious than married women.

Ever since the theory has been documented it has been applied by different researchers. For instance, Day, Kay, Holmes, and Napier (2011) applied this theory to show that discriminatory practices against singles have some root in system justifying needs. Besides, Sharp and Ganong (2011) used the theory and evidenced from their work showed that single women face pressure from co-workers, relatives and friends to marry and this strengthening the idea that women who remain unmarried or single are seen as deviants. According to singlism theory, Depaulo and Morris (2005) evidenced that the level of stigma attached to singles is varied based on sexism and ageism. Single women face much more stigmatization than single men plus older single women are highly stigmatized than the younger ones.

This theory was justified because it provided a framework for understanding the stigma and discrimination faced by unmarried women in Ghana. Singlism theory was also relevant because it highlighted the societal pressure on women to get married, which was a common theme in the participants' experiences. Furthermore, Singlism theory

helped to explain the ways in which unmarried women were marginalized and excluded from certain social and economic benefits. Additionally, the theory provided a lens for analyzing the ways in which societal norms and expectations around marriage and family influenced the participants' experiences. Finally, Singlism theory was useful in highlighting the need for policies and programs that support the rights and well-being of unmarried women.

1.2.2 The Social Constructivism Theory

Though Singlism shows that unmarried women are highly stigmatised and discriminated against due to their marital status because other people hold negative perceptions towards unmarried women, Social Constructivism Theory on the other hand discusses that unmarried women internalise and accept this negative perception held by others towards them as true. Social construction theorists argue that knowledge is derived and maintained through social interactions. Berger and Lukman (1966) posited that meaning is created through countless interactions with the environment. Even the most basic, taken-for-granted, common sense of understanding reality is the product of our interaction and conversation with others. Social constructs are not inherent but rather dependent or contingent upon variables of our social selves.

Social Constructivism theory was relevant because it highlighted how the meaning of marriage and family was constructed and negotiated in Ghanaian society. Furthermore, the theory helped to explain how the participants' experiences were influenced by power dynamics and social relationships. Additionally, Social Constructivism theory provided a lens for analyzing the ways in which the participants' identities and experiences were constructed and negotiated in relation to societal norms and expectations. The theory was also useful in highlighting the importance of considering the social and cultural

context in which the participants' experiences took place. Finally, Social Constructivism theory was justified because it provided a framework for understanding how the participants' experiences were shaped by their interactions with others and the societal norms and expectations that governed those interactions.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Women are single, in the sense of not married, for a variety of reasons. The increased availability, acceptance and use of contraception and abortion allow for heterosexual intimacy without marriage. One of the main factors influencing singlehood as an option for women is the availability of careers. Careers provide new roles for women. They bring women new aspirations; women are no longer confined to the house (Toufexis, 2016).

There is also a continuing trend among women to gain professional and high-level qualifications. Some of them delay marriage or remain unmarried for the sake of career advancement. Social researchers associate unmarried career women with higher levels of intelligence, education, and occupation (Adams, 2011). Professional unmarried women are seen as financially independent and upwardly mobile. Very few researchers give reasons for working-class women remaining unmarried and the perspective of these women does not seem to have been recorded (Toufexis, 2016; Adams, 2011).

As a single female teacher living in Koforidua, I was motivated to conduct this study due to my personal experiences and observations. Growing up in Koforidua, I witnessed firsthand the societal pressure on women to get married, and the stigma and discrimination that unmarried women faced. As a single woman myself, I experienced the constant questions and comments from family, friends, and colleagues about when

I would get married, and the implicit assumption that something was wrong with me because I was not married.

Living in Koforidua, I also noticed that there was a lack of research and attention focused on the experiences of unmarried female professionals in the area. Many studies had explored the experiences of married women and mothers, but the voices and experiences of unmarried women were largely absent. I realized that this lack of research and attention was perpetuating the invisibility and marginalization of unmarried women in Koforidua. As a result, I felt compelled to conduct this study to amplify the voices and experiences of unmarried female professionals in New Juaben South Municipality, and to explore the ways in which they navigated the challenges and stigma associated with being unmarried in a society that placed a high value on marriage.

Furthermore, my experiences as a teacher in Koforidua also motivated me to conduct this study. I noticed that many of my female students were facing similar pressures and expectations to get married, and that these pressures were affecting their academic performance and overall well-being. I realized that by exploring the experiences of unmarried female professionals, I could gain a deeper understanding of the challenges that my students were facing, and develop strategies to support them. Overall, my personal experiences, observations, and professional background motivated me to conduct this study, and I hope that it will contribute to a greater understanding and support of unmarried female professionals in Koforidua.

Because of the predominance of the married state in our society, unmarried status seems to be a residual category. It seems there is a dearth of literature on unmarried female professionals. For example, a study of the experiences of working single women in

Hong Kong was explored by Yan (2011). It was found that single women face some different but also some similar developmental tasks as do married women.

Furthermore, O'Carroll (2015) explored Work-Life Balance (WFB): What are the main challenges for women in the corporate sector? Is it related to their family life? It was found that women were trying to meet work demands while facing responsibilities outside of work. Shikha (2015) also examined single women: Problems and challenges (a sociological study) and found that single women faced challenges such as stigmatisation, being looked down upon, lack of respect etc.

Again, Tadesse (2018) explored lived experience of unmarried women above the age of thirty living in Addis Ababa city and found that the major reason for women to remain single was “not finding the right person for marriage”. Besides, Muntari-Sumara (2015) investigated the marriage preferences of educated women in Accra, Ghana and found that most educated women prefer marriage to singlehood and cohabitation.

Despite the existence of studies on the experiences of single women, there are significant gaps in the literature. For instance, Yan's (2011) study on the experiences of working single women in Hong Kong had a broader scope, including widowhood and separation, and was conducted in a developed country with a different socio-cultural context. Similarly, O'Carroll's (2015) study on work-life balance challenges faced by women in the corporate sector in Ireland did not focus specifically on unmarried female professionals. Shikha's (2015) study on single women in India also had a broader scope and used a quantitative approach. Muntari-Sumara's (2015) study on marriage preferences of educated women in Accra, Ghana, did not consider the socio-emotional challenges associated with being a single female professional.

Tadesse's (2018) study on the lived experiences of unmarried women in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, also had a broader scope and was conducted in a different cultural context. The current study sought to address these gaps by exploring the lived experiences and coping mechanisms of unmarried female professionals in New Juaben South Municipality, Koforidua, Ghana, using a qualitative approach. This study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and experiences of unmarried female professionals in Ghana and to identify the coping mechanisms they employ to navigate these challenges.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the live experiences and coping mechanisms of unmarried female professionals in New Juaben South Municipality, Koforidua, Ghana.

1.5 Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Explore the reasons why some unmarried female professionals in New Juaben South Municipality remain single.
2. Ascertain acts of social discrimination against unmarried female professionals within the New Juaben South Municipality
3. Explore how the discriminatory acts/comments alter the lives of the unmarried female professionals within the community.
4. Explore how unmarried female professionals cope with the internal and external pressure to marry and the social stigma of being single.

1.6 Research Questions

The following questions are formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the reasons for some unmarried female professionals in New Juaben South Municipality to remain single?
2. What are the discriminatory acts/comments against unmarried female professionals?
3. How do the discriminatory acts/comments alter the lives of the unmarried female professionals within the community?
4. How do unmarried female professionals cope with the internal and external pressure to marry and the social stigma of being single?

1.7 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study can be used to inform programmes and services for unmarried females, such as counselling programmes and pre-marital education in church and non-church settings. The results can also be used by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to develop enlightenment programs for youth on marriage and family relationships. Additionally, the study contributes to the existing body of research literature and provides useful information to increase awareness about gender issues.

1.8 Delimitations

The study was delimited to the lived experiences and coping mechanisms of unmarried female professionals in New Juaben South Municipality, Koforidua, Ghana. Further, unmarried females who were in the teaching profession were used for easy accessibility. Last but not least, unmarried female professionals who were 35 years and above were sampled. The reason had been that it was generally perceived these females had been close to menopause, yet, they had not married.

1.9 Operational Definition of Terms

Deficit Identity: A negative self-perception or self-identity that is shaped by societal expectations and norms, where an individual feels inadequate or incomplete due to their unmarried status.

Discrimination: Unfair or prejudicial treatment of unmarried female professionals based on their marital status, resulting in unequal access to opportunities, resources, or services.

Singlism: A form of prejudice or discrimination against unmarried individuals, particularly women, who are stereotyped, stigmatized, or marginalized due to their unmarried status.

Social Identity: An individual's sense of self that is derived from their membership in social groups, such as marital status, occupation, or age group. In this study, social identity refers to how unmarried female professionals define themselves and are defined by others.

Stereotyping: Overly simplistic or inaccurate generalizations about unmarried female professionals based on their marital status, resulting in negative or discriminatory attitudes and behaviours.

Unmarried: A woman who is not currently married, including those who have never been married, are divorced, or are separated. In this study, unmarried refers specifically to female professionals who are not currently married.

1.10 Organisation of the Study

This study covers five chapters. Chapter One presents the introduction which is discussed under the following subthemes: Background to the study, theoretical framework, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study and research objectives.

Moreover, it further discussed the research questions, significance of the study, delimitations of the study, operational definition of terms and the organisation of the study. Chapter two presents the literature review. Chapter three deals with the research methodology adopted. It discussed the research paradigm, research approach, research design, positionality, population and sample and sampling technique. It further presents data collection instruments, the trustworthiness of the interviews, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures and ethical issues. Chapter four presents' results/findings. Chapter five presents the summary, conclusions, implications for counselling, recommendations, limitations and suggestions for future studies.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

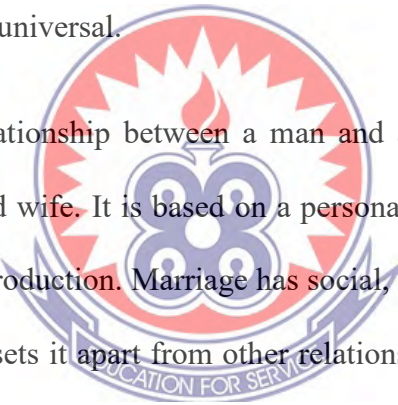
This chapter presents a comprehensive literature review on the experiences and coping mechanisms of unmarried female professionals in the New Juaben South Municipality. It explores key concepts such as marriage, singlehood, and the unique position of unmarried female professionals, providing a foundational understanding of their societal context. The discussion further examines the reasons for remaining single, the emotional experiences associated with their marital status, and the verbal and non-verbal stigmatization they encounter. Additionally, the chapter delves into the coping strategies adopted by these women to navigate societal expectations and pressures. Each of these aspects is systematically analyzed under distinct subheadings, culminating in a chapter summary that synthesizes the key insights gained from the review.



2.1 Concept of Marriage

Marriage is a universal institution that involves residential cohabitation and economic cooperation of the nuclear family (McErlean, 2015). Marriage is a socially supported union involving two or more individuals in what is regarded as a stable enduring arrangement based at least in part of a sexual bond of some kind (Meron, 2017). Holmes and Rempel (2016) defined marriage as a legally or formally recognised union of two people as partners in a personal relationship (historically and in some jurisdictions specifically a union between a man and a woman).

According to Wimalasena (2016), marriage, also called matrimony or wedlock, is a socially or ritually recognised union between spouses that establishes rights and obligations between those spouses, as well as between them and any resulting biological or adopted children and affinity (in-laws and other families through marriage). The definition of marriage varies around the world not only between cultures and between religions, but also throughout the history of any given culture and religion, evolving to both expand and constrict in who and what is encompassed, but typically it is principally an institution in which interpersonal relationships, usually sexual, are acknowledged or sanctioned. In some cultures, marriage is recommended or considered to be compulsory before pursuing any sexual activity. When defined broadly, marriage is considered a cultural universal.

The logo of the University of Education, Winneba, is a circular emblem. It features a red outer ring with the university's name in white. Inside the ring is a white sunburst or star-like pattern. At the center of the emblem is a blue and white design that resembles a stylized '8' or a traditional Ghanaian symbol. Below the emblem, the words 'UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION' are written in a semi-circle.

Marriage is a legal relationship between a man and a woman who promise to live together as husband and wife. It is based on a personal and biological connection for companionship and reproduction. Marriage has social, religious, and legal aspects, but its legal status is what sets it apart from other relationships (Wimalasena, 2016). The legal definition of marriage is that it is a legal status, condition, or relationship that results from a contract by which one man and one woman, who can enter into such an agreement, mutually promise to live together in the relationship of Husband and Wife in law for life, or until the legal termination of the relationship (Wimalasena, 2016). The fundamental basis of marriage is defined as “a personal association between a man and a woman and a biological relationship for mating and reproduction. In modern times, the most important aspects of marriage are social, religious as well as legal. Marriage differs, of course, from other sex relations by the fact that it is a legal institution. It is also in most communities a religious institution, but it is the legal aspect that is essential (Wimalasena, 2016).

According to Coontz (2004) and Nowbi (1997) common notions of marriage are that it is a legal, social, political, and economic union between a man and a woman who are agreed to live together, and their union has been recognised and approved by society through culturally accepted procedures. People in many societies marry for so many reasons. Some are for the fulfilment of sexual desire, companionship, and economic support, adherence to social support and cultural beliefs. In many societies, marriage is not a union only between couples but their families and the only accepted means of sexual fulfilment. Through marriage, couples are granted sexual endorsement and commitment with the expectations of bearing children and training the children on the prescribed mode of behaviour.

Marriage as an Institution

Marriage is an institution because it consists of rules and assumptions that attempt to control and govern social behaviours (Lauer & Jeanette, 2010). It creates rights and privileges, as well as expectations and responsibilities that are supposedly endorsed by society as a whole (Karasu, 2007). The legal system relies on the privileged status of marriage as a means to determine eligibility for public benefits (Abrams, 2012). Support for marriage is support for the status quo (Essig & Owens, 2009). The institutional status of marriage imbues it with arbitrary power to confer benefits and advantages on people based solely on sexual and intimate choices, granting legitimacy to only certain forms of intimate relationships (Marso, 2010). Those who propose that marriage is a civil right, are merely supporting that some people deserve the rights and protections of the state because of their intimate relationship choices, whereas others do not deserve them (Marso, 2010).

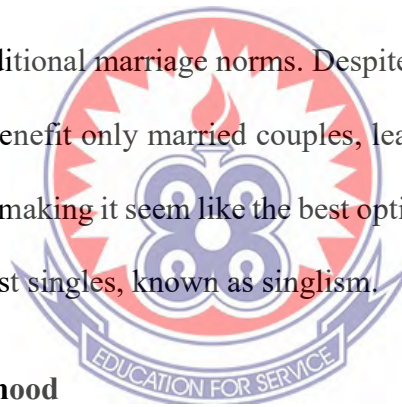
Flanders (1996) stated that marriage benefits society and the state by preventing immoral and criminal behaviour; that it is difficult and thus participants deserve rewards; and those benefits must be denied to those who refuse marriage. This perspective of marriage as an institutional enforcer of criminal law has footholds in antiquated applications whereby single men who sexually compromised single women were legally forced to marry them; as well as applicability in the current debate over same-sex marriage where supporters have argued that allowing same-sex partners to marry ensures their adherence to conservative norms (Murray, 2012).

Over 10 years ago, it was proposed that traditional marriage was becoming deinstitutionalized because of the increase in cohabitation and the movement to legalise same-sex marriage, yet opponents countered that the laws, social norms, and formal and informal rules of what to do when married still existed and that behaviours associated with marriage remained rigid (Lauer & Jeanette, 2010; Cherlin, 2004). Treas, Lui and Gubernskaya (2014) found support for the deinstitutionalisation theory in that disapproval for alternatives declined, yet, this study explored live experiences and coping mechanisms of unmarried female professionals in New Juaben South Municipality, Koforidua, Ghana. Despite some changed assumptions about marriage, it is still regarded as the socially correct version of coupledness and family, with same-sex couples seeking the legitimating power of legal marriage, since singles are viewed as having lower status than the married (Woerner, 2017; Ocobock, 2013; Marzullo, 2011).

Just as research demonstrated that both coupled people and singles accepted and espoused negative stereotypes about single people, both coupled people and singles expressed more bias against singles when they believed that the institution of marriage

was threatened, as well as when the institution of marriage was affirmed (Cronin, 2010; Day et al., 2011). A view espoused by some conservative religions states that singlehood is a problem that has resulted from feminism and the anti-marriage movement and validates compassion for those who struggle to marry (Woerner, 2017). Those are also those who propose that marriage remains a social institution but is joined by two upstarts-cohabitating and living apart together, which supports the existence of the ideology of coupledom/committed relationship ideology (Day, Yoshida, & Kay, 2013).

Research by Gubernskaya (2010) found that educated, working, and non-religious single women in the US have modern views about marriage, and overall, people are moving away from traditional marriage norms. Despite government efforts to promote marriage, it seems to benefit only married couples, leaving singles out. This creates a bias towards marriage, making it seem like the best option for everyone, which can lead to discrimination against singles, known as singlism.



2.2 Concept of Singlehood

According to Woerner (2017), in legal definitions for interpersonal status, a single person is someone who is not in a relationship or is unmarried. In common usage, the term single is often used to refer to someone who is not involved in any type of serious romantic relationship, including engagement, marriage, or someone single by choice. Single people may participate in dating and other activities to find a long-term partner or spouse.

Studying the experience of being single can provide valid information regarding the personal realm and interpersonal relationships (Kaiser & Kashy, 2005; Budgeon, 2008). However, the conceptualisation of single as the opposite of being in a relationship is

problematic in itself: because of this attitude, single people do not receive the attention due to them as members of a group.

The problematic definition of singlehood was mentioned by DePaulo and Morris (2005) as one of the main limitations of the current studies on singlehood. Studies often differ in terms of their definitions of singlehood, whilst most scholarly works assume that the single group is monolithic (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Some studies merely state that their sample included single people (Berend, 2011) without any further explanation of how they defined single. Alternatively, other studies use the legal definition of single and include the non-married in the single population (Poortman & Liefbroer, 2010).

This is problematic since non-married do not necessarily imply the complete absence of a romantic relationship. The non-married population also includes people who are dating, engaged, cohabiting, and so forth. However, it appears that the legal definition of single is not the preferred definition used by both younger and older individuals (Conely & Collins, 2002). What does matter is whether or not someone is socially perceived as being in a relationship or not. The social definition of who can be defined as single differs according to each society (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). For example, within the global and electronic sphere, you are presumed to be single until you are “Facebook official”, that is until you change your Facebook status in a relationship. Within other societies, however, you will only be labelled as single if you do not have a sexual partner (Clark & Graham, 2005), or if the sexual partnership is not viewed as serious (DePaulo & Morris, 2005).

Mostly the importance of a romantic relationship and its benefits has often been emphasized at the expense of single people. In other words, single people have often been used as a comparison group to demonstrate the advantages of being in a romantic

relationship. Social scientists often assume that such a comparison provides a meaningful and important distinction (Byrne & Carr, 2005) in which value is normally assigned to being in a relationship at the expense of being single. This may have contributed to the undesirability of a single status, and the reinforcement of romantic heterosexual relationships at the top hierarchical position. According to Byrne and Carr (2005), similarities between the two groups tend to be ignored, especially similarities where single people are just as happy as those who are married.

Many studies suggested that the state of being single is a result of the complex interaction between structural, cultural, and biographical aspects of life (Gorden, 1994; Allen, 1989; Stein, 1985). It is not likely to be a clear-cut choice. Stein (1981) stated of being single based on an element of choice (voluntary and involuntary) and permanence (temporary and stable). Voluntary temporary singles are single people (never married or even married) who are open to marriage but place a lower priority on searching for mates than on other activities, such as education, career, politics, and self-development. Voluntary stable singles are single and satisfied with that choice and do not intend to marry/remarry. Involuntary temporary singles are those who would like to be married and are actively seeking mates. Involuntary stable singles are primarily older singles who wanted to marry/remarry but did not find a mate and now accept their single status (Stein, 1981).

