Multiple perpetrator rape in Ghana: offenders, victims and offence characteristics

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Multiple perpetrator rape in Ghana: offenders, victims and offence characteristics

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ABSTRACT
Multiple perpetrator rape (MPR) is criminalised in Ghana but there is a dearth of research and official statistics on the phenomenon. This study explores some of the key characteristics of MPR in Ghana as reported in the media. Keyword search of the news archives of 9 Ghanaian media outlets generated 57 cases of MPR reported from January 2000 through June 2016. Content analysis of the cases showed 61 all-female victims and 57 all-male perpetrator groups. The average victim age was 17.9 years and the modal perpetrator-group size was two. The majority of the victims knew at least one member of the perpetrator groups. The perpetrator groups approached their victims outdoors but raped them indoors, using violent techniques to compel compliance. Although the characteristics of MPR in Ghana, as observed in this study, are comparatively similar to those found in other African countries, further studies are recommended for a nuanced understanding of MPR in Ghana.

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Gang rape; Ghana; media; multiple perpetrator rape; rape; sexual violence

Introduction
Globally, over 1.6 million lives are lost annually through violence and uncountable more destroyed in ways that are not apparent (WHO, 2002). Notable among the various forms of violence which result in deaths and seriously compromised health is sexual violence (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002). Sexual violence has been defined as,

any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. (WHO, 2002, p. 149)

Sexual violence occurs in several forms: multiple perpetrator rape (MPR), sexual slavery, single/lone perpetrator rape, child prostitution, among others (Jewkes, Sen, & Garcia-Moreno, 2002; UNICEF, 2014). MPR is used to refer broadly to “coerced sex where two or more men sexually penetrate”, usually in turns (Jewkes et al., 2012, p. 11). Gang rape – “rape of a person by two or more perpetrators” (Jewkes et al., 2002, p. 149) – is used synonymously to mean MPR. However, in gang rape the perpetrators are an organised group that engages in the act consistently (Horvath & Kelly, 2009).
Offence characteristics

Although MPR is one of the several forms of sexual violence reported widely across many parts of the world, there is a paucity of systematic information on the extent of the phenomenon (Jewkes et al., 2002; Park & Kim, 2016; WHO, 2002). In terms of the prevalence and context of MPR, research evidence shows that compared to high-income countries, higher rates of MPR are reported in low- and middle-income countries (LAMICs), for example, India, South Africa, Papua New Guinea, inter alia (Jenkins, 1998; Jewkes et al., 2002, 2012; UNICEF, 2014).

National level data and reports of surveillance studies from South Africa indicate that MPR represents one-third to half of all reported rape cases (Horvath & Kelly, 2009; Swart, Gilchrist, Butchart, Seedat, & Martin, 2000); and 8.9% of men who had ever raped had done so with other perpetrators (Jewkes, Sikweyiya, Morrell, & Dunkle, 2011). Generally, only about 2.8% of rape cases are reported to the police whilst it is believed that more than a million rapes happen in a year in South Africa (Swart et al., 2000).

According to da Silva, Harkins, and Woodhams (2013), MPR can be present in multifarious contexts (e.g. schools, neighbourhoods, prisons, streets, clubs/pubs, war-torn places, etc.). In a study on MPR from Nigeria (Ohayi, Ezugwu, Chigbu, Arinze-Onyia, & Iyoke, 2015), the findings showed that a higher proportion of the rape occurred in bushes, uncompleted buildings, perpetrators’ residence and the victim’s residence. In a content analysis of police case dockets in South Africa, van der Watt and van Graan (2013) found that MPR was perpetrated in bushes and isolated places; locations within residential suburbs and public spaces such as streets, homes, shacks or in dilapidated buildings or houses; inside the vehicles of perpetrators and in the private residence of the victims or an acquaintance.

In terms of temporal characteristics, previous evidence from South Africa showed that predominantly, MPR occurred during the weekends, with about 65.1–74% happening between Friday and Sunday (Jewkes et al., 2012; van der Watt & van Graan, 2013; Vetten & Haffejee, 2005). Gbemileke and Oladepo (2015) observed that in Nigeria, the majority (33.4%) of MPR cases were perpetrated during the day. However, the majority (68%) of MPR cases reported in South Africa have been found to occur at night (van der Watt & van Graan, 2013; Vetten & Haffejee, 2005).

Regarding the disclosure of the offence or reporting of the offence to the police, Gbemileke and Oladepo (2015) reported that in Nigeria, most (49.4%) of the cases were reported to the police on the same day of occurrence, whereas 2.7% was reported after 31 days of occurrence.