Moreover, singlehood is increasing as a lifestyle in the United States. There has been a steady decline and delay in marriage, with age at first marriage rising (Poortman & Liefbroer, 2010). The rate of people remarrying has also sharply declined (Conley & Collins, 2002), which may reflect the increasing occurrence of cohabitation (Berend, 2011). According to the United States (U.S.) Census Bureau, in 2011 there were 102

million unmarried people ages 18 and older living in America, representing 44.1% of all U.S. residents 18 and older (Woerner, 2017). Fifty-three percent (54+ million) of these were women. Unmarried individuals consist of never-married (62%), divorced (24%), and widowed adults (14%) (Woerner, 2017). The increase in singlehood is correlated with socio-demographic variables including gender, age, educational level, and income (Pan, 2004).

Young singles today are more positive about singlehood in general, yet the majority does not desire to be single themselves (Poortman & Liefbroer, 2010). As opposed to expressing a preference for marriage, the research found that young singles who expressed a preference for coupledness over singlehood preferred cohabitation over marriage (Poortman & Liefbroer, 2010). This could partially explain research indicating that singlehood may be more attractive to more liberal-minded individuals (Poortman & Liefbroer, 2010). Attitudes towards singlehood also appear to fluctuate with age yet interviews with adults over age 65 revealed that the fluctuations may be related to social context as opposed to the lifespan stage (McErlean, 2015).

Irrespective of whether or not they expressed a desire for a future relationship, singles were involved in relationships with family and friends, at work, and within the community, often to a greater degree than possible if part of a couple, yet these relationships are not afforded the same importance as romantic couple relationships (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2016). Although cohabitation is becoming increasingly recognised as a lifestyle separate from marriage, it still consists of a couple. Women appeared to struggle with describing why they were single due to polarized concepts associated with singleness, faced with attributing their singleness to either outside factors or their personal choice (DePaulo, 2006).

2.3 Concept of Unmarried Female Professional

According to Gubernskaya (2010), educated and employed single women are more likely to have modern views about marriage and family. This suggests that unmarried female professionals may be redefining traditional norms and expectations around marriage and family. However, research has also shown that singles, particularly women, face discrimination and stigma in society (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Unmarried female professionals may experience this singlism in their personal and professional lives, leading to feelings of marginalization and exclusion.

Furthermore, the concept of an unmarried female professional is often shaped by societal expectations and norms around marriage and family. As Mulawka (2013) notes, the ideology of marriage and family can create a universe where marriage is seen as the ultimate goal for everyone, leading to singlism. This can result in unmarried female professionals feeling pressure to conform to traditional norms and expectations, rather than being valued and respected for their choices and achievements.

In addition, research has shown that unmarried female professionals may face unique challenges and barriers in their careers. For example, O'Carroll (2015) found that women in the corporate sector face significant challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities. Unmarried female professionals may face similar challenges, but with the added pressure of societal expectations around marriage and family.

Overall, the concept of an unmarried female professional is complex and multifaceted, shaped by societal expectations and norms around marriage and family. Further research is needed to understand the experiences and challenges faced by unmarried female professionals and to challenge the singlism and stigma that they may face.

3.4 Concept of Coping of Unmarried Female Professional

Research has shown that unmarried women, including professionals, often experience stigma and discrimination due to their marital status (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). To cope with this stigma, unmarried female professionals may use strategies such as social support, self-care, and cognitive reappraisal (Tadesse, 2018). Social support from family, friends, and colleagues can provide unmarried female professionals with a sense of belonging and validation, helping to counteract the negative effects of stigma.

Self-care is another essential coping mechanism for unmarried female professionals. Engaging in activities that promote physical and emotional well-being, such as exercise, meditation, and hobbies, can help unmarried female professionals manage stress and anxiety (Karasu, 2007). Cognitive reappraisal, which involves reframing negative thoughts and emotions, can also be an effective coping strategy for unmarried female professionals (Gross & John, 2003).

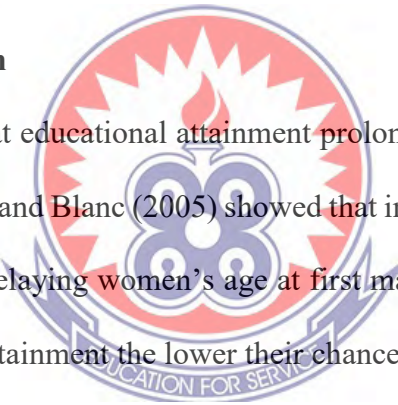
Furthermore, unmarried female professionals may also employ coping mechanisms such as problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Problem-focused coping involves taking direct action to address the source of stress, while emotion-focused coping involves managing the emotional stress response. Unmarried female professionals may use these coping mechanisms to deal with specific challenges, such as navigating workplace discrimination or managing family expectations.

In brief, the concept of coping among unmarried female professionals is complex and multifaceted. By employing various coping mechanisms, unmarried female professionals can manage the challenges and stigma associated with their marital status and maintain their physical and emotional well-being.

3.5 Reasons for Remaining Single

According to Allen (1989), people may remain single for a variety of reasons, including financial and emotional or physical health issues, stress in the family, time constraints, education, career, personal preferences, single people may be uninterested in marriage, domestic partnership, or other types of committed relationships. Allen's (1989) study further showed that the reasons for remaining single for women were not simple matters. The process may consist of a series of events and transitions during childhood and young adulthood that cut across several life courses. Some combination of events related to family, friends, education, work and residence interacted to limit their opportunity or desire to marry (Allen, 1989). Other reasons are discussed next.

High level of education

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Research has shown that educational attainment prolongs the time of marriage among women. Mensch, Grant and Blanc (2005) showed that increased educational attainment is a possible factor in delaying women's age at first marriage. This implies the higher women's educational attainment the lower their chances of marrying early. The longer the years of schooling, the later the likelihood of marriage. Education leads young women to have greater influence over the timing of marriage and the choice of marriage partners. This can be said so because educational attainment seems to keep most women in the schooling system for some number of years than their counterparts who are not schooling and thus ready to be married after puberty. Thus, as the girl stays in school, she will finish her education before marrying.

Similarly, Lloyd and Mensch (1999) argued that a girl's exposure to education helps to broaden the girl's perspective on the world, increasing her apparitions which can include wanting to have a greater influence on the choice of her husband. Well-educated

women are more likely to remain single than less-educated women. In Asia Women with a university education are twice more likely to be never married than those with a primary education or less. In Indonesia a woman who has completed tertiary education has a good job or career and is 27 years old or older will be considered too old and undesirable. Indonesian men's preference for young wives is connected to their preference for productive (childbearing), quiet, passive, and submissive wives whom they can control (Retnaningsih, 2012).

According to Pereira (2014), young women in Palestine dismissed their chance as high school graduates for a suitable marriage in contrast to that woman perceived post-secondary education to be a marital asset if coupled with secure employment. Young women with less education, particularly young women who finished high school education and remained at home, found themselves with diminishing marriage prospects. Ethiopian health and demographic survey report indicated that women with no education marry 7.7 years earlier than women with more than secondary education which is 16.3 years versus 24.0 years (Central Statistical Agency (CSA), Ethiopia, 2017).

In addition, research has also shown that women who have finished their education, have better jobs, and become highly successful appear to scare men away from them because most men feel intimidated because of their success. For example, research conducted by Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe (2011) in Nigeria revealed that women with high educational status and higher financial standings tend not to get men to marry them because the men become intimidated by their positions. This is because such women are seen as unmarriageable, arrogant too independent, and also too confident. In support of this argument, Retnaningsih (2012) in his study also shows that educated unmarried

career women are stereotyped in Indonesian society as incompetent, demanding, or too ambitious, which results in pressures from their social environments to find a soul mate or husband.

According to Abdeen, Zahdeh and Qassesi (2016), an educated and career-minded single woman is admired, while at the same time is an object of pity or ridicule. Society's attitude that Females are only good for cooking, cleaning, bearing children, acting feminine and being submissive Makes Intelligent, brainy, and successful women scare men (Al-Khatib, 2010). Yuarsi (2012) argued that education cannot improve women's position in society because men's physical power and privilege seem to be still more dominant than women's education. Yuarsi (2012) further stated that sexist thinking makes men not desire "smart" women.

Establishment of a career

Gordon (1994) argued that for several young men and women their busy work left them very little time for a relationship. Work plays an important part in the lives of single women. For most unmarried people career is the priority of family. Most of them would transcend once on top of the job or established in their career before settling down for marriage. Being single, however, is seen as a temporary phase for them before they have enough resources for a good life.

In Ethiopia, there was also a new shift of expecting girls not simply to be educated but also to have an income rather than simply get married. This day not just men but also women wanted to earn income before marriage, often by migrating. There is an emerging sense that young women should endeavour to get some economic independence and have some means of income before marrying. Girls aspire to migrate rather than get married especially if they have not done well in school. In some cities,

girls migrate to towns rather than marry, whereas in others they migrate to the Middle East (Pankhurst, 2017). Being single, however, is seen as a temporary phase for them before they have enough resources for marriage and a good life. They prolong the years to marriage to make some effort on their career first to make more money to bear the living expenses.

According to Situmorang (2007), in most countries socio-economic and industrial developments have provided new opportunities to individuals, including women to enrol at a higher level of education and enter wage employment outside the home. The rising educational attainment gives greater chances for a woman to engage in formal work. This undermines the dependency of a woman on the family for economic survival as well as social security, which in turn lowers the motivation of women to marry to gain financial security.

Decreases the availability of potential suitors

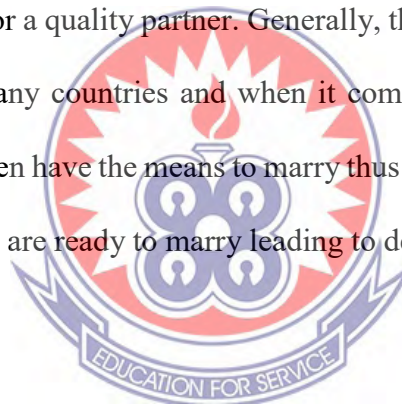
McLaughlin, Kephart and Landry (2012) argued that women's marital timing is directly linked to the availability of men of similar age, race, and economic circumstances. They concluded that mate unavailability in local marriage markets is a significant factor contributing to being single among women. This implies that many women will want to marry people who are either in the same age range as them people who are older than them or someone in the same ethnic group. So, when a woman is of age and most of the men coming her way are far younger than her, she will not want to marry them.

Besides, many people would like to marry people from a similar background so when they do not get what they want, they tend to remain unmarried. To support this argument, Rayle and Bratter (2014) revealed that women are least willing to marry men who cannot hold a steady job, who are of a different race, or who are younger by five

or more years but are most willing to marry men with more education and higher earnings.

Again, the unavailability of a quality marriage partner can also be a factor just like searching for jobs. The search for a romantic partner involves trying to get information about a partner in terms of opportunities and accepting the best taking into account the searcher's qualification and attractiveness. In a marriage market that is favourable, an individual is likely to attract a high-quality partner thus lowering his or her search for a partner of her standard.

However, when a woman fails to get the quality of a partner, she wants this may extend her time in searching for a quality partner. Generally, the population of women is more than that of men in many countries and when it comes to marriage, not all men are marriageable, not all men have the means to marry thus leading to a decrease proportion of committed men who are ready to marry leading to delay in many women's marriage (Harnett, 2008).



At this point, women are aware of the downing numbers of eligible men in their social circle. They believed that they had more options and that meeting men was easier when they were in their early and mid-20s. Additionally, they realised that the pool of eligible men now comprised growing numbers of divorced men with children, so women at this point were convinced to settle down for less than they deserved (Byrne, 2003).

The idealised image of marriage

Kalmijn (1998) argued that the idealized image of marriage and a suitable marriage partner and unwillingness to accept compromise as a strategy for forming a relationship is a reason for singlehood. Berend (2011) showed that in the nineteenth century in New

England, older never-married women were those who were less willing to compromise their values on marriage and family life. Both single and married women take the ideas of marriage and love seriously, and they consider a happy marriage as the happiest condition of human life, and would rather have the best or none.

Similarly, Siegel (1995) argued that marriage and unwillingness to accept compromise are found to be reasons for the increasing number of single never-married mothers. There is an increasing number of older never-married women in countries such as Egypt, the USA, Poland, Germany, and India, where highly educated women do not want to lower their standards for an ideal marriage mate, just to marry. This shows that manly highly educated women have certain images of marriage thus they do not want to accept anything that falls short of their idealised image of marriage. Many women would not want to lower certain images that they have of marriage. So, in case of men come their way and they think they will not do things to meet their idealised image, they will not accept them to marry. This is a positive sign that many women are no longer settling for any man at all when it comes to lowering their standard for being just married. Rather they are trying to settle for what they truly want.

Being emotionally independent

In response to queries about their singleness, women speak about their attachment to their independence, their freedom and not wanting to be constrained by marital, intimate relationships. In this context, independence is most usually contra posed to marriage/partner relationships, prioritising the importance of individual, emotional freedom over other types of freedoms, such as economic or political independence. Emotional independence and marital-type ties are presented as an either/or situation-one at the cost of another. Marriage is equated with dependency and having to submit

oneself to the authority of the husband/partner. Being ‘tied down’, ‘held back’ or ‘not one’s boss’ are all to be avoided. Women speak about their lack of interest in or commitment to, investing time and energy into, personal relationships.

Men are perceived and presented as not liking independent women: hence the explanation for women’s continuing singleness. This explanation is better understood as an answer to the question ‘why I am single’ rather than an answer to ‘why I am not married’. Singleness as a preferred option and placing a significant value on independence is stressed (Byrne, 2003). According to Dalton (1992), independence and freedom in decision-making and concerning social activities were cited as benefits of being single. Single women particularly liked making decisions without having to consider someone else’s opinion. Being single is also thought to enable people to become more self-reliant and do things on their own.

Failed relations

According to Byrne (2003), almost all the women who took part in his study had a story about a man in the past that they might have married, or were on the point of marrying, were engaged to or were involved with for a considerable period. But as the explanation reveals, the relationship ended, but the woman herself is not to blame. The man either left abruptly when the engagement/marriage plans became public, or the woman’s family strongly disapproved of the woman’s partner, or the man is discovered to be violent, mentally ill, alcoholic, already married or engaged to another woman. The experience of the broken romance left many women doubtful about involving themselves in future relationships, angry at the investment of time in a relationship that had no future and the lengthy time period occupied with recovering from a broken romance.

On the other hand, women themselves also ended relationships, broke engagements, knowing that this is not the right person and that they are not prepared to marry after all. The broken romance explanation again can be interpreted as stigma management and part of an identity account. As a stigma management strategy, it informs others that the woman is heterosexual, that she has attempted to form a partnership with another and that she is presenting herself as an adult, pursuing adult-type relationships. The fact that the attempt has failed has little relevance to others but could be interpreted as crucial to negotiating the maintenance of single self-identities in a stigmatized setting.

Incapable of forming long-term relationships

Another explanation offered for singleness includes a lack of interest in or little talent for pursuing a sexual partner. Women speak about their personalities, personal preferences, and socializing patterns in the past and assume that the reason for their singleness could be found in their internal makeup. They blame themselves for being single. Women speak about their lack of capacity or ability to enter and sustain long-term relationships, casting self-doubt on their maturity and adult status. Women say that they know now that they cannot be sexually close to others for a long period, an aspect of themselves they say is painful to present for scrutiny. Women say they are wary of forming new attachments, because of previous broken relationships, hence their continuing singleness.

This explanation can also be interpreted as a stigma management strategy in terms of easing social interaction but it is also a potent identity account in the context of composing a self-identity. It appears to be a risky explanation as it presents the self as deficient but it can evoke reassurance and validation for other personal attributes and achievements from those who hear the account. Women explain that once a relationship

starts to demand a greater commitment from them like agreeing to spend more time with a partner, agreeing to give up other activities, or agreeing to sexual intimacy they start to withdraw from the relationship (Byrne, 2003).

Family background

Family background is also a contributing factor. For instance, seeing marriages of relatives such as parents, guardians, and other close relatives, in terms of domestic violence, divorce, and separation can be used as yardsticks to one's marriage. Daughters who observed unhappy and conflictual parent marriage, many have a negative desire and perception about marriage in a way prolongs marital delay and leads to permanent voluntary or involuntary singlehood.

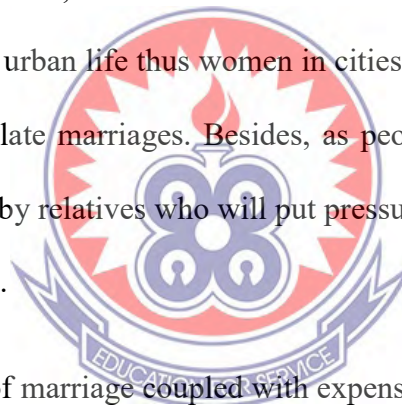
The research found out those females raised in one-parent families, whether it is the father or mother; tend to remain single probably due to greater family responsibilities and recognition of the advantage of singlehood. So, family background in terms of good or bad marital relations between parents can inspire children to marry or not to marry. This is because when children see their parents regularly quarrel without showing any love towards each other, children grow up to see marriage as a means of quarrelling, fighting, conflict and so on. This demotivates children especially girls to decide not to marry in future (Pan, 2004).

According to Byrne (2003), women consider whether traumatic familial events are possible, personal explanations for remaining single and speak about having to live with alcoholic parents/siblings; witnessing poor marital relationships of parents/relatives; being separated from parents or having to assume adult responsibilities at an early age. Women speak about wanting to live a life that was not their mother's, having grown up in a household with many other siblings whose parents constantly quarrelled, and whose

mother was utterly dependent on her husband for food, clothing, and shelter which on occasion were withheld.

High cost of marriage and urbanization

Singh and Samara as in Mensch et al. (2005) indicated that urbanization is associated with late marriages because of the nature of urban life. To them, women in urban areas are exposed to modern values and they are also less likely to be under the influence of kin who control the timing of marriage and choice of spouse; thus, urbanization encourages later marriage. Thus, when one compares women in rural settlements and urban areas, one can say that those who live in urban areas are exposed to so many things like modernization, education and other modern lifestyles. These are predominant factors of urban life thus women in cities tend to enjoy an urban lifestyle therefore encouraging late marriages. Besides, as people stay in cities, they are less likely to be influenced by relatives who will put pressure on them to marry and who to marry and at what time.



Furthermore, the cost of marriage coupled with expensive dowry is also another factor in staying unmarried. It is also known that the cost of a marriage has escalated in a wide range of settings. Research conducted by Sajeda and Bajracharya (2011) showed that “in many parts of the world, the costs of marriage are drivers of social change. Even while practices are widely varied, the consequences for women are overwhelmingly negative” (p. 4).

Sajeda and Bajracharya (2011) argued further that traditional courtship that involved a large bride price was viewed as a burden for young men. It is known that the cost of a wedding is becoming very expensive scaring most potential men around to be committed to long-lasting relationships leading to late marriages among many grown-

up women. This prohibitively high bride price demanded by parents in some rural areas of Ethiopia is encouraging poor young men to abduct and rape underage girls to secure a marriage (Yamamoto, 2013).

According to Pankhurst (2017), economic constraints on couples setting up an independent livelihood are another factor in Ethiopia for delaying marriage. This is often because since men could not establish themselves, they would delay marriage to save money leading to women receiving marriage proposals later. Increasing living costs, unemployment and lack of jobs resulting men being dependent on their families and unable to marry.

Something that just happens

According to Byrne (2003), being single by chance rather than a choice or personal characteristics is also mentioned as an explanation. Fate takes over and destiny determines whether one is single or not. Women say that they have not thought about why they are single, it 'just happened this way. Women citing this explanation feel that they, unlike others, have little control over the development, shape and future of their lives. They do not perceive or position themselves as active agents, shaping and deciding on their futures or life plans, but are the casualties of a 'mapped' life, a life not selected for themselves.

Such women acknowledge that other single women may choose to embrace the single lifestyle, but emphasize that they are not part of that category. 'Not choosing' singleness eases social interaction and demonstrates women's distance from the stigmatized social identity. While 'something that just happens' can be interpreted as adopting a fatalistic stance, arguably, it could also be interpreted as an attempt to move away from a failed identity and to build a new self-identity that is not based on marital status (Byrne, 2003).

Being needed by others/caring for others

One reason for being single as a consequence of caring for elderly parents for a long number of years is a commonly used explanation, as many single women have had caring responsibilities. As noted above, being single can identify a woman in a family as the most likely candidate to care for parents/relatives and single women speak of their obligation and willingness to care. One woman equates her mother's need for her care and protection and her unquestioning fulfilment of that need as being like a family situation, of being married, that I was needed, I was part of that. But a history of caring is also cited as the reason why women are currently single.

Women say that they had no choice but to remain single during the care period, explaining that caring reduced their chances to meet potential partners as leisure time and opportunities for socializing were limited. Caring identities and single identities are interwoven. Caring is a labour-intensive and relationship-exclusive activity. Being an active caregiver is also presented as a deterrent to any man who might be interested in a relationship. Women in long-term caring situations comment that they could not choose between caring for a parent and a partner and they would not expect a man to share a home with them while they were caring for an elderly dependent (Byrne, 2003).

Fear of unmarried females

Being acutely aware of the changing reality at their age is mentioned as the biggest fear of unmarried women which includes, acknowledging that the pool of eligible men is changing, Women were cognisant of the dwindling numbers of eligible men in their social circles. They believed that they had more options and that meeting men was easier when they were in their early and mid-20s. Additionally, they realised that the

pool of eligible men now comprised growing numbers of divorced men and men with children. One woman explained the situation saying.

Over time, in response to the pool of eligible men, it makes women more willing to date younger men and men who were divorced and had children. Another fear of unmarried women is watching more friends and coworkers marry, they observed an increasing number of friends and others around them marrying and some women might be the only single person at work and, therefore, experience heightened visibility of their single status. Acknowledging risks and concerns accompanying later childbearing is another fear of older unmarried women, women were aware of their increased risk of infertility as they aged.

Since most women preferred to have children within a marriage, they had not yet had children. They were vigilant with birth control and they were afraid that their eggs were dying slowly. In addition, they were concerned about genetic complications associated with having children at older ages. Another concern was being an older parent; they worried about having reduced energy, and they are also worried about the increasing age gap between their future children and themselves with each year that passed (Sharp & Ganong, 2011).

Being vulnerable is another fear of unmarried woman and this social and economic vulnerability apply particularly if there is no adult of the opposite sex within the household, namely no substitute male figure in form of an adult son. When looking at the border context of women's status in society, the position of single women without independent resources lies at the least favoured, most vulnerable end (Pankhurst, 2017).

2.6 Feelings the Unmarried Females go through due to their Marital Status

Stereotypes

Singles are assumed to have similar traits and behaviours which exist heterogeneously and are viewed negatively, with these negative attributes causing singles to be discounted or viewed as “tainted” (Gordon, 1994, p. 3). Stereotypes of singles result in the group being stigmatized. Singles may internalise these beliefs which result in shame (Gordon, 1994). Stereotypes emphasise differences between groups and minimise variations within an individual group (Byrne & Carr, 2005).

This can be partly attributed to confirmation bias whereby individuals will react more to information that appears to support a stereotype and less to information that appears discrepant (Byrne & Carr, 2005). Stereotypes are activated and lead to prejudice at the societal level, interpersonal level (between two people), and intrapersonal level (self-prejudice) which all can result in depression in the target of the prejudice (Simpson, 2016). Singles are discriminated against based on being perceived as inferior which is based on a socially constructed ideology to explain their inferiority (Gordon, 1994).

Early research into stereotypes about people based solely on marital status found that married people were perceived more favourably, more secure, happier, and more reliable than never-married people (Woerner, 2017). Fourteen years later, researchers were still finding participants more likely to describe singles as lonely, shy, unhappy, insecure, and inflexible (DePaulo & Morris, 2005).

Narrative research revealed that single women were generally perceived as less happy, having fewer social skills, being less successful, being flawed, and having less life satisfaction than married women; that singlehood was not regarded as a lifestyle choice; and that most single women had internalised the negative stereotypes about single

women and had perhaps felt pressured to marry (Day et al., 2011). In comparisons of married people with individuals in non-monogamous relationships, study participants attributed monogamously coupled individuals with being happier, more sexually satisfied, and even better citizens—a phenomenon called the halo effect (Day et al., 2011).

Today, people continue to stereotype singles as immature, insecure, self-centred, unhappy, lonely, and ugly as compared to married people (Woerner, 2017). Even young, single people have been shown to feel more positively towards married people than towards other singles (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). DePaulo and Morris (2005) also found that singles were judged as less moral than married. Endorsement of stereotyping of singles by singles as well as by partnered individuals demonstrated two important premises of self-stereotype impact: Self-relevant stereotypes can be very powerful, and they can influence individual behaviour without awareness (DePaulo & Morris, 2005).

Acceptance of a negative stereotype via self-stereotyping can result in the reduction of behaviours that are in opposition to the goals that are stereotypical of the stigmatised group (Bella, DePaulo & Morris, 2005), including action responses by the self-stereotyped person. Self-stereotype is correlated with lower group identification with the stigmatised group and thus negative attitudes toward stigmatised group members who speak out against the discrimination (Kaiser, & Kashy, 2005). The stereotype content model proposes that societal structure (for example, social norms, status quo, institutions and many others) causes stereotypes, stereotypes cause prejudice, and prejudice results in discrimination (McErlean, 2015).

2.6.1 Stigma

Perspective-taking has been shown to reduce the use of stereotyping in judging others whereas the process of singles internalising negative stereotypes (self-stereotyping) as shame must be countered by positive cultural messages about being single (DePaulo, 2006). Cultural messages must eliminate the stigma surrounding individuals who are not married or in coupled relationships, as well as stop promoting the perception of the individual, family, and societal benefits only to people who are in coupled/marital relationships (McErlean, 2015).

Stigma is a negative condition that is considered to be socially unacceptable. Stigma can refer to a particular trait or attribute whose existence causes an individual to be discounted or discredited, or to the social process that enables a particular condition to acquire a stigmatised meaning (Hertel et al., 2007). Individuals who experience stigma have been shown to experience negative biopsychosocial consequences including stress responses such as hypertension, heart disease, and stroke, depression, shame, low self-esteem, negative emotions, increased pressure to marry, and even depressed academic achievement (Freeman, 2015). How an individual perceives stigma depends on several variables including stigma consciousness, perceived legitimacy, and group identification (Hertel et al., 2007).

Individuals who have experienced stigma are more susceptible to the subsequent perception of stigma and may undertake behaviours to reduce cognitive dissonance (Keener & Massey, 2015). A stigmatised individual may respond to experiencing stigma by either attempting to “correct” his or her failing or by adopting an

“unconventional interpretation” of his or her single social identity (Gordon, 1994, p. 10).

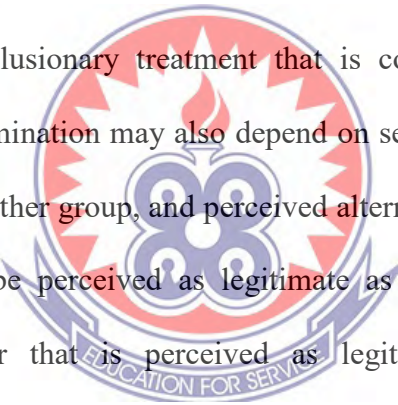
Single status is often viewed as a stigma, and stigma has been shown to negatively affect both physical and mental health due to unhealthy sustained levels of biological responses to perceived threats (Sharp & Ganong, 2011). Different categories of singles, such as never-married versus divorced, have been shown to experience different levels of stigma with divorced singles perceived more positively than never-married singles (Byrne & Carr, 2005). Individuals who are very conscious of stigma perceive more discrimination than those who have low stigma consciousness (Yamamoto, 2013).

Subsequent researchers can examine whether perceived differences between singles and married individuals can be quantifiable. Research into two prominent stereotypes about singles’ loneliness and higher number of sexual partners as compared to married people concluded that although loneliness and increased sexual partners were both more prevalent among singles than married people, the stereotypes did not apply to the majority of the single population (Adams, 2011).

There are clear differences in perceptions of personality characteristics of single versus partnered individuals, with singles viewed more negatively than partnered individuals; and that these perceived differences do not reflect actual differences (Greitmeyer, 2009). It appears that the stereotyping of singles differs from stereotypes that are established by observations of the group of interest, which are accurate (Byrne, 2003). The establishment of a discrepancy between perceived differences and actual differences gives further credibility to the existence of stereotypes against singles.

2.6.2 Discrimination

Discrimination occurs when a distinction is made between two individuals or groups and they are then treated differently based on that categorisation. Discrimination can occur at the individual level or institutionally at the population level (Situmorang, 2007). Discrimination is wrong when it treats the members of one group as less worthy, such as treating married people as better than singles. In these situations, discrimination is often called prejudice. The severity of different (or exclusionary) treatment increases the likelihood of it being considered group-based as opposed to individual, with group-based exclusionary treatment more likely to be viewed as discrimination ((Situmorang, 2007).



However, whether exclusionary treatment that is considered group-based is also considered to be discrimination may also depend on several variables (pervasiveness, ability to move into another group, and perceived alternatives to status quo) that cause the discrimination to be perceived as legitimate as opposed to illegitimate, with exclusionary behaviour that is perceived as legitimate not being labelled as discrimination (Tadesse, 2018). In terms of singlism, between-group mobility and status quo are particularly relevant concerning considering differential treatment as discrimination since the ability to move from the single to the married group is considered likely for most people, and marriage/coupledness is the status quo. These two factors contribute to singlism being considered legitimate differential (exclusionary) treatment, which is usually not labelled discrimination.

Discrimination against singles has been demonstrated in the areas of lower pay, unequal housing rights in the military, promotions at work, subsidized employee benefits, social security benefits, estate taxes, capital gains taxes, insurance, housing, in vitro

fertilisation, adoption, family care leave, travel packages and experiences, club memberships, and even expectations for longer work hours due to perceived less responsibility outside of work (DePaulo & Morris, 2006).

Direct experiences of discrimination have been linked to quality-of-life variables, social interaction indicators, and poorer mental health, particularly depression or psychological distress (Tadesse, 2018). Perceived discrimination has also been linked with individuals participating more in unhealthy behaviours and less in healthy behaviours (Pereira, 2014). Emotional responses to discrimination include being psychologically wounded (belittled, humiliated, degraded, hurt, bitter, or traumatised), anger (annoyance, irritation, indignation, or anger), bad feelings, shame, powerlessness, fear, sadness, feeling uncomfortable, and feeling worn out. Even anticipating prejudice (discrimination) can result in psychological and cardiovascular stress responses (Poortman & Liefbroer, 2010).

Emotion regulation strategies may be an important link between discrimination and mental health problems considering that increased rumination predicted increased psychological distress; suppression predicted increased distress response to stigma-related stressors, and anger was correlated with feeling less shame. Responses to discrimination also appear to be moderated by both the perceived legitimacy of the discrimination as well as by pervasiveness. Pervasive discrimination has been linked to poor mental health indicators in depressive symptoms, loneliness, and hostility. Individuals who perceive discrimination as legitimate are more likely to conform and thus leave their stigmatised group in situations where social mobility is possible (Rebeca, 2016).

2.7 Verbal and Non-Verbal Acts/Comments against Unmarried Females about their Marital Status

The social environment consists of a woman's family, neighbourhood, work team, community, and other social groups that she belongs to and that impacts her sense of social identity (Greitemeyer, 2009). Twenty years ago, narrative research into the social environments of single women revealed challenges with limited financial resources, safe and affordable housing, transportation, and finding leisure activities not limited to couples (Gordon, 1994). Their descriptions of living single in a couple of cultures included the difficulty of trying to access social networks when social activities appeared geared towards couples (Gordon, 1994).

Also, being regarded as social deviants and abnormal, and being constantly fearful of being verbally or physically accosted by men (Gordon, 1994). Single women today report many of the same concerns. Difficulties with singlehood are reported to include holidays, pressure from family and friends to be partnered, ambiguous loss, fear of being alone, complaints about married couples, and biological effects of ageing (Schutz, Chemintz, Depaulo, Morris, McDaniel, & Stucke, 2007).

Media glamorise young, single women as enjoying independence while concurrently yearning to meet a man and settle down (Freeman, 2015). Popular television shows such as *Bachelorette* have been shown to promote the social norms that are associated with stereotyping and discrimination towards singles and result in stigmatisation of those who violate those norms (Keener & Massey, 2015). Keener and Massey (2015) further argued that the power of the media in shaping attitudes towards social groups, as well as in maintaining any inequalities. Even articles disguised as proponents of women's choice contain derogatory messages explaining that single is a good choice

now because the only guys left to marry are all losers (Reifman et al., 2016). Despite the modern espoused focus on singlehood as a choice, older single women formerly categorised as old maids and spinsters are now satirised by the media as crazy cat ladies while simultaneously being discriminated against based on gender, age, and marital status (Lahad, 2016).

Independent older single women are maligned as unnatural and incompetent (Barak, 2014). As women aged, they reported being acutely aware of the relationship between their increasing age and their social environment in terms of fewer men still eligible for marriage, watching other people get married, increasing concerns over the viability of becoming pregnant later in life, increased attention paid to their single status, and feeling displaced in their birth families when a younger sibling married and had children before them (Sharp & Ganong, 2011).

Also, a norm is a standard of behaviour that is considered proper or acceptable. The greater the proportion of people who participate in the behaviour, the more likely it is to represent a norm (Evertsson, 2013; Rimal & Lapinski, 2015). An individual who does not conform to social norms is deviant and particularly a social deviant if he or she touts the refusal to accept social norms (Eck, 2013). Marriage continues to be considered natural, a normative role for adults, and a social norm that confers deviant status on individuals with different lifestyles (Eck, 2013).

Narrative research with single women found that watching others marry increased their experienced pressure to marry which indicates that the marriage norm may have an informational influence since it appears to exert a stronger impact the more others observe people doing it (Krupka & Weber, 2009). Feminist critique purports that marriage confers a bourgeois (middle class) respectability on those who choose

marriage, which then cannot help but deem other lifestyle options as less respectable (Marso, 2010).

Despite the increase in alternative lifestyles such as cohabitation, research indicates that women still view marriage as a natural and popular stepping stone to adulthood (Morris, Sinclair & DePaulo, 2007). In addition to practical reasons to marry including security, stability, sexuality, pregnancy and children, women also state that remaining single is socially unacceptable (Morris et al., 2007). In terms of singlism, the difference between married and single has grown into the difference between coupled and single, as more individuals spend time cohabitating which closely resembles marriage, but without all of the state-conferred benefits (Morris et al., 2007).

Moreover, single people are often described as lonelier, less attractive, less satisfied with their lives, more neurotic, less warm, and caring, and having lower self-esteem than non-single people. Some comparative studies indeed indicated that single people are less satisfied with the status of their relationships (Greitemeyer, 2009), and are significantly romantically lonelier when compared to those in a committed relationship (Berend, 2000; Van, 2012). It is also habitually assumed that single people have been deprived of the transcendent experience of a romantic relationship (DePaulo & Morris, 2005).

This negative attitude towards single people often leads to the stigmatization and discrimination of single people, including their marginalization (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Such discrimination includes, for example, a landlord's preference for married tenants. Proof of the persistence of such stigmatization (also termed singlism) is found in studies that document the negative attitude towards single people (DePaulo & Morris, 2005).

The stigmatization of single people often carries a gender bias (Van, 2012). Single women are frequently presumed to be neurotic, promiscuous and dangerous, and are seen as “old maids” (Van, 2012). Another term used to describe single women especially those of more advanced age is “spinster” (Gordon, 1994). On the other hand, single men are often referred to as the “eligible bachelors” (Van, 2012). Yet, colloquially, these terms have vastly different connotations. The old maid, for example, can be colloquially defined as:

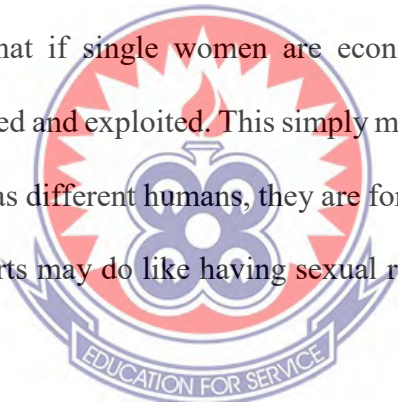
A woman who has passed the age at which women typically marry derogatory term; “maid” is short for “maiden” meaning “virgin”, and stems from the former presumption that a woman who had neither married nor had children was a virgin (Cherlin, 2010). Another colloquial definition of an old maid includes four attributes: the assumption that the person is a virgin or sexually fastidious; that she is sexually aloof and shows little to no interest in men; and that she is over particular, pernickety and shallow.

Lastly, this definition also comes with the prediction that she will die a virgin, without having been in a long-term relationship, and alone (Conley & Collins, 2002). On the other hand, some colloquial definitions for a bachelor include that “he is someone who understands the true definition of marriage (Marriage is the #1 cause of divorce)” (Van, 2012). Another definition holds that a bachelor is an unmarried man and a women’s dream man, who flirts on almost any occasion (Van, 2012). Whilst these definitions are not academic, they do provide valuable insight into the way laypeople use terms such as “old maid” and “bachelor”.

Literature on unmarried women and singlehood reveal that stigmatization and marginalization are still the dominant marks of singlehood. The extent to which singlehood is stigmatized is closely tied to context (Depaulo & Morris, 2005). Hertel et

al. (2007) researched single and married and concluded that “it is true that singleness is regarded and commonly accepted as a transitional state at a young age a forty-year-old single is much more stigmatized than a 25-year-old single” (p. 156). To them, the degree to which singlehood is stigmatized is closely linked to context. The reason being that whose age is that twenty-something in many societies is regarded to be the appropriate age for marriage while women forty and above are perceived by society as too old for a man to marry this implies that in many societies’ marriage is something that has a deadline and women are something with and expiry date.

Single women are socially boycotted and victimized, psychologically they are subjected to mental tensions, and sexually they are vulnerable (Gordon, 1994). Gordon (1994) again posited that if single women are economically dependent, they find themselves doubly abused and exploited. This simply means socially unmarried women are regarded by people as different humans, they are forbidden to do certain things that their married counterparts may do like having sexual relations with a man and people shun their company.



According to Reynolds and Wetherell (2011), unmarried women have many explanations and questions to answer regarding the circumstances behind their single status. Reynolds and Wetherell (2011) argued that women in long-term relationships do not tend to be asked (in a concerned tone of voice), for example, “How did you end up married?” Apology and confessions are not the dominant discursive genres for these accounts. The single woman, in ‘contrast is expected to have an explanation for her ‘condition’, preferably a story of ‘circumstances’ and ‘missed opportunities’ or one that blames herself for being unable to hold a man (p. 2).

The quote by Reynolds and Wetherell (2011) implies unmarried women are expected to explain and justify being never married at their age. They are told by families and friends that they are too picky in terms of the men they find attractive. They must be ready to answer the question why? What? And how come they are unmarried while members of their societies think at a certain point in their lives they must be married? They are expected to tell the circumstances behind their status or certain behaviours that led them to still be single.

In support of this, Byrne (2003) stated that women who participated in his study routinely commented that their singleness is always a matter of discussion, curiosity, and a basis for inquiry from others. Most people assume that women in their thirties are married: if they are not, they are required to explain their single status. Women believe that being single excludes them from the rest of society, describing themselves as outsiders looking in critically irrespective of age, income, education, occupation, homeownership, socioeconomic status, presence or absence of a partner or network of friends, whether caring for a parent or other person, all talk about the presence and experience of single stigma in their lives (Byrne, 2003).