Offenders and victims of MPR

MPR has a variety of perpetrators (including gangs, students, soldiers, prisoners and prison staff) as well as a range of victims depending on the context of the act (da Silva et al., 2013). In South Africa, MPR is associated usually with the unemployed including still-in-school young men (Jewkes, Sikweyiya, Dunkle, & Morrell, 2015). The offence is predominantly committed by young men, with children and young women as victims (Jewkes et al., 2002; UNICEF, 2014). However, in Nigeria, Ohayi et al. (2015) observed that MPR was reported more often among adult victims than among victims less than 18 years old. Again, studies from some parts of West Africa (including Nigeria) indicate that although males are also gang raped, most victims of MPR are females (Gbemileke & Oladepo, 2015; Ohayi et al., 2015).

In terms of perpetrator-group size, evidence from South Africa shows that the offender groups of MPR are mostly made up of two members (e.g. Jewkes et al., 2012; van der Watt & van Graan, 2013; Vetten & Haffejee, 2005). The preponderance of duo perpetrator groups in MPR has also been found in the analysis of MPR cases in the US, UK and South Korea (Park & Kim, 2016; Porter & Alison, 2006). Similarly, the most recent systematic review and meta-analysis of the characteristics of multiple perpetrator sexual offences identifies the predominant perpetrator-group size to be two (Bamford, Chou, & Browne, 2016). Additionally, most perpetrators of MPR have been found to be strangers to the
victim, although some perpetrators have been found to be acquainted with the victim (Bamford et al., 2016; Jewkes et al., 2012; Porter & Alison, 2006; Vetten & Haffejee, 2005).

In a recent study, da Silva, Woodhams, and Harkins (2014) analysed a national sample of 336 allegations of completed and attempted rape of female victims from the UK. Rapes committed by multiple and lone offenders were compared. Among other things, the findings showed that multiple perpetrators approached their victims outdoors but raped them indoors. Compared to lone perpetrators, multiple perpetrators were younger and less likely to be arrested and convicted. In terms of the modus operandi and characteristics of MPR, evidence from South Africa (e.g. van der Watt & van Graan, 2013) shows that perpetrators adopt the blitz and confidence approaches to contact their victims. In the blitz approach, there is sudden violence and overpowering of the victim, whereas the confidence approach is usually characterised by winning the trust or confidence of the victim through the use of con story or ruse or offering the victim a lift. Victims are assaulted by means of hitting with hands or offensive objects such as stones, hammers and axes. Perpetrators also use weapons including knives and firearms to elicit compliance from the victim (van der Watt & van Graan, 2013).

In South Korea, Park and Kim (2016) compared 340 sexual assault cases based on offender characteristics, victim characteristics and offence behaviours to identify differences among sexual assaults committed by lone, double and groups of three or more perpetrators. The results indicated that the proportion of multiple perpetrator groups who were in their teens at the time of the offence was significantly larger than that of lone perpetrators. Similarly, the victims of MPR were teens between ages 13 and 19 years mostly known to the perpetrator group. The evidence showed further that members of the multiple perpetrator groups were more than twice as likely to be temporary workers or unemployed, compared to lone perpetrators. In terms of the offence behaviours, multiple perpetrator groups made use of threats or violence when approaching their victims, compared to lone perpetrators (Park & Kim, 2016).

**Explaining MPR**

The multifactorial theory of multiple perpetrator sexual offending (Harkins & Dixon, 2010, 2013) provides a comprehensive framework for explaining MPR. This framework integrates factors of group dynamics and processes at the individual (i.e. deviant sexual interest and cognition), socio-cultural (i.e. rape culture and rape myth, and hypermasculinity and male dominance), and situational (i.e. male bonding, theories of group behaviour and unique settings) levels to explain multiple perpetrator sexual offences. The framework proposes that these three factors (i.e. individual, socio-cultural and situational) and the interaction between any two or all of them play a role in different types of MPR. These interactions could be among the individual and socio-cultural contexts (internalisation of socio-cultural factors), the individual and situational factors (group processes) and the situational context and socio-cultural factors (sub-cultural context).

Even though the present study is exploratory in nature (not hypothesis testing), the findings are discussed in the light of the reviewed evidence from the African, Asian and Western literature to draw some key similarities and differences regarding the victims, perpetrators and offence characteristics of MPR in Ghana. Potentially, knowing how similar or different MPR is in Ghana can contribute to the understanding of MPR and help formulate preventive strategies which are socio-culturally sensitive and appropriate in Ghana.