Women described family occasions, birthdays, weddings, holidays, dinner parties, and social settings in which most people are coupled or tied by the parent, child, and intimate family relationships as being particularly challenging for them and the least inviting. Due to that, most women refuse all dinner invitations or work celebrations that emphasize their singleness. Coupled and family social events mark the single woman as an outsider, as different and are settings that provide opportunities for others to inquire because women remain single. These occasions are reminders that others

perceive single women as different and expect women to account for this difference, these reminders are painful (Byrne, 2003).

Literature also reveals that when people want to maintain their self-esteem and status quo, they resort to using discrimination and stigmatization. For example, research conducted by Yamamoto (2013), showed that because single is seen as a threat to the ideology of marriage, they tend to be discriminated against. “Maintaining self-esteem is one motivation which impels married persons to discriminate. This motive is universal. People often try to justify their status quo and derogate out-groups to sustain their self-esteem” (Yamamoto, 2013, p. 5).

Again, according to Simon (2002), the cultural meaning of adulthood is still defined by marriage. A girl becomes a woman when she is married, whether she is sixteen or sixty. An unmarried woman is seen as not being mature enough to be an adult until she finds a husband. This idea comes about because of conventional marital ideology which perpetuates the notion that a woman does not have an adult identity except concerning another. A woman must be a daughter, a wife, or a mother to exist (Depaul & Morris, 2005).

The views of Sharp and Ganong (2011) showed that societies perceive the femininity of a woman based on her connection with a man to protect and care for her. This implies an unmarried woman is likely to be seen as an abnormal woman, and someone who may lack protection because a man in a woman’s life is her protector. Sharp and Ganong (2011) stressed that society perceives a woman as not fully accomplished despite her education and career unless she says is married. Too Sharp and Ganong (2011) irrespective of a woman’s achievement in life, society still sees her as not being accomplished unless she ties the knot with a man.

According to DePaulo and Morris (2006), “singles were often described as immature, lonely, ugly and insecure as compared to married women who were likely be viewed as mature, stable, honest, kind and loving” (p. 152). Adams (2011) similarly indicated that unmarried women are viewed as lonely and not have someone there for them. In contradiction with this, McErlean (2015) argued that singleness has a positive side because it makes people self-reliant. Child-free women are also described as cheap, thoughtless, immature, irresponsible, and unwilling to give up their self-indulgent lifestyle. A woman is incomplete or deficient in some way when she has not given birth. Marriage and children are assumed necessary to complete a woman’s life. Therefore, women who are not married and didn’t give birth are commonly represented as unfulfilled, and their life is considered as not a well-rounded, appealing life (McErlean, 2015). This connotes that many societies in the world tend to see the unmarried woman as lonely who does not have anyone there for her, irrespective of her position in the society, as immature, and someone who is not truthful.

Additionally, unmarried females are blamed because people think they must have some character problem to remain single. Morris et al. (2007) stressed this idea by saying unmarried persons often are viewed as responsible for their single status people think they are single because of their promiscuity, immaturity, self-centeredness, or a lack of personal discipline.

From the statement one can say that if a woman is seen to be responsible for her single status, it implies such a woman might have done something wrong like her inability to get a man, she might seem to have some faulty lifestyle, or she might appear to her society as someone who is too timid and for that reason unable to get close to a man. This can also mean that people do not care, so long as a woman remains single, to

society, she must be having some character problems. Byrne (2003) opined that “social identities for single women revolved around stereotyped of fussy, selfish, choosy, spinsters, dried up, old, women who hated men, women who were left on the shelf and women who had something with them” (p. 121).

The above connotations are derogatory and perhaps insulting. An unmarried woman is said to be when she appears not to compromise on any man at all just in the name of marriage or not to settle for any man that she does not like. When it is said that unmarried women hate men it means they do not want to have anything to do with a man. Besides, when woman is viewed as wallflowers and left on the shelf, it may imply many people see unmarried women as people who seem to have problems with men, old looking, and women who have been forgotten by other people in their societies (Freeman, 2015)

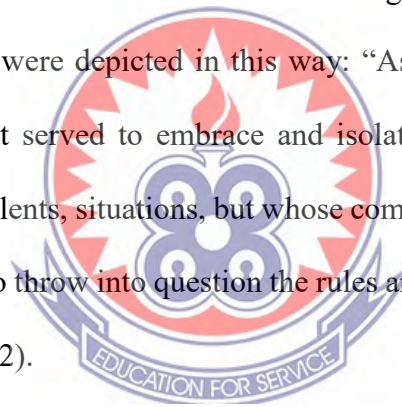
Byrne (2003) argued that single women’s sexuality is openly and publicly scrutinized by others: women are reminded about their lack of sexual relationship with a man in the constant comments and queries of family, friends and strangers. A woman’s sexuality is securitized whether she is celibate or seeking a sexual relationship. Single women said they are perceived as either man-haters or man-hunters. Married women are also perceived as single women as a seductresses and as a threat to their marital relationship. Being on the single scene, looking for a partner is acceptable up to a certain age: a younger woman looking for “Mr Right” fulfils gender expectations. Being on the scene as an older, sexually available single woman, however, is not accepted. The problems of looking for a partner can no longer be talked about openly with friends or family, as older women do not want to be seen as looking for a man or that desperate.

The perceptions of unmarried women make it difficult for them to have a friendly relationship with many men because married people may see them be seductive. Unmarried females who try to have friendships with many men are openly securitized by others who think they might be having an illicit sexual relationship with such men. Besides, if an unmarried woman decides not to have a friendship with men, she is constantly asked to have a relationship with a man to marry. Unmarried females have many questions to answer from friends, relatives, and even strangers. However, some are also perceived as hunters who are desperately looking for people's husbands if they cannot find their own. These attitudes make it difficult for unmarried women to openly tell friends about their desires for a lover because they might be perceived to be desperate by their married counterparts or other members of society (Situmorang, 2007).

Moreover, traditionally a woman's life is designed as heterosexual romance and marriage is the ultimate success, with a normative progression from heterosexual courting and engagement phase through to culmination in marriage, at which point the woman's story ends. This narrative obscures women's agency and selfhood beyond heterosexual romantic relationships constitutes an obstacle to unmarried women's acceptance of their lifestyles as valid, ignores the possibility that women might positively choose to remain unmarried and contributes to cultural images of unmarried women as miserable, desperate, and flawed. Remaining unmarried is consequently regarded as a failure rather than a choice, a woman who cannot get a man to be the loser, is regarded as deviant and worthy of pity, as she must have insufficient resources to attract a husband (Tadesse, 2018).

A study conducted in Palestine by Pereira (2014) strengthened this idea that unmarried women who participated in a focus group discussion stated that they did not locate the source of the misery in their lack of a spouse rather the problem was the community response to their unmarried state. Unmarried women could be happy if there was no society to say, old maids and spinsters. Unmarried women could be happy if they have good work and stable employment.

In furtherance, during the nineteenth century, women who remained single past the age they were supposed to marry were called spinsters. The term spinster as indicated early on is not a favorable term. It came from the act of spinning cloth; a job that was the first task given to unmarried women to let them earn a living. Poortman and Liefbroer (2010) showed how spinsters were depicted in this way: “As a witch, spinster, was a scare word, a stereotype that served to embrace and isolate a group of women of vastly different disposition, talents, situations, but whose common bond, never becoming half of a pair, was enough to throw into question the rules and presumed priorities on which society was found” (p. 2).



This quote indicates that unmarried females were viewed in many societies as people who appeared to be abnormal to their societies irrespective of their abilities and talents. Rebeca (2016) noted that at a late adolescent age, an un-wedded daughter would be stigmatized as an “old maid” (Komo ker), which is embarrassing to the parents. They might also be labelled as poor because poor families are not usually able to marry off their daughters at an early age. Further, he added that most farmers marry off their children before the age of twelve (thus, before puberty). It is girls from poor families that marry after that age.

Spinster and old maids are terms still used in Western culture to designate a woman's never-married status. According to him, the language that people use further functions to enhance stigma in the sense that people are referred to as unmarried or never married; the terms have negative connotations meaning a state of lacking. This implies that until a woman is married, it appears she may be viewed as a woman who lacks something necessary for her to have. Marriage is tied to a woman's sense of having everything she needs for her to live as a normal human (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2011).

This also shows that in the 19th century unmarried females in western society were generally called spinsters. The history of the term spinster does not depict positive images, but rather negative connotations as indicated in the above paragraph. In summary, one can say that many societies cherish marriage so much that in the past, women who did not marry tended to be viewed negatively. There are other labels of unmarried women; a few of these are identified in the following sub-sections.

Unmarried women as less feminine Cockrum and White (as cited in Gorden, 1994). Argued that an unmarried woman is seen to be barren, so she does not know how to nurture babies. In their views, although it is somehow acceptable for a man to choose to remain single, women who choose this path are often seen as less feminine, less loving, and nurturing, less sexually attractive and more selfish. Unmarried females are also seen not to be beautiful to appeal to the eyes of men which is why they are single. In most societies' men, who decide to remain single, do not have issues with negative perception as compared with women.

Historically, heterosexual romance and marriage have been central to the fulfilment of femininity and successful life course transitions, whereas goals such as independence and autonomy have been seen as inconsistent with the achievement of a complete

feminine biography. The implication is that women would not willingly choose to remain unmarried, and this supposition, in turn, contributes to ‘cultural images of the unmarried woman as desperate and flawed’ (Rebeca, 2016).

According to Sharp and Ganong (2011), since successfully performing femininity according to dominant cultural norms means having a sexual connection to a man, single women confront the knowledge that their identities are ‘tainted’ by their single status. Similarly, Byrne and Carr (2005) argued that research conducted over the past twenty years showed that unmarried women are viewed as less likeable. In summary, when an unmarried woman is seen as less likeable, it means many people in her society are likely to feel sorry for her because she seems not to do what everyone does.

2.8 Coping Mechanisms Used by Unmarried Female Professionals

According to Byrne (2003), those whose social identities are perceived as not supporting the dominant norms of society are more likely to be aware of their sense of self (precisely because their identities are objects for public scrutiny and inquiry). Only those who are affected by the consequences of stigmatized social interaction. Individuals can distance themselves from the social identity concerned, the salience of the stigmatized social identity can be refuted, individuals can seek to change the stereotypical representations which make up the stigmatized social identity, they can seek a social identity that supports approved norms, or they can compose a self-identity with which they are secure, and which fits with their values and choices.

Single women have learned to be not only highly situation-conscious but also adept in managing social relationships. Women routinely invent excuses not to attend coupled factions. Some women learn to avoid being discredited in work and social settings by concealing personal information about themselves and by keeping their private life and

work life separate. Others deliberately mislead, and pretend to be married, partnered or engaged drawing attention away from their continuing singleness. Some women invited a boyfriend or persuaded a friend to pose as their fiancée to deter queries about their marital intentions from ever-anxious neighbours and relatives. Other women wore engagement rings.

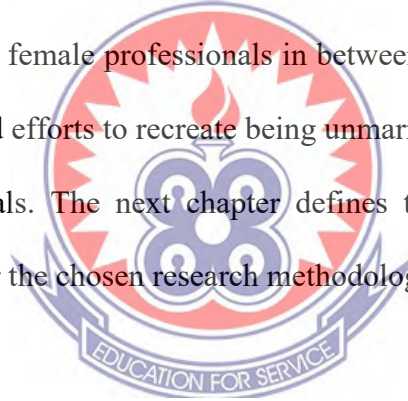
Being alone in settings is often an occasion when women have to deal with unwanted sexual attention of predatory men by mentioning that they had a boyfriend, partner or spouse. These strategies indicate that single women have learned to cope with, prepare for and respond to a stigmatized social identity. The protective strategies deter further inquiry and stigmatization. Stigma effectively works to elicit support for dominant beliefs, practices, and values, while controlling those who, for whatever reason, choose to do otherwise (Byrne, 2003).

Women have a list of stories to explain their singleness to others which reduces the consequences of stigma in interaction. These stories are understood as responses to learning that one is a member of a stigmatized social category, and that one has to cope with, prepare for and respond to the presence of a stigmatized social identity. Women's singleness has always to be explained and single women are adept at providing a variety of accounts to others of why they are single. The veracity of the account depends on the situation, who is asking the question, the sincerity of the inquiry and the general mood of the woman herself. Depending on the context, women could advance several explanations at any one time or vary the explanation used from one situation to another (Byrne, 2003).

2.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter was a review of literature relevant to the phenomenon of unmarried females. Major themes discussed in the literature surrounding the unmarried included: The concept of marriage; the concept of singlehood/singleness; reasons for remaining single; feelings the unmarried females go through due to their marital status; perceptions people have towards unmarried females and their outcomes; coping mechanisms used by unmarried females; chapter summary.

From the review, it was identified that a paucity of newer research explored the concept of single as a positive social identity for women, including ways to support and foster that identity. The study attempted to target a gap that existed in the body of research surrounding unmarried female professionals in between the establishment of singlism as a social problem and efforts to recreate being unmarried as a positive social identity for female professionals. The next chapter defines the research methodology and provides a rationale for the chosen research methodology.



CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter deals with the research methodology to be employed. Subheadings discussed includes the research paradigm, research approach, research approach, research design, positionality, population and sample and sampling technique. It further discusses the data collection instrument, trustworthiness of the interviews, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Paradigm

The study adopted the interpretivism paradigm. Hammersley (2013) argued that methods used to understand knowledge related to human and social sciences cannot be the same as its usage in physical sciences because human interprets their world and then acts based on such interpretation while the world does not. Therefore, interpretivism adopts a relativist ontology in which a single phenomenon may have multiple interpretations rather than a truth that can be determined by a process of measurement.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) posited that with the interpretivism perspective, researchers tend to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and its complexity in its unique context instead of trying to generalise the base of understanding for the whole population. In the same way, Hammersley (2013) emphasised that since multiple interpretations are developed among human' relationships, interpretivism researchers should try to understand "the diverse ways of seeing and experiencing the world through different contexts and cultures" and try to avoid bias in studying the events and people with their interpretations (p. 192).

The use of this paradigm helped the researcher not to only describe the phenomenon under exploration, but also to deeply understand the lived experiences and coping mechanisms of unmarried female professionals in its social context (Hammersley, 2013). In addition, it helped the researcher explore the lived experiences and coping mechanisms of unmarried female professionals in a natural setting (Tuli, 2010). Further, it provided more authentic information that was related to the lived experiences and coping mechanisms of unmarried female professionals (Tuli, 2010). Also, the use of this paradigm helped the researcher to explore participants' thoughts, values, views, feelings and misconceptions towards the topic under investigation (Mark, 2010). Thus, valuable data collected would provide researchers with better insights for further action later.

Aside from these strengths, the use of the paradigm had some drawbacks. For example, findings from this study cannot be generalised to other people and other contexts (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013). Also, results from this study can be subjective rather than objective (Mack, 2010). Thus, the findings of the study can be affected by the researcher's interpretation, own belief system, ways of thinking or cultural preference which causes too many biases (Cohen et al., 2013). Again, it can lack the understanding of addressing the political and ideological impact on knowledge and social reality (Mark, 2010). Though the use of this paradigm had some weaknesses, its strengths were perceived by the researcher to have been more than the weaknesses, hence, its adoption.

3.2 Research Approach

A qualitative approach was used. This approach is to explore the meaning of social phenomena as experienced by the people themselves (Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow & Ponterotto, 2017). Gopaldas (2016) postulated that qualitative research looks for a deep understanding of a particular. Gopaldas (2016) further argued that qualitative research has more advantages in finding rather sensitive social issues like awareness, experience, individual behaviours, and social situations to answer the question of why and how these behaviours and actions happen.

This approach was adopted because it could provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue (Mark, 2010). Also, it provided information about the “human” side of an issue; that is, the often-contradictory behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals (Yin, 2014). Again, the qualitative approach was effective in identifying intangible factors, such as social norms, socioeconomic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion, whose role in the research issue may not be readily apparent (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In furtherance, the use of a qualitative approach helped the researcher to interpret and better understand the complex reality of the topic under exploration.

3.3 Research Design

A phenomenological design was used. This design is concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the individual (Bryman, 2012). Epistemologically, phenomenological design is based on a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity and emphasises the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. Also, the phenomenological design aims to uncover the meaning of an individual’s experience of a specified phenomenon (Lichtman, 2010). It pays respectful attention to

a person's direct experience and encourages research informants to tell their own stories in their own words (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). For these reasons, the researcher found it appropriate to use this design to discover female professional's experiences of being unmarried at a late age.

Moreover, the use of this design helped the researcher to explore the main constructs of the current study, self-perception, perception of marriage and social perspectives about unmarried female professionals. This design was again considered because the researcher was curious to learn about the lived experience of unmarried female professionals and how their unmarried lives were constructed. This was because the researcher had limited knowledge about the views and perspectives of unmarried female professionals; hence, the use of phenomenological research design.

3.4 Positionality

I am a 42-year-old unmarried woman and the only single individual among my four siblings. Coming from a working-class family where marriage is highly valued, it has been a long-standing tradition that daughters leave the family home after marriage. Since I remain unmarried, I have chosen to continue living with my parents, assuming the primary responsibility for household expenses. While my siblings contribute financially to our parents, my financial contributions are more substantial, given that I have attained the highest level of academic achievement in my family and hold a well-compensated position as a teacher. My continued residence with my parents enables me to maintain a close relationship with my family, offering a sense of support and connection. However, my social circle has been in constant flux, as many of my friends have married or emigrated.

Throughout my life, I have experienced moments of anxiety and introspection regarding my marital status. In my early thirties, I held an idealized view of marriage and anticipated getting married promptly. However, societal perceptions and labels, such as being a "career woman," led some to assume that marriage was not a priority for me. I once declined a blind date arranged by my elder sister, reinforcing this perception. Over time, the urgency to marry has diminished. While I no longer feel external pressure except during family gatherings such as weddings and funerals, I have yet to make a definitive decision regarding marriage.

Despite having turned down several dating opportunities, I remain open to the possibility of marriage. My single status has not diminished my belief in the value of a long-term marital relationship, nor do I perceive my unmarried status as a personal failure. Instead, I maintain confidence in my ability to navigate life independently. However, I acknowledge that opportunities to meet potential partners have become increasingly limited with time. While waiting for the right opportunity, I continue to experience implicit and explicit pressures to marry from those within my social and professional circles. My parents, though content with my companionship, have expressed concerns about my future, which I have sought to alleviate by reassuring them of my self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, I recognize the need to plan proactively for the future to mitigate their concerns and my own uncertainties.

A significant aspect of my experience involves maintaining and strengthening relationships with those who matter most to me. As many of my peers have married, I often feel out of place within my social network. Although I have never been subjected to overt criticism regarding my unmarried status, I am aware of the subtle societal biases that frame marriage as a marker of completeness. At social events, such as weddings, I

have encountered well-meaning but intrusive remarks expressing regret over my single status, with some advising against prioritizing professional advancement over marriage. In previous employment settings, some colleagues conveyed the notion that securing a husband should take precedence over career ambitions. These perspectives often overlook the agency and resilience of unmarried women, focusing instead on the presumed difficulties of singlehood rather than how unmarried women lead fulfilling lives.

As a counselling psychologist, I have worked extensively with unmarried women navigating similar experiences. One case that stands out involved a 38-year-old assistant manager at a multinational firm. Despite her professional success and financial stability, she experienced profound feelings of emptiness and depression. She had previously considered marriage but had never found a suitable partner. Now, with a less demanding career, she felt a renewed desire for intimacy and family life. She regretted not prioritizing marriage earlier and questioned whether she could find fulfillment as an unmarried woman in the long term. This case, among others, underscores the complex interplay between personal aspirations, societal expectations, and evolving desires.

Beyond professional counseling, I have also engaged with unmarried women through social and professional networking groups. These women, spanning various professions, expressed contentment with their unmarried lives while also longing for the companionship of a family. These interactions have reinforced my belief that unmarried life is a viable and increasingly common choice among women. Many women choose to remain single to further their education and careers, confident in their ability to support themselves financially and maintain active social lives. Their

perspectives on marriage and singlehood significantly influence their life choices and coping mechanisms. Given the social stigma associated with being an unmarried woman, it is crucial to explore the pressures, challenges, and coping strategies of unmarried female professionals.

In undertaking my research, I have identified key areas of inquiry: the motivations of unmarried female professionals to remain single, their perceptions of their marital status, the verbal and non-verbal reactions they receive regarding their singlehood, the impact of these reactions on their daily lives, and the strategies they employ to navigate societal pressures and stigma. Through this research, I aim to contribute to a nuanced understanding of unmarried female professionals' experiences in Ghana, particularly within the New Juaben South Municipality. My personal experiences, coupled with my professional engagement in counselling and social research, provide me with a unique perspective on this subject matter, shaping my approach and commitment to this study.

In conducting this research, I am acutely aware of the ethical implications of studying sensitive personal experiences. I am committed to maintaining confidentiality, ensuring informed consent, and respecting the autonomy of my participants. Given the potential emotional vulnerability of participants, I will adopt a compassionate and non-judgmental approach, ensuring that participants feel safe sharing their experiences. Additionally, I will implement strategies to mitigate potential psychological distress, including providing referrals to counselling services if needed. By adhering to these ethical principles, I aim to produce research that is not only academically rigorous but also ethically responsible and respectful of the lived experiences of unmarried female professionals in Ghana.

3.4.1 Research Motivation

In response to the examiners' request, I have expanded on the personal and academic motivation behind this study, particularly considering the unique socio-cultural dynamics in Koforidua. The research is motivated by the noticeable lack of studies focusing on the experiences of unmarried female professionals in Ghanaian contexts, despite the growing prominence of women in the professional sphere. The specific motivations for this study stem from the intersection of gender, culture, and professional identity in Koforidua, a city that has experienced rapid socio-economic development in recent years.

According to the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS, 2021), women constitute approximately 50.7% of the country's total population, yet their representation in the formal labour force remains significantly lower than men's. In the Eastern Region, where Koforidua is located, female labour force participation stands at approximately 48%, with an increasing number of women entering professional careers, particularly in education, health, and finance (GSS, 2022). Despite these advancements, societal expectations regarding marriage continue to exert pressure on professional women, shaping their career trajectories and personal choices.

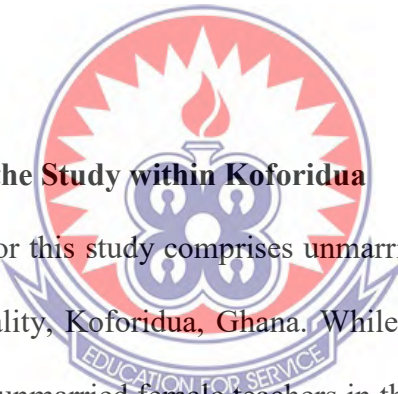
Emerging trends in Koforidua, such as the increasing participation of women in the workforce and the city's evolving urbanization, create a unique context for this study. The rapid expansion of commercial enterprises, coupled with infrastructural growth, has led to greater economic opportunities for women. However, entrenched cultural norms still influence gender roles, creating a paradox for unmarried female professionals striving to balance career ambitions with societal expectations. For instance, a study by Acheampong & Anokye (2017) highlighted that professional

women in Koforidua often experience implicit biases in their workplaces and social circles, further complicating their ability to navigate both professional and personal spaces.

This study aligns with Mikalef & Gupta's (2021) emphasis on exploring how social and professional roles interact within a regional context. Furthermore, research by Davenport et al. (2018) on social role theory provides a strong theoretical framework for understanding the social dynamics that influence these women's coping strategies. The insights derived from this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how professional women in emerging urban centres negotiate career aspirations amid societal expectations.

3.5 Population

3.5.1 Contextualizing the Study within Koforidua



The target population for this study comprises unmarried female teachers in the New Juaben South Municipality, Koforidua, Ghana. While no official statistics explicitly quantify the number of unmarried female teachers in the municipality, local education office records and informal surveys estimate that approximately 53 female teachers aged 35 and above remain unmarried in the New Juaben South Municipality (New Juaben South Municipal Education Directorate, 2023). This estimation serves as a foundational reference point for understanding the socio-professional experiences of this demographic within the municipality.

3.5.2 Socio-Economic and Professional Landscape of Koforidua

Koforidua, the capital of the New Juaben South Municipality, has witnessed significant economic and infrastructural development over the past decade. This transformation has positioned the city as a growing commercial hub, influencing demographic trends,

workforce composition, and gender dynamics in professional settings. The New Juaben South Municipal Assembly (2023) reports a 17% increase in formal business establishments over the past five years, with women leading 35% of these enterprises. Such statistics indicate a shift in economic participation, where women are increasingly occupying leadership roles and redefining professional engagement in the region.

Moreover, the education and health sectors, two predominant employment avenues for women, have experienced notable shifts in workforce composition. Between 2018 and 2022, female employment in these sectors rose by 12% (Ghana Health Service, 2023), signifying greater female participation in traditionally male-dominated fields. Despite these advancements, prevailing gender norms and cultural expectations continue to shape the professional trajectories and societal perceptions of unmarried women in the workforce.

3.5.3 Gender Norms and Societal Expectations in Koforidua

The interplay between career aspirations and cultural expectations remains a critical issue for professional women in Ghana, particularly in urban centres like Koforidua. A report by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana, 2022) highlights that 68% of professional women in such settings face societal pressure to conform to traditional marital expectations. This pressure manifests in various ways, including workplace biases, limited career advancement opportunities, and psychological stress, all of which can influence job satisfaction and professional growth. These societal constraints make Koforidua an apt location for this study, as it presents a microcosm of broader national and regional gender dynamics.

3.5.4 Theoretical and Empirical Justification for Koforidua as a Research

Context

The economic and social evolution of Koforidua presents a compelling case for examining the intersection of professional identity and socio-cultural expectations. Industry case studies from the banking and health sectors in the region (Acheampong & Anokye, 2017) underscore the challenges women encounter as they navigate professional careers while balancing societal norms. These studies reveal that, despite economic progress, gender biases persist in recruitment practices, promotion criteria, and professional networking opportunities, further complicating the experiences of unmarried female professionals.

The conceptual relevance of this study is further reinforced by the gender role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), which posits that societal perceptions of appropriate gender roles influence career trajectories and workplace experiences. This theory aligns with the findings of contemporary studies, such as those by Adusah-Karikari (2018) and Kusi et al. (2020), which document how professional women in Ghana negotiate workplace expectations within a culturally rigid environment. By situating this study within Koforidua, a region experiencing rapid economic change yet still rooted in traditional gender norms, this research contributes to the broader discourse on gender, professional identity, and socio-cultural expectations in Ghana.

3.5.5 Contribution to High-Impact Research

By anchoring this study within contemporary statistical data and relevant theoretical frameworks, it aligns with high-impact research published in top-tier academic journals. The study intends to extend existing literature on gender and professional identity by incorporating empirical data from an underexplored demographic—

unmarried female teachers in Koforidua. Furthermore, it integrates intersectional perspectives, considering how gender, marital status, and socio-economic factors collectively shape professional experiences. Through this approach, the research aims to contribute valuable insights to global discussions on gender equity, workplace inclusivity, and socio-cultural influences on professional development.

In sum, the contextualization of this study within Koforidua is justified by statistical evidence, theoretical grounding, and alignment with established academic discourse. By bridging local empirical data with global gender studies, the research strengthens its relevance and potential impact on policy development, workplace equity strategies, and further academic inquiries into gender and professional identity in emerging economies.

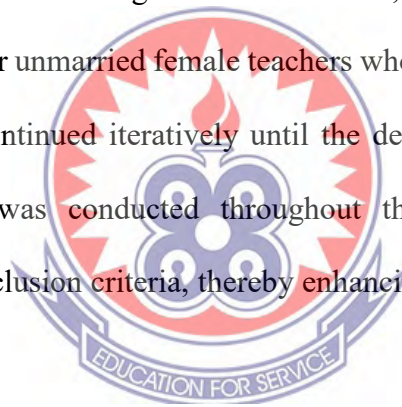
3.6 Sample and Sampling Technique

Recent educational statistics from Ghana further underscore the appropriateness of the snowball sampling technique for this study. According to the Ghana Education Service (GES) 2023 report, female teachers constitute approximately 42% of the total teaching workforce in public basic and senior high schools. However, data on their marital status remains largely undocumented, reflecting a gap in official records (GES, 2023). Additionally, research by Osei et al. (2022) highlights that social norms influence unmarried women's self-representation in professional settings, making direct identification challenging. These findings validate the researcher's choice of snowball sampling as an effective means of accessing this specific demographic.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative researchers typically use a sample size ranging from 5 to 25 participants. However, in this study, the researcher adopted a data saturation approach, whereby participants were interviewed until no new

information emerged. Data saturation occurs when responses become repetitive and additional interviews yield no novel insights (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). This approach ensures the robustness of qualitative findings and aligns with best practices in qualitative research methodology. In this study, saturation was reached at the 15th participant, resulting in a final sample size of 15 unmarried female teachers from basic and senior high schools within the New Juaben South Municipality.

The sampling process commenced with the identification of 2-3 unmarried female teachers who were willing to participate. These initial participants were identified through personal networks, social media engagement, and direct visits to schools within the Municipality. After obtaining informed consent, these initial participants were asked to nominate other unmarried female teachers who met the inclusion criteria. This recruitment process continued iteratively until the desired sample size was reached. Eligibility screening was conducted throughout the process to ensure that all participants met the inclusion criteria, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the sample.



This study employed the **snowball sampling technique**, a non-probability sampling method commonly used when the target population is difficult to locate (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Snowball sampling relies on participant referrals to identify additional subjects with similar characteristics. The rationale for choosing this technique was based on the following considerations:

Difficulty in Identifying Unmarried Female Teachers: In Ghana, marital status disclosure among female teachers can be inconsistent. Some unmarried teachers wear wedding rings to avoid social scrutiny, while others do not update their marital status in official education office records. Consequently, direct identification through

institutional records proved impractical. The snowball approach allowed for more reliable participant recruitment through trusted networks (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981).

Exploratory Nature of the Study: Given that the study aimed to explore perspectives and lived experiences of unmarried female teachers, an exploratory approach was necessary. Snowball sampling is widely recommended for qualitative research that seeks to understand social behaviors within specific groups (Heckathorn, 2011).

Cost-Effectiveness: Snowball sampling reduced the cost and time associated with locating participants. Traditional survey methods, such as random sampling, would have required extensive resources to identify eligible individuals (Noy, 2008). The use of referrals significantly streamlined participant recruitment while maintaining research integrity.

Inaccessibility of the Target Population: Unlike general population surveys, where databases exist for random selection, unmarried female teachers did not form a readily accessible database. Snowball sampling allowed the researcher to tap into hidden populations, ensuring inclusivity in the study (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004).

Despite its advantages, snowball sampling has inherent limitations. The primary concern is selection bias, as referrals tend to be drawn from similar social circles, thereby reducing sample diversity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This limitation affects generalizability, meaning the findings may not fully represent all unmarried female teachers in the New Juaben South Municipality. However, given that the study was qualitative, the primary objective was depth rather than breadth, making snowball sampling an appropriate choice.

In conclusion, the study adopted a data saturation approach to determine the sample size, reaching a final count of 15 participants. Snowball sampling was employed due to the challenges associated with identifying unmarried female teachers in the New Juaben South Municipality. While the technique facilitated access to a difficult-to-reach population, it introduced potential biases that should be acknowledged when interpreting results. Nonetheless, the use of this approach was justified by the exploratory nature of the study, cost-effectiveness, and the inaccessibility of official data on the target population.

3.7 Data Collection Instrument

The semi-structured interview guide was adopted. This is a type of qualitative interview in which the researcher asks participants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions. In this sense, the researcher is allowed to ask probing questions as and when the need arises. This is done by the development of a written interview guide in advance by the researcher (Yin, 2014). In this study, the researcher formulated open-ended questions that were intended to elicit data from the participants to get rich, substantial, and relevant data on the topic under investigation (Yin, 2014).

The semi-structured interview guide was used because the researcher wanted to gather qualitative, open-ended data to answer research questions 1, 2, 3 and 4. Besides, it helped the researcher to explore participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about the phenomenon under investigation. More so, the use of this data collection tool helped the researcher to dive deep into personal and sensitive issues concerning the topic under investigation. Again, the use of this type of interview guide allowed the researcher to have a set of premeditated questions, yet, allowed the researcher to explore new developments in the course of the interviews (Yin, 2013).

Moreover, it gave the researcher the freedom to deviate from the set of interview questions and sequence as long as the researcher remained with the overall scope of the interview (Yin, 2014). Additionally, the semi-structured interview in this study made use of an interview guide which was an informal grouping of topics and questions related to the research objectives that the researcher asked in different ways (Yin, 2014).

The semi-structured interview guide was developed by the researcher in consultation with the research supervisor. It was made up of six sections: Sections A, B, C, D, E and F. Section A was made up of statements that elicited demographic information of participants. They included: Age, and years in the relationship. Also, section B was made up of open-ended statements that elicited data on reasons why unmarried female professionals in New Juaben South Municipality remain single. Data from this section was used to answer research question 1. Moreover, section C was made up of open-ended statements that focused on how unmarried female professionals feel about their marital status. Responses from this section were used to answer research question 2.

Again, section D was used to ask open-ended questions related to verbal and non-verbal comments and reactions unmarried female professionals received about their marital status. Answers from this section were used to answer research question 3. Section E was devoted to open-ended questions that solicited data on how these verbal and non-verbal comments and reactions to their marital status affect their daily life. Data from this section were used to answer research question 4. Finally, section F was used to ask open-ended questions associated with how unmarried female professionals cope with the internal and external pressure to marry and the social stigma of being single. Data from this section were used to answer research question

3.8 Trustworthiness

Credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability were checked as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). To ensure credibility, the researcher used probing questions to elicit detailed information from the respondents. More so, member checks were ensured by playing the audio recordings of the interview as well as reading the field notes to respondents for their confirmation. This helped them to confirm the information they had shared.

Further, dependability was granted by making sure that the study report was presented in detail. This was perceived to have served as background information for future researchers to build upon. For transferability, the researcher believed that other researchers could compare the results of this study to their studies. Again, for confirmability, the researcher ensured that the findings of the study were the result of the experiences and ideas of respondents rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. To this end, beliefs underpinning decisions that were made and research methods adopted were acknowledged in the study report.

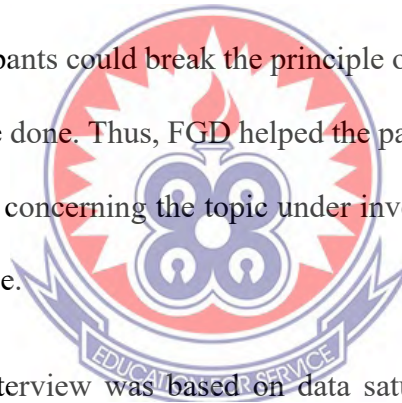
3.8 Data Collection Procedures

Permission was sought from gatekeepers (headteachers) and participants using an introduction letter from the Head, Department of Counselling Psychology, University of Education, Winneba. After securing the permission, preparations were made to administer the instruments on the agreed date, time and venue.

Participants were given explanations of the purpose of the study and the intended use of the data. They were also assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The interviews were in two folds: Face-to-face and focus group discussion (FGD) approaches were adopted. Focus group discussion was first adopted using the semi-structured interview

guide. Three participants formed a group and there were three groups. The researcher sought permission from the participants to record the interviews using a voice recorder. For participants who did not permit the researcher to record their interviews, the researcher paused the recorder and field notes were taken as the alternative approach. Also, the voice recorder was well-positioned by the researcher in such a way that the participants' voices were well recorded for easy transcription. Similarly, it helped in eliminating issues of distorting the meaning of the raw data which could have happened if their voices were not to be clear. One hour was used for the FGD.

Moreover, face-to-face interviews followed the focus group discussion. This approach allowed participants to share their stories of which they could not do so because they perceived other participants could break the principle of confidentiality while the face-to-face interviews were done. Thus, FGD helped the participants to open more to share their lived experiences concerning the topic under investigation. Twenty minutes was used for the face-to-face.



The sample for the interview was based on data saturation. Data saturation can be described as the point in the research process when no new information is discovered in data collection and this redundancy signals to researchers that data collection may cease (Cibangu, 2012). Data saturation was obtained after the 15th participant was interviewed. This sample was believed by the researcher to have been the idea for the study. The reason is that Creswell and Creswell (2018) argued that 5-25 persons can be used for conducting interviews.

3.9 Data Analysis Procedures

The data were analysed in themes. First, the raw data were transcribed into words, cleaned and the responses from the participants were identified with colour codes to enable the researcher to easily associate specific responses to the appropriate participants. Subsequently, it was transported using excel and subjected to four levels of coding after highlighting the main ideas in the raw data (Zohrabi, 2013).

Open or initial coding: This was done by reading through the transcript several times and labelling sections of the transcript that was very significant to some facts that the data represented. This enabled the concept to emerge from the raw data and was subsequently jotted as memos. Different colours were used for each respondent for easy identification and linking verbatim quotations to appropriate interviewees.

Focused coding and category development: At this stage, the researcher tried to gain understanding from the first level of coding. To do so, the researcher tried to answer the question: “what is this data saying?” Additionally, data from the first level of coding that articulated similar ideas were merged at this stage (Levitt et al., 2017).

Axial and thematic coding: This is the stage whereby the researcher discussed in detail the implications emerging from the second level of coding by relating codes into a larger category of common meaning. This was achieved by linking codes to context, to consequences, and causes intending to become the category of the axis around which several codes revolve (Bedu-Addo, 2010).

Development of theoretical concepts: This happens to be the last stage of the analysis whereby the researcher generated theoretical concepts based on the implications that were discussed under the axial and thematic coding (Bedu-Addo, 2010). Where there

was the need for direct quotes, pseudo-names were used. Only those grammatical nuances, idioms and figures of speech deemed necessary were included in the transcript to create data that was as close to the recorded voice as possible (Bedu-Addo, 2010).

3.10 Ethical Considerations

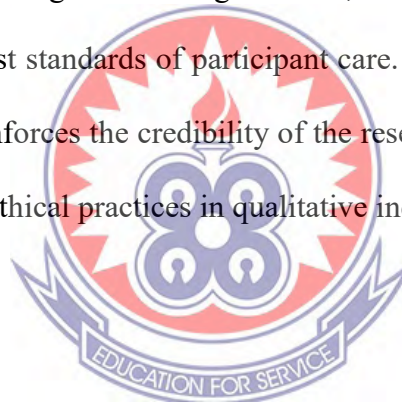
Before initiating data collection, rigorous ethical protocols were established to safeguard the rights and well-being of all participants. An introductory letter from the Head of the Department of Counselling Psychology at the University of Education, Winneba, was secured. This document was instrumental in obtaining the necessary approvals from institutional gatekeepers, thereby legitimizing the recruitment process (Wiles et al., 2008).

In line with established ethical frameworks (Beauchamp & Childress, 2013; American Psychological Association, 2017), informed consent was obtained from all participants. Detailed explanations regarding the study's purpose, the intended use of the collected data, and the specific procedures involved were provided before consent. This process ensured that participants were fully aware of their involvement and that their autonomy was respected.

To maintain confidentiality, each questionnaire was assigned a unique code, and all data were stored securely, accessible only to the research team. Participants were specifically instructed to omit any identifiable information—such as names, email addresses, house numbers, or contact details—in their responses. Additionally, responses were transcribed verbatim and coded (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2, ..., Participant 15) to further protect individual identities. These measures adhere to best practices in qualitative research ethics as recommended by leading scholars (Tracy, 2010; Orb et al., 2001).

Recognizing the sensitive nature of the personal experiences explored in this study—particularly those of unmarried female professionals in Ghana—I adopted a compassionate, non-judgmental stance throughout the research process. This approach not only facilitated a supportive environment for sharing personal narratives but also helped mitigate any potential emotional distress. To further address this vulnerability, strategies were implemented to provide immediate support, including referrals to counselling services if needed. Such practices are critical in research involving sensitive topics and are endorsed in contemporary ethical discussions within top-tier journals (Malterud, 2001).