**MPR in Ghana**

In Ghana, MPR, like most sexual offences, is religiously proscribed and legally criminalised: “Whoever commits rape shall be guilty of first degree felony and shall be liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term of not less than five years and not more than twenty-five years” (Act 29 of Ghana, Section 97). Despite this law, sexual crimes and violence represent a reality which hits the headlines in Ghana.
on daily basis – with rape remaining a major social challenge in the country (Aryee, 2013; Quarshie, Osafo, Akotia, Peprah, & Andoh-Arthur, 2017). For instance, the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service recorded a total of 3937, 14,658 and 238 cases of rape, defilement1 and incest, respectively, between 1999 and 2014 (Ghana Police Service, 2015). As observed elsewhere, often, official records do not separate MPR from single/lone perpetrator rape cases whilst MPR remains one of the traumatic but under-reported sexual crimes; hence, the actual statistics may be more than the reported cases found in official records (Hauffe & Porter, 2009; Porter & Alison, 2006; Walby, Allen, & Simmons, 2004). Combining the statistics on all sexual offences in this manner is problematic in that MPR can be significantly “unique” from other forms of sexual violence in terms of patterns, mental health consequences, medico-legal outcomes and intervention and prevention efforts (Jewkes et al., 2002; Smith, 2004; UNICEF, 2014; WHO, 2002).

Extensive electronic database literature search conducted for the purposes of literature review for this study indicated that compared to single perpetrator rape, there is a dearth of research publications on MPR from Ghana (Aryee, 2013). Thus, per our knowledge in the area, this present study represents a pioneering research effort at exploring some of the key characteristics of MPR in Ghana. This is an exploratory study that seeks to review media news reports of MPR in Ghana in order to explore some of the key characteristics of the perpetrators, victims and the offence in the country.

The use of media surveillance for obtaining data on rape and other criminal behaviours is critical, especially, in non-Western contexts such as Ghana where there are inadequate, unreliable or unavailable police records on certain crimes (Adinkrah, 2014, 2017). More significantly, police–civilian relationship in Ghana is characterised by tensions making witnesses to crime scenes and criminal events more inclined to disclosing eye-witness information to journalists rather than to police investigators (Adinkrah, 2017; Boakye, 2009b; Quarshie, Osafo, Akotia, & Peprah, 2015; Quarshie et al., 2017). Thus, in Ghana, “media-based information on crime events is often richer and more comprehensive than police records” (Adinkrah, 2017, p. 9).

Hence, this study aims to explore some of the key characteristics of the victims, perpetrators and the offence of MPR in Ghana as reported in the local Ghanaian media. It is hoped that this study will serve as a useful starting point to building a nuanced scientific understanding of MPR in Ghana to inform intervention and prevention efforts.

**Method**

**Research setting**

Ghana, an Anglophone West African country, is the context for this study. It is bordered to the east, west and north by Togo, Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso, respectively, with the Gulf of Guinea occupying the southern coastal line. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS, 2016), Ghana’s population stands at 27,670,174 and can be described as largely youthful as 2 in every 5 persons in the country are less than 15 years old. The population is heterogeneous in terms of indigenous languages, ethnic and religious groupings (Salm & Falola, 2002). Ghana is a patriarchal society where men wield more power and control compared to women (Nukunya, 2011; Sarpong, 2006). The cultural and historical heritage of the country is intensely religious as religiosity pervades every sphere of the life of Ghanaians, with children brought up mainly through religious socialisation (Gyekye, 2003; Nukunya, 2011; Salm & Falola, 2002; Sarpong, 2006). Ghana’s population is made up of Christians (71%), Muslims (18%), adherents of African Traditional Religion (5%) and 6% identified as belonging to other religious groups or without any religious beliefs (GSS, 2013).

**Design and procedure**

Generally, the methodological approach adopted for this study was modelled after the media (news) surveillance approach employed by recent studies (e.g. Quarshie et al., 2015, 2017) on some legally
and socially proscribed behaviours in Ghana (e.g. suicide, incest, etc.). The web portals of four categories of media sources were adopted for this study: radio, TV, newspaper and general news outlets. The radio stations selected were Joy FM (www.myjoyonline.com) and peace FM (www.peacefmonline.com). These radio stations are the most popular with the widest coverage, listenership and affiliation across the country (Adinkrah, 2014; Quarshie et al., 2015). Ghana Television (www.gbcghana.com) and TV3 Ghana (www.tv3network.com) were the TV stations selected for this study. Ghana Television is the state-owned television broadcaster; and TV3 Ghana is the popular and most watched privately owned free-on-air television station with the widest coverage across Ghana. The newspapers [i.e. Daily Graphic (graphic.com.gh); Daily Guide (dailyguideafrica.com); and Ghanaian Times (ghanaitantimes.com.gh)] and the general news outlets [i.e. Ghana News Agency (ghananewsagency.org), and Ghanaweb (ghanaweb.com)] selected for this study have wider readership with coverage across officialdom, health, education, sports, entertainment, politics, *inter alia* (Gadzekpo, 2010; Quarshie et al., 2015). Online news by media outlets in Ghana are published in English.