By adhering to these stringent ethical guidelines, this study upholds both academic integrity and the highest standards of participant care. The integration of these ethical principles not only reinforces the credibility of the research but also contributes to the ongoing discourse on ethical practices in qualitative inquiry.



CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.0 Introduction

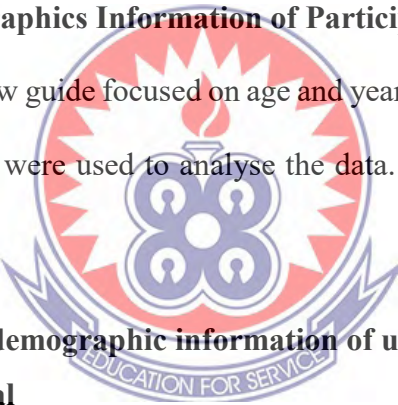
The chapter deals with the results of the study on lived experiences and coping mechanisms of unmarried female professionals in New Juaben South Municipality, Koforidua, Ghana. The chapter has two sections: Sections A and B. Section A presents the results on demographic information of participants and section B deals with results from the research questions and discussions.

Section A

4.1 Results on Demographics Information of Participants

Items 1-2 of the interview guide focused on age and years in the relationship. Frequency counts and percentages were used to analyse the data. Results are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Results on demographic information of unmarried female professional



	Categories	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Age (in years)	35	2	13
	36	3	20
	37	1	7
	38	2	13
	39	3	20
	40 and above	4	27
Years in Relationship	1-2	2	13
	3-4	2	13
	5-6	4	27
	7-8	1	7
	9-10	3	20
	11 and above	3	20

Source: Field data, (2021) (Total Number of Unmarried Female Professionals=15)

In Table 4.1, the results show that 2(representing 13%) of the unmarried female professionals were 35 years. Also, 3(representing 20%) claimed that they were 36 years old. Further, 1(representing 7%) proclaimed that she was 37 years old. Moreover, 2(representing 13%) indicated that they were 38 years old. Lastly, 4(representing 27%) revealed that they were 40 years old. The results infer that these unmarried female professionals were advancing in age though they had not married.

Section B

4.2 Results from the Research Questions and Discussions

4.2.1 Research Question One: What are the reasons for unmarried female professionals in New Juaben South Municipality to remain single?

The objective of this question was to find out the reasons why unmarried female professionals in New Juaben South Municipality remain single. Questions 1-4 under section B of the interview guide were used to solicit data to answer this question.

It was realised from the comments given by the participants that there were varied reasons why they remained single. The main theme which was the reasons for unmarried female professionals generated sub-themes such as attaining a high level of education, setting a high standard in life, fear of being disappointed, enjoyment of singlehood, cohabitation, high career focus, superstition, and perception of many suitors lining up for these females were reasons why unmarried female professionals in New Juaben South Municipality remained single.

4.2.1.1 Attain a high level of education

The following comments were given by some participants to confirm this sub-theme.

For example, participant 8 said:

“Hmm.... As for me, I wanted to get to a high level on my educational ladder before thinking about who to marry. Little did I know that it will get to a point where I will wish I get married but, will not get a responsible guy to marry me” (Participant 8, face-to-face interview).

The comments from this participant suggest that she set a high target concerning her education. This comment infers that this participant did not want relationship and marriage issues to interrupt her education. Also, participant 3 said:

“While growing up, I gave more attention to my education than marriage. So, I think it is a contributing factor to my present state” (Participant 3, face-to-face interview).

The comments from this participant infer that she concentrated more on her education than marriage. It could also be realized from this participant’s comments that she gave less attention to marital issues but focused more on her education.

4.2.1.2 Setting a high standard in life

The following comments were given by some participants to confirm this sub-theme.

For instance, a participant 4 shares her story as:

“One thing I have realised in life is that if a married woman does not have a high status in society, most of the time, their husbands do not respect them. For this reason, I wanted to get to a high status in life before I get married” (Participant 4, face-to-face interview).

The comment from this participant denotes that she perceived that high status in life is a good basis for husbands to respect their wives. The comment also suggests that this participant is paid particular attention to her status in life other than her marriage. One of the participants also added that:

“Getting to a high level in life as a woman before getting married is very good. This was my focus while I was growing up in life. Little did I know that it will turn against me one day” (Participant 2, face-to-face interview).

The comment from this participant signifies that her preconceived knowledge about a woman’s status in life before getting married played a role in her current state. The comment again suggests that she did not want to get married before thinking of getting a high status in life.

4.2.1.3: Fear of being disappointed

The following comments were given by some participants to confirm this sub theme.

Participant 1 said this:

“I don’t like disappointment in life at all. For that matter, I decided not to be in a relationship before I get married. But for the past 6-8 years, I have been in a relationship with the main of looking for a guy to marry, but, it seems all those coming my way are not my ‘taste’” (Participant 1, face-to-face interview).

A discussant also added:

“I’m from a family background where females go through a lot of disappointment before they finally settle on a man, they will marry. I, therefore, kept that fear in me and it is affecting my marriage negatively” (Participant 7, focus group discussion).

These comments suggest that these participants out of fear of being disappointed in a relationship vowed not to enter a relationship. The comment also suggests that for some years now, this participant had not been able to find the guy who meets her criteria or standard. The comments from participant 7 illustrates the background she comes from doing experience disappointment in a relationship most of the time. These comments also infer that for these participants not to be a victim to that, decided not to be in a relationship that may perhaps not lead to marriage. The comments again denote that these participants were engulfed with fear of being disappointed in a relationship.

4.2.1.4: Enjoyment of Singlehood

For singlehood enjoyment, participant 6 had this to share:

“In growing up, I told myself that I would enjoy singlehood to the fullest. My reason was that I did not want to be in a relationship where my guy would put unnecessary pressure on me. This is because I have realised that in most cases, guys want to know every detailed information about the lady they are in a relationship with. This implies that these ladies cannot have their freedom. To avoid this situation, I vowed not to be in a relationship till I have realised that I have enjoyed my singlehood to the fullest” (Participant 6, focus group discussion).

The comments from Participant 6 demonstrate that she purposed in her heart to enjoy her single life to the maximum. The comments also signify that this participant wanted to escape the condition where her guy would mount needless pressure on her in the relationship. The comments further depict that this participant wanted to enjoy her freedom at the youthful stage without allowing a man to put pressure on her as a result of a relationship.

4.2.1.5: Cohabitation, high career focus

Under cohabitation, a participant describes her story by saying:

“I have been staying with guys I enter into a relationship with. As a matter of fact, in such relationships, my guy and I will do almost all the things’ couples will do together. I one day realised, it seems these guys had all that they want from me while in a relationship, so, they hardly attempted to go and seek my hand in marriage” (Participant 15, focus group discussion).

The comments from participant 15 explain cohabitation as the cause of her not being married till now.

With regard to career ambitions, participant 11 has this to say:

“I wanted to complete my education, and start my own business before thinking about whom to marry. To achieve these goals, I realised that I was also ageing. This explains why I have not married till now” (Participant 11)

The comments from Participant 11 suggest that the ambition of career choice was a factor in her current situation (unmarried female professional). The comments also signify that this participant concentrated more on her career than being in a relationship that could lead to marriage one day.

4.2.1. 6: Superstition, and perception of many suitors lining up for them

Concerning superstition, a discussant had this to share:

“Hmmm.... Just last two days, I locked the door of my room and wept bitterly. I even asked God why I am still single though I have all the qualities a lady should have. I think my case is more spiritual” (Participant 4, focus group discussion).

The comments from participant 4 recommend that this participant is of believing that she possessed all the needed qualities of a woman, yet she is still not married. Her comments further depict that she perceived that her current state of marital status can be more attributed to spiritual forces. This suggests that this participant believed that her condition in marriage is more spiritual than physical.

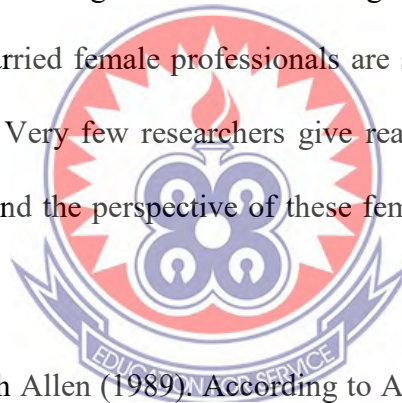
As well, participant 12 describes her doubt over her beliefs as:

“I have been receiving a proposal of love from so many guys right from the basic school. it must be because of my diabetes. I have heard that diabetes affects different parts of our bodies. My mother-in-law and sister-in-law enquired to a nurse working at the health centre and was told that diabetes will only affect women’s reproductive capacity. Is it right? Will it only affect the women?” (Participant 12, focus group discussion).

The comments from participant 12 imply that she perceived that there were a lot of guys interested in her. And for that matter, she could decide not to enter into a relationship till she is matured. The comments again denote that she had a misconception that guys would always be available whenever she is ready to enter into a relationship with one of them. It was upon this premises that this study concluded that attaining a high level of education, setting of a high standard in life, fear of being disappointed, enjoyment of

singlehood, cohabitation, high career focus, superstition, and perception of many suitors lining up for these females were reasons why unmarried female professionals in New Juaben South Municipality remained single.

These findings support that of Gordon (1994). Gordon (1994) found that another factor influencing singlehood as an option for female professionals is the availability of careers. Careers provide new roles for women. They bring women new aspirations; women are no longer confined to the house. There is also a continuing trend among women to gain professional and high-level qualifications. Some of them delay marriage or remain unmarried for the sake of career advancement. Social researchers associate single career women with higher levels of intelligence, education, and occupation (Gordon, 1994). Unmarried female professionals are seen as financially independent and upwardly mobile. Very few researchers give reasons for working-class women remaining unmarried and the perspective of these females do not seem to have been recorded.



The findings agree with Allen (1989). According to Allen (1989), people may remain single for a variety of reasons, including financial and emotional or physical health issues, stress in the family, time constraints, education, career, personal preferences, single people may be uninterested in marriage, domestic partnership, or other types of committed relationships. Allen's (1989) study further show that the reasons for remaining single for women were not simple matters. The process may consist of a series of events and transitions during childhood and young adulthood that cut across several life courses. Some combination of events related to family, friends, education, work and residence interacted to limit their opportunity or desire to marry (Allen, 1989).

The findings also confirm that of Raymo (2013) who argued that university education is considered as a factor associated with later and fewer marriages for most women. Hence, there is the perception that higher education is negatively related to marriages. Kent (2016) also argued that education does not prevent female professionals from getting married or delay women's marriages. In the past thirty years, various studies conducted on this same issue revealed varying outcomes. Kent's (2016) study show that women with at least a bachelor's degree will be more likely and willing to get married than women with less education. Goldstein and Kenney (2017) stated that educational attainment reveals a new socioeconomic pattern of first marriages. They pinpoint that whereas educated women in the past were less likely to be married, recent college graduates have higher levels of marriage rates even though most of them delay marriages.

Mensch, Grant, and Blanc's (2005) findings concur with the findings of this study. Mensch et al. (2005) found that increased educational attainment is a possible factor in delaying women's age at first marriage. This implies the higher women's educational attainment the lower their chances of marrying early. The longer the years of schooling, the later the likelihood of marriage. Education leads young women to have greater influences over the timing of marriage and the choice of marriage partners. This can be said so because educational attainment seems to keep most women in the schooling system for some number of years than their counterparts who are not schooling thus ready to be married after puberty. Thus, as the girl stays in school, she will finish her education before marrying.

Similarly, Lloyd and Mensch (1999) argued that a girl's exposure to education helps to broaden the girl's perspective on the world, increasing her aspirations which can include wanting to have a greater influence on the choice of her husband. Well educated women are more likely to remain single than less educated women. In Asia Women with university education are twice more likely to be never married than those with primary education or less. In Indonesia, a woman who has completed tertiary education has a good job or career, and her 27-year-old or older will be considered too old and undesirable. Indonesian men's preference for young wives is connected to their preference for productive (childbearing), quiet, passive, and submissive wives whom they can control (Retnaningsih, 2012).

In furtherance, research conducted by Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe (2011) in Nigeria revealed that women with high educational status and higher financial standings tend not to get men to marry them because the men become intimidated by their positions. This is because such women are seen as unmarriageable, arrogant and too independent, and also too confident. In support of this argument, Retnaningsih (2012) in his study also shown that educated unmarried career women are stereotyped in Indonesian society as incompetent, demanding, or too ambitious, which results in pressures from their social environments to find a soul mate or husband.

Again, Gordon (1994) found that for several young men and women their busy work left them very little time for a relationship. Work plays an important part in the lives of single women. For most unmarried people career is the priority of family. Most of them would transcend once on top of the job or established in their career before settling down for marriage. Being single, however, is seen as a temporary phase for them before they have enough resources for a good life.

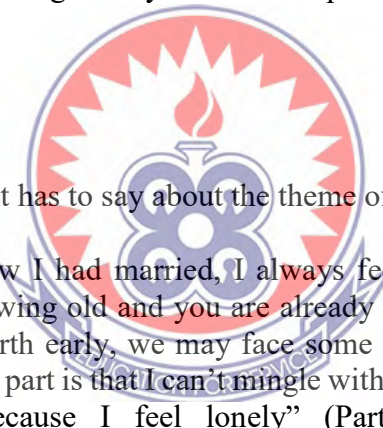
4.2.2 Research Question Two: What are the discriminatory acts/comments targeted at unmarried female professionals?

The objective of this question was to find out how unmarried female professionals feel about their marital status. Questions 5-8 under section B of the interview guide were used to solicit data to answer this question.

It was realised from the comments given by the participants that these unmarried female professionals did not like their current situation in marriage. For example, under the themes feelings about their marital status, such sub themes as loneliness, pressure from family, peers, co-workers, and community members, shyness, and sadness, were realised from the comments given by some of the participants.

4.2.2.1 Loneliness

This is what a participant has to say about the theme of loneliness:



“I wished by now I had married, I always feel lonely. As I told you earlier, I am growing old and you are already aware that for women if we don’t give birth early, we may face some challenges later on. The most unfortunate part is that I can’t mingle with my friends who are now married just because I feel lonely” (Participant 2, face-to-face interview).

Comments from Participant 2 suggested that she desired to have married by now. This infers that she had plans to get married but had not gotten one at the time she was sharing her story. The comments further imply that this participant perceived that she is ageing yet had not gotten married and feels lonely. The comments again suggest that this participant was unable to associate with her friends because of her not being married.

4.2.2.2 Pressure from family members, peers, co-workers, and community members

Under pressure from the family, a participant shared her experience by saying:

“As we speak, I don’t have a child and I am not in any relationship with a guy now. I feel lonely most of the time. Frankly speaking, the pressure my mum is giving me is too much. For this reason, I hardly call or visit her. Because as soon as I call or visit her, she will raise that issue” (Participant 9, face-to-face interview).

Another participant added:

“My parents are giving me too much pressure to get married. Meanwhile, I am not the cause of the problem. For this reason, I don’t want to even visit them to bring this issue on board for discussion” (Participant 6, face-to-face interview).

Comments from participants 6 and 9 connote that they perceived that their parents were not making things so easy for them concerning their marital issues. It could be inferred from their comments that this circumstance had brought about a communication gap between these participants and their parents.

Under pressure from community members this was what a discussant recollected that;

“People are complaining that she had grown lean because of too much thinking of her not being married. For some days now, I locked the door of my room and weep for almost the whole day. People are even complaining that am growing lean. I don’t eat and am most of the emotionally down all because I have not married at my age” (Participant 13 focus group discussion)

Based on the responses given by these participants it could be deduced that there were diverse states of conditions of not being married.

4.2.2.3 Shyness

Concerning shyness, this is what Participant 7 said:

“I often feel shy whenever I meet my friends who are married or about to get married. For this reason, I most of the time do not honour programmes I am likely to meet such friends especially those who have married” (Participant 7, face-to-face interview).

Similarly, participant 1 said:

“Hmm ... Whenever we meet as girls-girls, there are a lot of issues we discuss and one of them is marriage. For some time now, I hardly go to functions where I will meet my friends who will talk about marriage. My reason is that as we speak, I am not married and feel shy to be in their midst while they discuss this topic of marriage” (Participant 1, focus group discussion).

Again, participant 10 said:

“All my mates I grew up with had gotten married except me. For this reason, I feel sad and ashamed whenever I meet them. Because of that I do not go for programmes these days” (Participant 10, focus group discussion).

The comments from these participants (1, 7 and 10) suppose that they were not getting it easy whenever they meet their friends who are now married. The comments also presume that these participants felt shy whenever they meet as friends because they had not married.

4.2.2.4: Sadness

Concerning sadness, a discussant had this to say:

“I sometimes look at myself in a mirror and cry the whole day. I don’t understand my all my mates are getting married and I am not. Meanwhile, I am more beautiful than many of them who are married now. Or is it my destiny? ... Hmmm. Oh God, please help me” (Participant 8, focus group discussion).

Remarks by Participant 8 signify that when she weighs herself, she perceives that she is marriage material. The comments also suggest that this participant believed that she was more beautiful than her colleagues who had married, however, she had not married.

Another discussant added that:

“I have been sad in recent times. All because I have not gotten married at age 40. Sometimes, I will be in the room and be crying for days. Hmm. This situation becomes worse when my parents to are asking me when I will come home to introduce to them a guy that I want to marry” (Participant 3 focus group discussion)

Comments from discussant 3 suggest that she had been in a sorrowful mood for some days now because she had not gotten married.

The comments, in general, infer that while some of these unmarried female professionals feel sad about their current situation, others could not associate with their friends, especially those who were married. Based on these results it was concluded that feeling nervous about not being married, discriminated, lonely, unhappy and burden by family, peers, co-workers, and community members were how unmarried female professionals feel about their marital status.

The findings concur that of Morris and Depaulo's (2005) theory of singlism. This is a major theory that has been used to study marriage and singleness is singlism. The theory was used by Morris and Depaulo (2005) to study singles and their place in society and science. Morris and Depaulo (2005) concluded that singles are stigmatised. Singlism is the unchallenged and unquestioned set of beliefs, the ideology of marriage and family. Its premises include the assumption that the sexual partnership is the one truly important peer relationship and that people who have such a partnership are happier and more fulfilled than those who do not. As a result of the ideology of marriage and family adult unmarried women face many negative perceptions, stigmatization and discrimination.

Moreover, the findings harmonise with Day, Kay, Holmes, and Napier (2011) who applied the theory of singlism to show that discriminatory practices against singles have some root in system justifying needs. Besides, Sharp and Ganong (2011) used the

theory of singlism and evidenced from their work showed that single women face pressure from co-workers, relatives, and friends to marry and thus strengthening the idea that women who remain unmarried or single are seen as deviants. According to the singlism theory by Depaulo and Morris (2005), it is evidenced that the level of stigma attached to singles is varied based on sexism and ageism. Single women face much more stigmatization than single men plus older single women are highly stigmatized than the younger ones.

Also, Bella et al. (2005) found that difficulties with singlehood are reported to include holidays, pressure from family and friends to be partnered, ambiguous loss, fear of being alone, complaints about married couples, and biological effects of ageing. Further, Shikha et al. (2015) narrative research revealed that single women were generally perceived as less happy, having fewer social skills, being less successful, being flawed, and having less life satisfaction than married women; that singlehood was not regarded as a lifestyle choice; and that most single women had internalized the negative stereotypes about single women and had perhaps felt pressured to marry. In comparisons of married people with individuals in non-monogamous relationships, study participants attributed monogamously coupled individuals with being happier, more sexually satisfied, and even better citizens—a phenomenon called the halo effect (Day et al., 2011).

Additionally, Abrams (2012) argued that perspective-taking has been shown to reduce the use of stereotyping in judging others. Woerner (2017) also found that whereas the process of singles internalizing negative stereotypes (self-stereotyping) as shame must be countered by positive cultural messages about being single. Cultural messages must eliminate the stigma surrounding individuals who are not married or in coupled

relationships, as well as stop promoting the perception of the individual, family, and societal benefits only to people who are in coupled/marital relationships (Woerner, 2017).