The web portals of the selected media sources were each searched for news reports on MPR from January 2000 through June 2016. The earliest date, January 2000, was chosen because media pluralism (Amoakohene, 2004; Gadzekpo, 2010) and airwaves liberalisation (Nyarko, 2016) actualised in Ghana between the mid-1990s and early 2000s. By the year 2000, most media houses had web portals. June 2016 was chosen in order to access the latest news on MPR, as at the time these searches were conducted. Three authors (MIAB, POA and TT) conducted archival searches on the websites of the selected radio and TV media sources, whilst the other three authors (PAD, PAO and ENBQ) searched the news archives of the selected newspapers and general news media outlets using keywords including, “gang rape”, “defilement”, “rape”, “multiple perpetrator rape”, “sexual violence”, “sexual crime”, “gala”,2 “group rape” and “gang bang”. An aggregate of 252 news reports was obtained and screened for reports representing completed cases of MPR eligible for inclusion in the study. A total of 57 news reports of MPR were included in the final analysis of the study (see Figure 1).

Criteria for inclusion and exclusion of news reports

News reports screened and included in the final suite of MPR cases for analysis were those reporting rape involving two or more perpetrators in Ghana. Specifically, the definition of MPR by Jewkes et al. (2012) was adopted to guide the extraction of the news stories included in this study. However, a news report was excluded if it was found to be an international story, occurred before January 2000, involved a single/lone perpetrator, a case of group sex, an editorial, an opinion piece or a follow-up to an already reported primary story on MPR. In some cases, the exact account of the same stories was reported by two or more of the selected media sources. A story was considered as a duplicate if the exact account was reported by two or more of the selected media sources. In such a case, the story was factored into the analysis as one count. It is common knowledge regarding media practice in Ghana that many media houses stream or draw their news items/stories verbatim from other media outlets. We removed 53 duplicates from the pool of news stories accessed (see Figure 1). There was no story with multiple accounts reported in the selected media sources for this study.

Media reporting of MPR in Ghana

Ghana’s media landscape can be described as liberal, as public life in the country continues to experience a growing media presence (Nyarko, 2016). Broadcast media continue to provide the Ghanaian public with a wide spectrum of access to media and content. For instance, according to Gadzekpo (2010), there are more than 160 FM radio stations, over 40 regular newspaper outlets and approximately 10 different free-on-air television stations in Ghana. As found in earlier studies (e.g. Amoakohene, 2004; Nyarko, 2016), the plethora of broadcast media outlets in the public life of Ghana appears
to foster consensus building and remains at the frontline in the public agenda setting process of the country.

Like every sexual crime and violence, MPR is newsworthy in Ghana (Gadzekpo, 2010; Quarshie et al., 2017). Thus, journalists and correspondents of various media houses in Ghana give prominence to such reports by obtaining information from multiple sources (e.g. police investigators, prosecutors, court proceedings, relatives, witnesses and significant others) in order to produce comprehensive investigative journalistic news reports on an incident of MPR.

However, as observed in previous studies on media reports of other criminalised behaviours in Ghana, for instance, (attempted) suicide and incest (see Quarshie et al., 2015, 2017), the reportage of MPR can be described as explicit, sensational and mostly replete with identity details and vivid description of situational characteristics. For example, the use of sensationalistic headlines (e.g. “father, two others gang-rape step-daughter to death”); detailed identity information such as names, ages and the schools and grades of the victim and perpetrators of the offence are explicitly indicated in the news reports; in some cases, clear images of perpetrators are displayed, and names of specific geographical and residential locations of victims and perpetrators are included; and verbatim reports of police investigators, prosecutors and significant others are added to the news stories. Thus, this form of media practice can be described as crude and unethical, as it diverges from recommended best media practice regarding sexual crime reportage (Byerly, 1994; Kitzinger, 2013).