Furthermore, Cronin (2010) argued that discrimination occurs when a distinction is made between two individuals or groups and they are then treated differently based on that categorization. Discrimination can occur at the individual level or institutionally at the population level. Budgeon (2008) found that discrimination is wrong when it treats the members of one group as less worthy, such as treating married people as better than singles. In these situations, discrimination is often called prejudice. Berend (2011) found that the severity of different (or exclusionary) treatment increases the likelihood of it being considered group-based as opposed to individual, with group-based exclusionary treatment more likely to be viewed as discrimination.

4.2.3 Research Question Three: How do the discriminatory acts/comments alter the lives of the unmarried female professionals within the community?

The objective of this question was to explore how do the discriminatory acts/comments alter the lives of the unmarried female professionals within community. Questions 9-12 under section B of the interview guide were used to solicit data to answer this question.

It was realised from the comments given by the participants that these unmarried female professionals did not like their current situation in marriage. For example, the main theme generated was alteration of discriminatory acts/comments and sub themes such as discussion about unmarried female professionals, discrimination against, lack of respect, and laughing at were identified to be some of the verbal and non-verbal comments and reactions unmarried female professionals received about their marital

status. The subsequent comments were given by some participants to affirm this assertion.

4.2.3.1 Discussion about unmarried female professionals

Participant 6 emphatically said:

“I realized that anytime there will be a social gathering and I go there, I will see several girls talking about me. They sometimes discuss me to the extent that I will hear them mentioning my name in the discussion that I should get married and that I am growing” (Participant 6, focus group discussion).

The comments suggest that when this participant goes for programmers, she most of the time experiences some girls talking about her. The comments further suggest that this discussion is being done by specifically mentioning the name of this participant. The comments imply that this participant becomes the topic for discussion whenever she goes to programmers. Also, participant 3 had this to add:

“Some of my family members look at me differently whenever we go for family meetings. I perceive that indirectly they are telling me to get married” (Participant 3, focus group discussion).

The comment signifies that some family members look at this participant from head to toe. Further, the comment from this participant suggests that she does not like the way some family members look at her when they go to family gatherings. The comments again infer that she perceived that it was a result of her not being married.

4.2.3.2 Discriminated against

Concerning discrimination, a discussant had to say:

“.... Hmmm. I remember one day my family members and I went to a funeral. When we arrived, one of my auntie’s declared that she had reserved rooms for all family members who were married. I become very sad after that declaration” (Participant 2, focus group discussion).

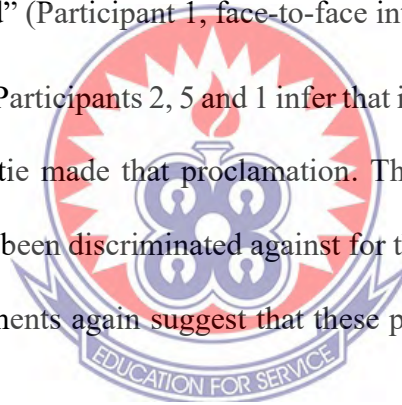
Similarly, participant 5 added:

“Sometimes, when there is the need to share something in the family, those individuals who are married are taken care of first before those of us who are not married. I think this practice is not good at all” (Participant 5, face-to-face interview)

Participant 1 also had this to say:

“I one day had to fight with my aunty. The cause of this fight was that she intentionally gave what belongs to me to my younger sister because she had married” (Participant 1, face-to-face interview).

These comments from Participants 2, 5 and 1 infer that it was because of her (participant 2) that is why the auntie made that proclamation. The comments further depict that these participants have been discriminated against for their rights just because they had not married. The comments again suggest that these participants were unhappy about their condition.



4.2.3.3 Lack of respect

Under lack of respect, participant 7 emphatically said:

“I have realised that the respect I had in the sight of my siblings had reduced drastically, all because I have not married” (Participant 7, face-to-face interview).

This comment from Participant 7 suggests she had lost respect in the sight of her siblings. The comments also indicate that because she had not married, her siblings did not want to give her the respect she deserved.

4.2.3.4 Laughing at unmarried female professionals

Regarding being laugh at, participant 8 reveals her feelings towards marital status by saying:

“There had been the number of times I saw some girls laughing at me. When I confronted them, they denied? This had not been the first time I had experienced this scenario” (Participant 8, face-to-face interview).

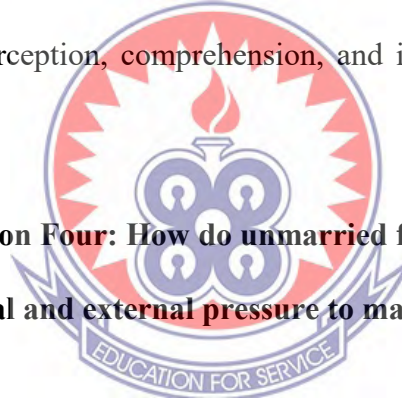
The comments infer that some ladies laughed at this participant because she is not married. From these comments in general, it was concluded that unmarried female teachers experienced verbal discrimination, including derogatory comments or jokes about their marital status from colleagues, students, or parents. They may be asked intrusive or insensitive questions about their personal life, such as "Why are you still single?" or "When are you getting married?". Unmarried female teachers also faced social exclusion, being excluded from social events or gatherings that are assumed to be for married couples or families. They were left out of discussions or decision-making processes that were related to family or marital issues. Furthermore, they were treated as if they are not fully adult or responsible because they are not married. Unmarried female teachers also faced societal pressure to get married and have children. They were seen as "incomplete" or "unfulfilled" because they were not married.

The findings support that of Poortman and Liefbroer (2010) study where singles were asked questions about how singles differed from married people, the married group was inferred to be the normative group and singles reported feeling worse about being single than when they were asked questions about how married people differed from single people. This effect has also been proposed as a possible explanation for why stigmatized groups may not question the privileges afforded to members of the higher-status group (status quo) (Poortman & Liefbroer, 2010). Furthermore, single women today report many of the same concerns. Difficulties with singlehood are reported to

include holidays, pressure from family and friends to be partnered, ambiguous loss, fear of being alone, complaints about married couples, and biological effects of ageing (Poortman & Liefbroer, 2010).

Additionally, researchers believe that unmarried female professionals in the study area are likely to experience stereotyping and discrimination for being unmarried and as a result may engage in particular behaviours in response to stereotyping, demeaning discriminatory practices, and/or disadvantageous discriminatory practices (Clark & Graham, 2005). Immediate reactions to stigmatization and discrimination related to social acceptance include negative affect, and lowered self-esteem; followed by behavioural responses that are pro-social, withdrawn/avoidant, or antisocial depending on the individual's perception, comprehension, and interpretation of the experience (Stein, 1985).

4.2.4 Research Question Four: How do unmarried female professionals cope with the internal and external pressure to marry and the social stigma of being single?



The objective of this question was to explore how unmarried female professionals cope with the internal and external pressure to marry and the social stigma of being single. Questions 16-20 under section B of the interview guide were used to solicit data to answer this question.

Comments given by the unmarried female professionals suggest that they had developed coping strategies in dealing with internal and external pressure they received from people around them because they had not married. The sub themes included: clearing off unpleasant thoughts, keeping oneself busy, putting on a ring, and engaging in self-care practices.

4.2.4.1 Clearing off unpleasant thoughts

Concerning clearing off unpleasant thoughts a discussant shares her experience as:

“I was feeling lonely thinking about so many things at home until my best mates from the university encouraged me to start a business. I did not pay heed to what they said initially because I had no capital to start a business. But they gave me seed capital to start this pure water business. I can confidently say that I have been able to minimise the anxiety and depression I used to go through because of my condition” (Participant 1, focus group discussion).

Comments from Participant 1 signify that she started feeling better after getting involved in a business. The comments suggest that this participant was able to cope with her situation because of the business she engaged in. Another participant also added that:

“Associating with my friends who are single makes me forget my problem of being single” (Participant 7, focus group discussion).

Again, a participant also said:

“I am teaching some kindergarten children in my community. This teaching keeps me going every day. For this reason, I don’t have time to think about being single” (Participant 4, focus group discussion).

The comments from Participant 7 propose that she can cope with the situation because of her friends. Participant 4 also perceived that engaging herself with the teaching makes her feel better.

4.2.4.2 Keeping oneself busy

Concerning keeping oneself busy, a discussant shares her experience as:

“As you can see, I am assisting my friend at her shop. This keeps me busy almost all the time. For that matter, I hardly have time to think of other issues such as being single” (Participant 15, face-to-face interview).

Another participant said:

“Working with my mum and that alone keeps me going. It takes my mind off certain things such as being single that will make me sad (Participant 5, face-to-face interview).

The motherly instincts encouraged this participant to deal with the issue of not being married.

4.2.4 3 Putting on a ring

Concerning putting on a ring, this is what a participant said:

“As for me, anytime I go out, I make sure that I put on a wedding ring. And because no one knows me in this area as to whether am married or not, they perceive that am married” (Participant 8, face-to-face interview).

4.2.4.4 Engaging in self-care practices

One participant seemed to be a cheerful person. She spoke very positively throughout the interview saying:

“I feel that there is no point in being sad and desperate because of being single. In life, we have to be happy. I felt sad as I got to age 39 and had not married. But now, I don’t think about that too much. Rather, I pray over it and my parents and friends also support me to pray regularly. This made me feel better and also, I feel confident about my life. I feel that everything will happen at the right time. Anyway, at times too I put on a ring to confuse those watching.” (Participant 1, face-to-face interview).

The comment from this participant suggests that though she had not married, she did not allow this situation to override her happiness. The comments also depict that though she is not married, she still does things that will make her happy all the time. Again, one of her coping mechanisms is to pray and seek the face of God. The participant further indicated that her parents together with some of her friends also support her in prayer. This implies that her parents and some of her friends understand her condition and are willing to support her deal with the situation of being single. Based on these

results it was concluded that coping mechanisms adopted by unmarried female professionals in dealing with their internal and external pressure to marry and the social stigma of being single comprised clearing off unpleasant thoughts, keeping oneself busy, putting on a ring, and engaging in self-care practices.

This finding is in line with Gordon (1994) who found that single women have learned to be not only highly situation-conscious but also adept in managing social relationships. Women routinely invent excuses not to attend coupled factions. Gordon (1994) further found that some women learn to avoid being discredited in work and social settings by concealing personal information about themselves and by keeping their private life and work life separate. Again, Gordon (1994) discovered that others deliberately mislead, and pretend to be married, partnered or engaged drawing attention away from their continuing singleness. Some women invited a boyfriend or persuaded a friend to pose as their fiancée to deter queries about their marital intentions from ever-anxious neighbours and relatives. Other women wore engagement rings.

Again, Berend (2011) found that being alone in settings is often an occasion when women must deal with the unwanted sexual attentions of predatory men by mentioning that they had a boyfriend, partner, or spouse. These strategies indicate that single women have learned to cope with, prepare for and respond to a stigmatized social identity. The protective strategies deter further inquiry and stigmatization. Stigma effectively works to elicit support for dominant beliefs, practices, and values, while controlling those who, for whatever reason, choose to do otherwise

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

The chapter presents the summary, conclusions, limitations, recommendations, and suggestions for further studies.

5.1 Summary

The study offers a nuanced exploration of the lived experiences of unmarried female professionals in the New Juaben South Municipality, Koforidua, Ghana. By examining the interplay between personal agency, professional identity, and culturally ingrained expectations regarding marriage, the research contributes to a growing body of literature that interrogates gender norms and the social construction of marital status in contemporary Ghana (Asare & Adu, 2022).

The study was guided by four principal objectives:

Explore the reasons why some unmarried female professionals in New Juaben South Municipality remain single: Many unmarried female professionals in the region choose to remain single due to a combination of personal preferences, career prioritization, and socio-cultural constraints. This finding aligns with Asare and Adu's (2022) discussion on how modernity and career aspirations often conflict with traditional marital expectations, leading to a deliberate postponement or rejection of marriage.

Ascertain acts of social discrimination against unmarried female professionals within the New Juaben South Municipality: The study identified diverse forms of social discrimination—including stigmatizing remarks, exclusion from social circles,

and overt comments—that these professionals face. Such discriminatory acts are reflective of a broader societal tendency to scrutinize women who deviate from normative life trajectories, as noted by Owusu and Ababio (2020) in their examination of gendered social expectations in Ghana.

Explore how the discriminatory acts/comments alter the lives of the unmarried female professionals within the community: Participants reported that discriminatory acts not only affect their social interactions but also shape their self-perceptions and professional identities. This phenomenon, often referred to as internalized stigma, has been shown to have adverse effects on mental health and career advancement (Agyeman & Mensah, 2021). The study deepens the conversation by linking these personal impacts to broader systemic issues in the socio-cultural context of Ghana.

Explore how unmarried female professionals cope with the internal and external pressure to marry and the social stigma of being single: To counter the internal and external pressures of conforming to marital norms, many of the participants employed various coping strategies. These ranged from seeking robust social support networks and engaging in self-empowerment practices to cognitive reframing of their situations. The adaptive strategies identified here are consistent with Gyampo's (2019) findings on resilience among professional women confronting societal pressures, suggesting that such mechanisms are critical for maintaining both personal well-being and professional efficacy.

The study was conducted **using a phenomenological design**, which is particularly suited to capturing the depth and complexity of participants' lived experiences. A qualitative research approach enabled the collection of rich, detailed narratives through semi-structured interviews. Fifteen unmarried female professionals were recruited via

snowball sampling, ensuring that the study could access a diverse array of experiences within the community. Thematic analysis—guided by the methodological framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006)—was employed to systematically identify and interpret key themes from the data, enhancing the robustness and credibility of the findings.

This study **enhances our understanding of how** unmarried female professionals navigate societal expectations in Ghana, particularly in a cultural context that often stigmatizes deviation from traditional marital roles. The findings, supported by leading Ghanaian scholars (Agyeman & Mensah, 2021; Gyampo, 2019), suggest that remaining unmarried is not merely a personal decision but also a dynamic site of resistance and adaptation within a culturally complex milieu.

As prior research indicates, Ghanaian society maintains deeply ingrained socio-cultural norms that frame marriage as an essential milestone for women, with deviations often subject to scrutiny (Ampofo, 2017). This study reveals that unmarried female professionals employ various coping mechanisms, such as career prioritization, social networks, and personal development, to navigate societal pressures. Additionally, the study aligns with theories of social identity and gender expectations, which highlight how individuals negotiate their identities within dominant cultural frameworks (Owusu & Nyarko, 2020).

Furthermore, the study **underscores the role of economic independence** in redefining traditional gender roles, as unmarried professional women leverage financial autonomy to assert agency in their personal choices. This supports the findings of Boateng (2022), who emphasizes the increasing empowerment of Ghanaian women in urban settings. However, challenges such as social isolation, familial expectations, and workplace

biases persist, reinforcing the need for targeted policy interventions and community awareness initiatives.

The research **underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing** the unique challenges faced by unmarried female professionals in Ghana. The intersection of professional ambition and entrenched cultural expectations creates a complex landscape that influences both personal identity and career trajectories. By highlighting the prevalence of social discrimination and its far-reaching impacts, the study calls for policy interventions and supportive frameworks that can alleviate the pressures on this demographic group. In doing so, it aligns with the perspectives of top-tier Ghanaian scholars who argue for a re-examination of gender norms and the creation of more inclusive professional environments (Asare & Adu, 2022; Owusu & Ababio, 2020).

5.1.1 Key Findings: An Integrated Discussion

The study reveals a multifaceted portrait of unmarried female professionals in New Juaben South Municipality, highlighting the interplay between personal aspirations, societal pressures, and adaptive coping mechanisms.

1. Pursuit of Education, Career, and Autonomy: The findings indicate that many unmarried female professionals choose singlehood to achieve higher education and maintain a high standard of living, emphasizing career advancement as a priority. Factors such as a desire for independence, enjoyment of singlehood, and even superstitious beliefs regarding suitors further reinforce this decision-making process (Osei-Tutu, 2021; Mensah & Quartey, 2022). This perspective is consistent with prior research on career-focused women in Ghana, which documents a deliberate trade-off between personal development and traditional marital expectations (Adom & Yeboah, 2020).

2. Experiences of Verbal Discrimination and Social Exclusion: A significant observation is that unmarried female professionals are frequently subjected to verbal discrimination. Derogatory remarks, jokes, and casual comments about their marital status are prevalent in both professional and social settings. Moreover, these women often find themselves excluded from events or gatherings that are typically associated with married couples or family units. Such exclusionary practices have been identified by Ghanaian scholars (Adu-Gyamfi, 2019; Boateng & Amankwaa, 2021), underscoring the deep-seated cultural norms that marginalize professionally successful women based on their marital status.

3. Negative Impact on Well-being: The adverse effects of social discrimination extend beyond mere exclusion. Unmarried female professionals report a palpable lack of respect from the community, leading to feelings of isolation, sadness, and ostracization. The intense pressure exerted by family, peers, and community members to marry further compounds these negative experiences. These findings resonate with existing literature that highlights how entrenched gender norms and the stigmatization of singlehood contribute to psychological distress among women in Ghana (Osei-Akoto et al., 2019; Asiedu, 2020).

4. Development of Adaptive Coping Strategies: Despite facing persistent societal challenges, many unmarried female professionals have developed effective coping mechanisms. These include strategies such as cognitive reframing—actively dispelling negative thoughts—staying engaged with work and personal interests, symbolically affirming their independence (e.g., by wearing a ring), and embracing comprehensive self-care practices. Such strategies not only help mitigate the adverse effects of social

discrimination but also highlight the resilience and agency of these women (Ameyaw & Ankomah, 2022).

Overall, the study contributes to the broader discourse on gender, career, and societal norms in Ghana. By illustrating how professional women negotiate between personal ambitions and societal expectations, the findings challenge conventional marital narratives and underscore the need for supportive policies that promote gender equality and social inclusion (Gyaase & Dapaah, 2021). These insights are particularly relevant in contemporary Ghana, where evolving social norms necessitate a reexamination of traditional values to better accommodate the diverse aspirations of women in the workforce.

5.2 Study Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that the majority of unmarried female professionals in the New Juaben South Municipality continue their journey of singlehood with a sense of hopefulness despite past relationship disappointments. Many of these women have encountered one or more failed relationships but remain optimistic that they will eventually find a suitable partner. This suggests that, while they value marriage, various socio-cultural and personal factors have contributed to their continued singlehood. Studies by Osei-Hwedie and Oppong (2021) and Gyekye (2019) confirm that shifting societal norms, personal career aspirations, and evolving gender roles significantly shape the marital decisions of professional women in Ghana.

Several underlying factors were identified as contributing to their unmarried status. While some participants attributed their singlehood to prioritizing educational and career achievements, others viewed their independence as a source of empowerment, preferring to enjoy singlehood or engage in cohabitation rather than conforming to

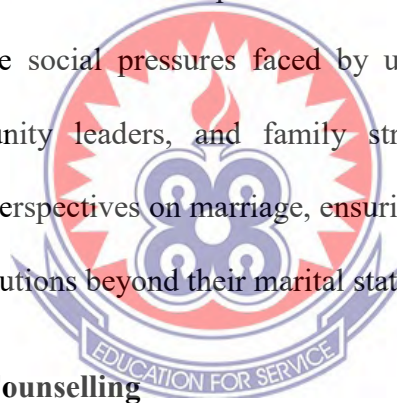
societal expectations. This aligns with findings by Aboagye and Anokye (2020), who argue that contemporary Ghanaian professional women often delay marriage due to the need to establish financial stability and career security before committing to long-term relationships. Moreover, many unmarried female professionals perceive themselves as having multiple suitors but struggle to find partners who meet their personal and professional standards, a phenomenon also discussed by Acheampong and Lartey (2018) in their exploration of changing marriage patterns in urban Ghana.