In spite of this crude and ethical diversion, these media reports on MPR are readily available and may shed light in relation to the high-profile or extreme cases of MPR that get included in the news. However, the generalisability of the findings of a study based on these report (i.e. as in the present study) may be limited by the fact that not all incidents of MPR get media attention. It is usually the
most extreme and sensational cases that are reported in the media and frequently there is important information missing, or sometimes untrue information.

**Data analysis**

The conventional content analysis (CCA) approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was used to analyse the final 57 news reports on MPR selected. Apart from the rationale of the study, to provide a systematic description of some of the key characteristics of MPR in Ghana, CCA was deemed apposite to this study because the phenomenon of MPR has been understudied in Ghana (Aryee, 2013; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). As recommended by scholars in the area of content analysis (e.g. Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Kondracki, Wellman, & Amundson, 2002; Morse & Field, 1995), the researchers began the analysis by independently reading the selected news reports closely and iteratively, without imposing any preconceived categories in order to achieve a sense of immersion and complete familiarity with the reports/data. Next, words and phrases that captured notable thoughts, actions and concepts in the reports were highlighted. This process allowed relevant categories to emerge naturally from the data. At research meetings, the researchers discussed, built consensus and sorted the emerged categories that represented more than one relevant notable thought in the reports to develop meaningful clusters of codes. Finally, the manifest and latent meanings of the identified codes and the relationships among them were explored, defined and discussed (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The nature of the data and design used for this study obviated the need for ethical approval from an institutional review board. However, in writing this paper, the authors ensured that relevant compelling excerpts and portions of the news reports culled to support and shed contextual light on selected themes were anonymised. For instance, direct identity information and names of victims, perpetrators, specific residential locations and schools, *inter alia*, were eliminated or replaced with pseudonyms.

**Findings**

Across the study period, 57 cases of completed MPR and 1 case of attempted MPR were reported in the selected media sources. But, based on the definition of MPR adopted for this study (Jewkes et al., 2012), the analysis and findings were based on the 57 cases of completed MPR reported in the selected media sources for the study. The news story of the attempted MPR was excluded from the final analysis because it did not involve penetration (due to the “timely” intervention and rescue of the victim by the security guards of the school where the incident occurred). Across the 57 cases analysed, there were 61 victims, and 184 perpetrators involved in 57 perpetrator groups. Generally, the findings were organised around two major thematic areas: *victim and perpetrator-group characteristics* and *key characteristics of the offence*.

**Victim and perpetrator-group characteristics**

This theme covers *victim characteristics, perpetrator-group characteristics* and *victim-to-perpetrator-group relationship*. Key findings under these subthemes are shown in Table 1.

**Victim characteristics**

All the 61 victims involved in the reported cases were females aged between 2 and 44 years with an average age of 17.9 years. The majority (55.7%) of the victims were adolescents³ aged between 10 and 19 years (see Table 1). In four cases, there were two victims each. The ages of 12 victims were not reported. Three (4.9%) of the victims were reported to be mentally challenged. The majority (67.2%: $n=41$) of the victims were pupils and students in primary school, junior and senior high schools and tertiary educational institutions.
Perpetrator-group characteristics

In all, there were 57 perpetrator groups (involving 184 all-male members). The ages of only 78 perpetrators were reported: ranged between 8 and 48 years with an average age of 20.1 years. As indicated in Table 1, the majority (21.7%; n = 40) of the age-reported perpetrators were adolescents aged between 10 and 19 years. The perpetrator-group sizes ranged from two to seven. The modal perpetrator-group was composed of two members.

Although the educational and/or economic backgrounds of 84 (45.6%) of the perpetrators were not reported, 44 (22.3%) of the perpetrators were reported as students enrolled in junior and senior high schools. Four (2.2%) were reported as unemployed, whereas 55 (29.9%) were employed in generally lower socio-economic occupations: barbers, fishermen, masons, porters, commercial drivers, cobblers, messengers, mechanics, bus conductors, labourers, petty traders, among others. Two (3.6%) were police officers, whilst 15 (27.3%) were reported as armed robbers.

The social relationships within the perpetrator groups were described as friends, robbery gangs and classmates/schoolmates. The social relationships within six perpetrator groups were not reported (see Table 1).