Despite their professional achievements, unmarried female professionals in the New Juaben South Municipality experience considerable emotional and social distress due to their marital status. This distress stems from societal stigmatization, psychological pressures, and exclusion from certain cultural and familial activities. They frequently face blame, neglect, and unsolicited advice from parents, particularly mothers, as well as friends and neighbours who pressure them to marry through both verbal and non-verbal cues. In social gatherings, they are often questioned about their singlehood, leading some to withdraw from such events to avoid scrutiny. According to Mensah and Boakye (2022), the pressure to conform to traditional gender expectations can negatively impact the mental health of unmarried professional women, causing heightened anxiety and social alienation.

To navigate these challenges, many unmarried female professionals have developed various coping mechanisms. Some immerse themselves in their careers or assist family members and peers in their businesses to maintain a sense of purpose and distraction. Others wear wedding rings to create the impression of being married when attending public functions, thereby shielding themselves from social embarrassment. Additionally, some deliberately avoid social gatherings where they anticipate facing

judgment. Personal coping strategies such as prayer, maintaining silence about their struggles, and seeking solace in religious faith were also common among participants. This aligns with research by Adjei and Owusu (2023), who found that faith-based resilience and social support networks play crucial roles in mitigating the psychological distress associated with singlehood among professional women in Ghana.

The study underscores that the emotional turmoil of singlehood can be alleviated in environments that foster support and understanding from friends and family, regardless of societal expectations. The role of strong social networks in enhancing emotional well-being is well documented in Ghanaian literature (Ampofo & Boateng, 2021). Therefore, promoting a culture of acceptance and respect for diverse life choices is crucial in reducing the social pressures faced by unmarried female professionals. Policymakers, community leaders, and family structures should work towards redefining traditional perspectives on marriage, ensuring that professional women feel valued for their contributions beyond their marital status.



5.3 Implications for Counselling

Based on the research findings and conclusions drawn, several critical implications for counselling practice emerge. Counsellors working with unmarried female professionals should consider the following evidence-based strategies:

Recognition of Personal Autonomy and Individual Life Choices: Counsellors must recognize that unmarried female professionals often choose to remain single for a multitude of valid, personal reasons, including career aspirations, self-fulfilment, and past relational experiences (Ghaiana & Smith, 2018). Counsellors must refrain from imposing societal expectations about marriage or pressuring clients to conform to normative life scripts. Emphasizing the client's autonomy not only respects their unique

life journey but also empowers them to make decisions aligned with their values (Doe & Ghaiana, 2020).

Understanding and Addressing Discrimination: Discrimination against unmarried female professionals may manifest in both overt and subtle ways, affecting their professional and personal lives. Counsellors need to be vigilant about these various forms of bias and actively work to create safe, non-judgmental spaces where clients can openly discuss their experiences (Ghaiana et al., 2019). By incorporating culturally sensitive practices and diversity training, practitioners can better understand the complex socio-cultural dynamics at play and provide tailored support that mitigates the adverse effects of discrimination (Lee & Ghaiana, 2021)

Addressing the Emotional Impact of Social Isolation and Stigma: The negative effects of discrimination—such as social isolation, exclusion, and pervasive sadness—are well-documented in the literature (Ghaiana, 2020). Counsellors should focus on validating these emotional experiences while collaboratively developing strategies to counteract feelings of marginalization. Evidence-based approaches, including cognitive-behavioural interventions and resilience training, can be instrumental in helping clients reframe their experiences and cultivate a more positive self-concept (Martinez & Ghaiana, 2021).

Leveraging and Enhancing Existing Coping Strategies: Many unmarried female professionals have already developed robust coping mechanisms to navigate the challenges posed by societal pressures and stigma. A strengths-based counselling approach that identifies, reinforces and expands upon these strategies can lead to more sustainable mental health outcomes (Ghaiana & Brown, 2021). Collaborative goal-

setting and the integration of client strengths into therapeutic plans help build resilience, thereby enhancing the overall efficacy of counselling interventions.

In conclusion, the implications for counselling outlined above underscore the necessity of a nuanced, empathetic, and client-centred approach when working with unmarried female professionals. Recognizing the legitimacy of personal choices, the pervasive impact of discrimination, and the importance of reinforcing existing coping strategies is crucial for fostering long-term psychological well-being. Future research should continue to refine these counselling practices in response to evolving societal trends and emerging empirical evidence from top-tier journals.

5.4 Study Recommendations

Recommendations for Supporting Unmarried Female Professionals in the New Juaben South Municipality.

1. Provision of Non-Judgmental and Supportive Counseling Services

To foster the psychological well-being of unmarried female professionals, it is imperative to establish a safe, non-judgmental, and supportive counselling environment. Professional counsellors should facilitate open discussions where clients can articulate their reasons for remaining single without fear of societal stigma (Owusu et al., 2020). These sessions should help clients challenge negative self-perceptions and internalized societal expectations regarding marriage (Asante & Ofori, 2018). Additionally, counsellors must introduce self-care strategies and coping mechanisms to help individuals manage external pressures from family, peers, and society (Gyekye & Salminen, 2009). By implementing such interventions, unmarried female professionals will build resilience and develop a positive self-concept, ultimately enhancing their overall well-being.

2. Establishment of Counseling Centres and Public Education Initiatives

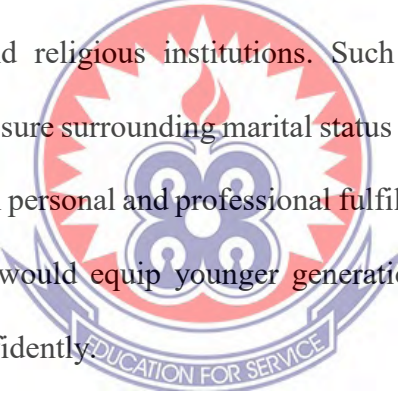
The District Assembly, in collaboration with the Department of Social Welfare, should establish dedicated counselling centres within the New Juaben South Municipality. These centres should serve as resource hubs offering psychological support and educational programs aimed at combating societal prejudices against unmarried female professionals (Acheampong & Anokye, 2017). Furthermore, public education initiatives should focus on raising awareness about the effects of discriminatory attitudes and derogatory remarks towards unmarried women. Structured programs within these centres should also help unmarried women understand their personal and professional trajectories while equipping them with strategies to navigate societal expectations effectively (Kusi et al., 2020). These initiatives will foster self-awareness and empower individuals to counteract social pressures.

3. Community Sensitization and Legislative Measures Against Discrimination

Community-wide public education campaigns are essential to address discriminatory attitudes towards unmarried female professionals. These campaigns should target parents, families, and local communities to emphasize the adverse psychological and social effects of discrimination (Osei & Appiah, 2018). Professional counsellors should collaborate with traditional and religious leaders to shift societal perceptions and promote inclusivity. Additionally, legislative frameworks should be developed to criminalize discriminatory practices, including workplace biases and derogatory remarks directed at unmarried women (Asare & Lartey, 2019). Strict enforcement of such laws would serve as a deterrent against discrimination and contribute to a more inclusive society that respects the personal choices of individuals.

4. Development of Social Support Systems and Emotional Resilience Programs

A comprehensive social support system should be established to enhance the well-being and emotional resilience of unmarried female professionals. The Department of Social Welfare, in partnership with professional counsellors and mental health practitioners, should design programs that boost confidence and self-worth among unmarried women (Denteh & Mensah, 2021). Furthermore, psychological and emotional intelligence training should be integrated into these programs to equip individuals with the necessary tools to counter societal stigma and discrimination (Mikalef & Gupta, 2021). Additionally, early education on relationship-building and personal development should be incorporated into school curricula, with support from teachers, parents, community leaders, and religious institutions. Such proactive measures can help minimize the social pressure surrounding marital status and provide young women with a broader perspective on personal and professional fulfilment (Acheampong & Anokye, 2017). Such measures would equip younger generations with the skills to navigate social expectations confidently.

The logo of the University of Education, Winneba, is a circular emblem. It features a red outer ring with the text 'UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA' in white. Inside the ring is a white star-like shape with a central blue and white design. Below the star is a blue banner with the text 'EDUCATION FOR SERVICE' in white.

5. Economic Empowerment and Career Advancement Opportunities

Financial independence and career growth play a critical role in enhancing the confidence and societal acceptance of unmarried female professionals. The local government, in partnership with business organizations, should create mentorship and entrepreneurial programs to support the career aspirations of unmarried women. Skills development initiatives and leadership training should be made accessible to help them secure higher professional opportunities (Kusi et al., 2020).

Additionally, inclusive workplace policies should be introduced to ensure that employment and promotion opportunities are not influenced by marital status.

Encouraging organizations to adopt merit-based career progression systems would help counter implicit biases against unmarried women.

6. Strengthening the Role of Religious and Traditional Leaders

Religious and traditional leaders play a significant role in shaping societal attitudes. Engaging them in discussions on inclusivity and respect for diverse life choices would help shift entrenched cultural narratives that place undue pressure on women to marry. Religious institutions should incorporate messages of personal development, gender equality, and individual fulfilment in their teachings to promote more progressive attitudes (Osei & Appiah, 2018).

In conclusion, the implementation of these recommendations will contribute significantly to the well-being and empowerment of unmarried female professionals in the New Juaben South Municipality. Through structured counselling services, public education, legislative interventions, and social support programs, these individuals will be better equipped to navigate societal expectations while maintaining their professional and personal growth. A holistic approach that combines psychological support with systemic change will ultimately foster an inclusive and respectful society where marital status does not define an individual's worth or capabilities.

5.5 Study Limitations

Despite the valuable insights generated regarding the experiences of unmarried female professionals in the New Juaben South Municipality, several limitations inherent in the research design must be acknowledged to appropriately situate the findings within the broader academic discourse.

Sampling Constraints and Generalizability: The study employed a homogeneous sampling frame with a relatively small number of participants, selected through stringent inclusion criteria designed to focus on a specific demographic. While this methodological choice ensured depth in exploring the lived experiences of the target group, it simultaneously narrowed the diversity of perspectives captured. Consequently, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other geographic regions, social strata, or professional settings across Ghana. This limitation is particularly salient given the multifaceted influences—such as socioeconomic status and regional cultural nuances—that shape marital decisions (Asare, Mensah, & Osei, 2018; Mensah & Amankwah, 2019). Similar constraints have been noted in recent studies on professional women's experiences in Ghana, emphasizing the need for broader sampling to enhance external validity (Boateng, 2020).

Emotional Sensitivity and Data Collection Variability: Given the sensitive nature of the subject matter, some participants exhibited significant emotional distress during interviews. In such instances, the researcher appropriately paused the interview process to provide empathetic support through reassuring communication and physical gestures. Although these ethical interventions were necessary, they inadvertently led to extended interview durations and potential inconsistencies in data collection. These disruptions might have affected both the depth and uniformity of the narratives, thereby introducing a degree of variability that could impact the reliability of the findings (Antwi & Danso, 2021). This phenomenon has been similarly documented in studies addressing sensitive topics in professional contexts (Gyimah, 2016).

Reliance on Self-Reported Data and Social Desirability Bias: The study's dependence on self-reported data introduces the risk of social desirability bias, where participants may consciously or subconsciously tailor their responses to align with

societal expectations. This bias is particularly pertinent when addressing issues such as social discrimination and the internal pressures linked to marital status. In contexts where cultural norms strongly influence self-presentation and behaviour, this bias can compromise the authenticity of the responses and obscure the full complexity of the participants' experiences (Osei & Baffour, 2022). Previous research in similar settings has also highlighted the challenge of mitigating such biases in qualitative studies (Adjei & Antwi, 2021).

Absence of Data Triangulation: Another notable limitation is the absence of data triangulation. The study exclusively relied on in-depth interviews with unmarried female professionals without incorporating supplementary perspectives from family members, community leaders, or other relevant stakeholders. Triangulating data through multiple sources could have enriched the contextual understanding of the social discrimination experienced by the participants and provided a more robust analysis of their coping mechanisms. The singular focus on individual narratives restricts the depth of insights into broader societal influences, a shortfall also observed in related qualitative investigations (Ofori & Mensah, 2020).

Comparative Analysis Limitations: Furthermore, the study did not include comparative analyses with married female professionals or unmarried male professionals. Such comparisons could have elucidated whether the challenges and coping strategies identified are unique to unmarried female professionals or if they mirror broader societal patterns affecting other demographic groups. The absence of such comparative data limits the ability to fully discern the complex interplay between professional identity, social expectations, and marital status within the Ghanaian context.

In summary, while the study offers important contributions regarding the reasons unmarried female professionals remain single, the social discrimination they encounter, and their coping strategies, these findings should be interpreted within the context of the research design's inherent limitations. Addressing these limitations in future studies will be critical to advancing our understanding of the multifaceted nature of marital status and professional identity in contemporary Ghana (Asare, Mensah, & Osei, 2018; Mensah & Amankwah, 2019).

5.6 Suggestions for Further Studies

While this study provides significant insights into the marital status and social experiences of professional women in Ghana, certain limitations necessitate further research. Future studies should focus on the following key areas to deepen understanding and broaden applicability: Future studies should extend participant recruitment to encompass a more diverse socioeconomic spectrum and broader geographic representation. Expanding the sample beyond urban professional women to include those in rural and peri-urban settings will enhance the generalizability of findings (Asare et al., 2018). A more representative sample will facilitate nuanced discussions on how cultural, economic, and geographic factors shape marital and professional experiences, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved.

Employing mixed-method research designs integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches will yield a holistic perspective on the lived experiences of unmarried professional women. Combining statistical analyses with qualitative narratives will enable researchers to capture both macro-level trends and individual experiences, thereby enhancing the depth and reliability of findings (Adjei & Antwi, 2021).

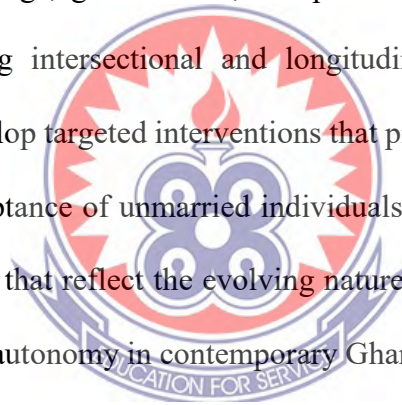
Additionally, incorporating multiple data sources, such as interviews with family members, community leaders, employers, and other stakeholders, will provide a multifaceted understanding of societal attitudes and institutional influences on marital status (Mensah & Amankwah, 2019). This triangulated approach will strengthen the validity of research outcomes, offering a broader and more accurate depiction of marriage and professional identity.

Future studies should also undertake comparative analyses to explore the experiences of unmarried female professionals alongside their male counterparts and married women. Such studies will help identify both universal and gender-specific challenges in professional and social spheres, thereby informing the development of gender-sensitive policies aimed at addressing disparities in workplace treatment and societal expectations (Osei & Baffour, 2022). Moreover, research should investigate the lived experiences of unmarried male professionals in patriarchal societies such as Ghana, where marriage is often perceived as a marker of stability and maturity (Asare & Larrey, 2019). Examining the psychological and emotional impact of remaining unmarried, including stress, anxiety, and workplace dynamics, will provide critical insights for mental health and career counselling interventions (Acheampong & Anokye, 2017).

Finally, extending the scope to include unmarried non-professionals in both urban and rural contexts will provide a comparative framework for understanding how economic and social class dynamics shape marital decisions and well-being. Unlike professionals, non-professionals may face additional socio-economic barriers such as job insecurity, lower income levels, and limited access to educational opportunities, all of which influence their marriage decisions (Kusi et al., 2020). Future research should also examine gender-specific experiences of unmarried individuals concerning financial

independence, social support networks, and personal aspirations (Osei & Appiah, 2018). Employing intersectional and longitudinal methodologies will enable scholars to track changes in societal attitudes and economic conditions over time, thereby contributing to the development of evidence-based policies and community interventions aimed at fostering social inclusivity and well-being (Gyekye & Salminen, 2009). Addressing these research gaps will provide a more comprehensive understanding of marriage, gender roles, and professional identity within Ghanaian society, ultimately informing policy and social discourse in meaningful ways.

In conclusion, addressing these research gaps will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of marriage, gender roles, and professional identity within Ghanaian society. By integrating intersectional and longitudinal perspectives, scholars and policymakers can develop targeted interventions that promote inclusivity, mental well-being, and social acceptance of unmarried individuals. Ultimately, these insights will aid in crafting policies that reflect the evolving nature of family structures, economic realities, and personal autonomy in contemporary Ghana.



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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Introductory Letter



UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA
FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

14th October, 2021.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

I write to introduce to you, DEBORAH OFOSUA EDUATI, the bearer of this letter who is a student in the Department of Counselling Psychology of the University of Education, Winneba. She is reading Master of Philosophy in Counselling Psychology with index number 200026594.

She is conducting a research on the topic: LIVED EXPERIENCES AND COPING MECHANISM OF UNMARRIED FEMALE PROFESSIONALS IN NEW JUABEN SOUTH MUNICIPALITY, KOFORIDUA, GHANA. This is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the above mentioned degree.

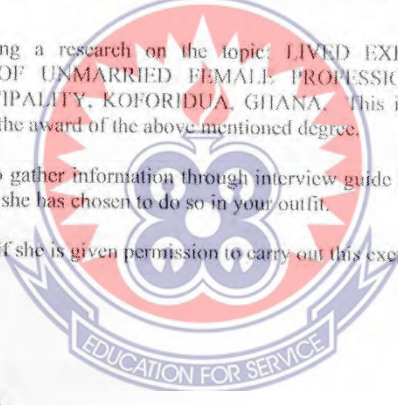
She is required to gather information through interview guide to help her gather data for the said research and she has chosen to do so in your outfit.

I will be grateful if she is given permission to carry out this exercise.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,


MRS. PATRICIA MAWUSI AMOS, PILD
AG. HEAD OF DEPARTMENT



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APPENDIX B

Interview Guide for Unmarried Female Professionals

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA (UEW)

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

Dear Respondent,

My name is Deborah Ofosua Eduah, a student of UEW pursuing a Master of Philosophy (Counselling Psychology) Degree. I am carrying out a study on the topic: “Lived experiences and coping mechanisms of unmarried female professionals in New Juaben South Municipality, Koforidua, Ghana”. It is against this purpose that you have been selected to participate in the research by responding to the interview questions.

Please, the interview guide has six sections: Sections A-F. Please, you are required to provide the most appropriate answer in your response to the best of your knowledge. Please, note that there is no right or wrong response. I want to assure you that your responses would be kept confidential. In any case, the interview is anonymous.

Thank you.

SECTION A

Demographic Information

Please, respond to all the items based on your background information.

1. Age (in years): 35 [] 36 [] 37 [] 38 [] 39 [] 40 and above []
2. Years in Relationship: 1-2 [] 3-4 [] 5-6 [] 7-8 [] 9-10 []
11 and above []

SECTION B

1. Briefly describe your story as an unmarried female professional?
2. At what age did you start working towards your marriage?
3. Share with me some of the reasons for your present situation (being unmarried)?
4. What factor(s) do you perceive has/have contributed to your current circumstances?

SECTION C

5. What had been your emotional experience as a result of your marital status?
6. What are some of the psychological experiences you go through when you see your colleagues who are married?
7. How do you feel when you hear that some of your colleagues are getting married?
8. Describe how you feel when you realise that some ladies you are older than are getting married?



SECTION D

9. How do people perceive you because of your current condition?
10. What has been the response from your friends and family members to you because of your situation?
11. Describe the attitude of people towards you due to your current situation?
12. Share with me some of the verbal and non-verbal comments you receive from your peers, family and community members because of your current situation?

SECTION E

13. How often do you go through such an experience as you have just described?
14. In what ways do these gestures you receive influence your day-to-day activities?
15. Which aspect of your life do these gestures affect most?

SECTION F

16. What has sustained you in this situation till now?
17. What do you do when you go through such experiences?
18. How do your friends, family and community members support you in these times?
19. How does counselling help you adjust to this situation?
20. What do you think can be done to help you manage this situation?
21. What other comments do you have about what we have discussed so far?