Victim-to-perpetrator-group relationship

The perpetrator–victim mean age difference was 2.2 years. As shown in Table 1, the victim-to-perpetrator-group relationships were described as a neighbour, a schoolmate/classmate, a friend to one perpetrator, a girlfriend to one perpetrator, a step-daughter to one perpetrator and stranger. It is noteworthy that the cases in which the victim was described as a girlfriend to one perpetrator were those in which a member of the perpetrator group had an unresolved rift in a love relationship with the victim. Again, the relationships reported as stranger were the cases in which, predominantly, the perpetrator groups were engaged in armed robbery activities in homes of the victims. Overall, however, the

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**Table 1. Key characteristics of victims and perpetrator groups.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victim age distribution, and educational and employment status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Educational and employment status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age distribution (in years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Under 10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–19</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>Junior high school</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>42.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>Senior high school</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26–40</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>Tertiary education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>Employed</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<table>
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<th>Perpetrator-group size and age distribution</th>
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<th>Perpetrator-group size</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
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<td>Age distribution (in years)</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>100</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Victim and perpetrator-group relationships</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Relationship within perpetrator groups</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victim-to-perpetrator-group relationship</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Neighbour</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Classmate/schoolmate</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Friend to one perpetrator</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girlfriend to one perpetrator</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Step-daughter to one perpetrator</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: NR: not reported.
victims involved in the majority (57.9%: \( n = 33 \)) of the MPRs across the period knew at least a member of the perpetrator groups.

**Key characteristics of the offence**

This major theme relates to seven subthemes: *place of perpetrator-group-to-victim approach, place of rape, compliance technique, temporal aspects, disclosure, medico-legal outcome and reasons for the act.* The observations of the summative content analysis of the key characteristics of the offence are shown in Table 2.

**Place of perpetrator-group-to-victim approach**

This subtheme covers the place where the perpetrator groups initially contacted and picked up their victims and the strategies used. Generally, the perpetrator groups approached and picked up their victims from a location and raped them elsewhere (80.7%: \( n = 46 \)). As shown in Table 2, generally, the perpetrator groups approached their victims outdoors or within public spaces or at social events (e.g. streets, farms, at funerals, parties, etc.). In 38 of the cases (66.7%), the victim was approached when she was alone. Both members of duo perpetrator groups approached their victims together. In some perpetrator groups of more than two members (e.g. armed robber gangs), all the members approached the victim, whereas in other perpetrator groups (involving three or more members), a member was delegated to approach the victim. Again, the perpetrator groups used three main strategies to get their victims: *confidence approach, blitz approach and use of accomplice* (see Table 2). The blitz approach was the most used (47.4%: \( n = 27 \)), whilst the use of accomplice was the least adopted strategy (7.0%: \( n = 4 \)). The confidence approach involves the use of ruse or a con story or where the victim is offered help or lift by the perpetrator group (da Silva et al., 2014; van der Watt & van Graan, 2013). Predominantly, the confidence approach was used by the duo perpetrator groups and the delegated perpetrators in approaching victims at school, home and social events. The blitz approach was characterised by the use of violence (usually by the whole perpetrator group) to overpower or abduct the victim particularly in isolated places and within public spaces (van der Watt & van Graan, 2013). In the accomplice approach, the perpetrator-group contracted a (male or female) friend or colleague of the victim to lure the victim to a designated venue for the rape (van der Watt & van Graan, 2013).

**Place of rape**

This relates to the predominant venues where the perpetrator groups raped their victims. As shown in Table 2, in most of the cases (66.6%: \( n = 38 \)) the rape occurred indoors (e.g. in the room of the victim, a perpetrator or an accomplice or in a classroom). The venue of 5 (8.8%) cases was not reported.

**Compliance technique**

This subtheme relates to the techniques or strategies the perpetrator groups adopted to elicit compliance from their victims. As shown in Table 2, the perpetrator groups adopted single and multiple techniques to elicit compliance from their victims. The single techniques included drugging victim using sedatives or alcohol; threatening with an offensive weapon such as gun, machetes, clubs, knives, etc.; and physical abuse (e.g. slapping, kicking, gagging, tying, etc.). It is noteworthy here that according to some of the news stories included in the analysis (40.3%: \( n = 23 \)), a combination of several compliance methods was adopted by some perpetrator groups (e.g. verbal threat and use of an offensive weapon such as gun, knives, machetes, etc.). In most of the cases (43.9%: \( n = 25 \), “single techniques” were adopted by the perpetrator groups to compel compliance from their victims.
Temporal aspects

This subtheme covers the time of day, days of the week and the months of the year in which the MPRs occurred across the study period (see Table 2). The majority of the cases occurred in the evening (54.3%: \( n = 31 \)). Similarly, most of the cases of MPR reported occurred between Fridays and the
weekend (see Table 2). Generally, most of the cases (57.9%; $n = 33$) occurred during the three main school holiday periods in Ghana (i.e. December–January, April–May and July–September) when pupils and students have breaks from school and are at home.

**Disclosure**

This subtheme is related to the time lapse between the incident and disclosure or report of the offence to the police, and by who (see Table 2). Twenty-six (45.6%) of the cases were reported on the same day of occurrence, whilst 5.3% ($n = 3$) were reported to the police after one year following the offence. With regard to the informant of the police, most of the cases (35.1%; $n = 20$) were reported to the police by a family member of the victim (e.g. parent, sibling or extended relative). In 10.5% ($n = 6$) of the cases, peers of the victim reported the offence to the police. As shown in Table 2, across the news reports analysed, besides the victim, the cases were predominantly (52.6%; $n = 30$) reported to the police by significant others in the lives of the victims (e.g. family members, peers and teachers).

**Medico-legal outcome**

This subtheme focuses on the medical outcomes and legal implications of the MPR cases for the victims and perpetrator groups, respectively (see Table 2). The majority of the victims involved in the cases for which the medical outcome of the offence was reported (29.5%; $n = 18$) were found traumatised or unconscious after the rape. Two (3.3%) victims died shortly after the rape and another two (3.3%) became pregnant as a result of the rape. In terms of the legal implications of the offence for the perpetrator groups (see Table 2), the analysis indicated that, although nearly 60% of the members of the perpetrator groups were facing various legal implications for the offence, about 38.0% ($n = 70$) were unidentified or at large as at the time of the news report by the media outlets.

**Reasons for the act**

The reasons or motivations for the offence by the perpetrator-group members were not reported in most of the media reports of MPR analysed (91.2%; $n = 52$). However, in 8.8% ($n = 5$) of the cases, some of the perpetrators ($n = 17$) attributed their participation in the offence to peer influence, specifically, the influence of the leader of the group who suggested the idea of the rape in the first place. For example, it was reported in a case thus:

Six young men have been arrested at Mankonor for allegedly gang-raping a 15-year-old Junior High School pupil … The police said the suspects, who were later arrested, admitted having sex with the girl in their caution statements, with five of them blaming Gangalia as the one who initiated the idea.

Again, in 5.3% ($n = 3$) of the cases, some perpetrators, particularly, the instigators of the rape mentioned that their reason for instigating the act was to punish the victim in order to redress (a perceived or an actual) wrong done them by the victim. Notably, the instigators were males who had been jilted or threatened with breakup by their girlfriends (i.e. victims), as illustrated in the excerpt below:

The victim had been in a relationship with Akpatse since last year but she threatened to quit the relationship and that did not go down well with [name of instigator of rape] … [name of instigator of rape] therefore asked his friends to assist him to teach the victim a bitter lesson.

The quotes above suggest that the members of the perpetrator groups chose to engage in the offence due to the instigators’ persuasion of the rest of the group.

**Discussion**

This study set out to explore some of the key characteristics of the offenders, victims and the offence of MPR in Ghana by analysing the contents of media reports on the phenomenon in the country from January 2000 through June 2016. The analysis showed seven main findings: (1) although the offence
was carried out by perpetrator groups mostly composed of two, three and four all-male members, the duo perpetrator group was the majority; (2) the perpetrator groups mostly approached their victims outdoors but the rape occurred mostly indoors by using multiple violent techniques to compel compliance; (3) the victims of the offence were mostly school-going females aged between 10 and 19 years and mostly familiar with at least one of the perpetrators; (4) the offence happened mostly at night during the three main school holiday periods in Ghana when pupils and students were on vacation; (5) most of the offence was reported to the police on the same day of occurrence, mainly by a family member of the victim; (6) the offence resulted in negative medical outcomes and legal implications for the victims and perpetrator groups, respectively; and (7) peer influence and intention to punish victim were adduced for the act by some of the perpetrators.

**Offenders**

The observation that the MPRs were carried out by all-male perpetrator groups against all-female victims is consistent with the literature that MPR is one of the known forms of sexual violence carried out by (usually young) males against girls and women across the world, particularly, in patriarchal societies (Bamford et al., 2016; Jewkes et al., 2002, 2012; Park & Kim, 2016; UNICEF, 2014; WHO, 2002). Again, consistent with evidence from Africa, Europe and Asia (e.g. Bamford et al., 2016; Jewkes et al., 2012; Park & Kim, 2016), this study has shown that the offence was mostly carried out by duo perpetrator groups with members who were adolescents, early adults or both, even though the present study is fraught with missing data regarding the age distribution of the perpetrators (see Table 1).

The evidence that the perpetrator groups approached their victims (mainly when alone) outdoors but the rape occurred indoors is inconsistent with findings from South Africa (Jewkes, Sikweyiya, Morrell, & Dunkle, 2010, 2012; van der Watt & van Graan, 2013; Vetten & Haffejee, 2005) where, predominantly, the location of MPR has been found to be outdoors. However, this evidence is consistent with findings from the UK, where MPR offenders approach their victims outdoors and at social events but raped them indoors (da Silva et al., 2014; Porter & Alison, 2006). A contextual explanation could be the idea that sexual socialisation in Ghana views sex as a sacred act, hence, prescribes it as an indoor activity – any outdoor sexual activity is repugnant to the Ghanaian society (Nukunya, 2011; Sarpong, 2006). A more possible practical reason could be that the use of indoors or secluded places conceals the offence and prevents others from witnessing the rape on-going (Porter & Alison, 2006).

Similarly, the use of multiple violent techniques by the perpetrator groups to compel compliance in this study supports the consistent observation in the literature (e.g. Hauffe & Porter, 2009; Jewkes et al., 2012; Vetten & Haffejee, 2005) that the offenders of MPR tend to use more violent strategies to overpower their victims.

**Victims**

More than half of the victims of the MPR cases in the current study were mostly school-going females aged between 10 and 19 years, and mostly familiar with at least one of the perpetrators. Although the literature shows that adult women have been victimised by MPR, predominantly, girls under age 18 are often the victims. As explicated elsewhere (see Jewkes et al., 2010; White & Smith, 2004), this observation illustrates the evidence that the victimisation of sexual offences peak during adolescence and emerging adulthood (McGloin & Stickle, 2011; Santrock, 2009; Stolzenberg & D’Alessio, 2008). Again, it is evident in this study that the majority of the victims of the MPR knew at least one member of the perpetrator group. This supports the evidence on rapist–victim relationship from Ghana (Aryee, 2013; Boateng & Lee, 2014) and South Korea (Park & Kim, 2016) where at least a member of the perpetrator group knows the victim. It is, however, inconsistent with observation in South Africa where mostly the victim is a stranger to the perpetrator group (Jewkes et al., 2012; Vetten & Haffejee, 2005).
Offence

Consistent with evidence from South Africa (van der Watt & van Graan, 2013; Vetten & Haffejee, 2005), the offence happened mostly at night. This study also shows that most of the offence occurred during the three main school holiday periods in Ghana (i.e. December–January, April–May and July–September) when pupils and students were on vacation. During school holidays, students in boarding schools also return home and it is plausible that most students get the chance to engage in outdoor social events (e.g. parties, funerals, etc.) where the offenders tend to prey on them.

The evidence that most of the offence was reported to the police on the same day of occurrence mainly by a family member of the victim is consistent with the observation in Nigeria where the majority of MPR cases was reported to the police on the same day of occurrence. As observed in a recent study on incest in Ghana (Quarshie et al., 2017), there is a growing awareness, on the part of sexual victims and significant others, of the importance of reporting sexual abuse cases to the police early in order to receive help.

The negative medical outcomes of MPR for the victims (e.g. gynaecological injuries, pregnancies, trauma, deaths, etc.) observed in this study lend support to previous evidence from South Africa, Nigeria and the UK (e.g. Hauffe & Porter, 2009; Jewkes et al., 2010, 2012; van der Watt & van Graan, 2013; Vetten & Haffejee, 2005). Further, the observation in this study that about 38% of the perpetrators were either unidentified or at large supports the seemingly universal fact in the area of criminology and forensic science that, MPR, compared to single/lone perpetrator rape, is difficult to investigate and prosecute (Jewkes et al., 2012; Smith, 2004; Uchendu & Forae, 2016; van der Watt & van Graan, 2013; Vetten & Haffejee, 2005; WHO, 2002). Often some victims of MPR are unable to provide detailed (identity) information about the perpetrators to help the police effect arrest of the perpetrators (da Silva et al., 2014; Jewkes et al., 2012; Park & Kim, 2016).

The observation that the offence is perpetrated by adolescent boys and early adult men warrants a critical paradoxical question: why do some boys and young men perpetrate this sexual offence in an intensely religious country where children and adolescents are brought up mainly through religious socialisation? This is interesting because all the religious groups in Ghana proscribe MPR and other forms of sexual crime, as religion establishes and exerts a strong regulatory system in socialising children and young people in terms of sexual behaviour (Anarfi & Owusu, 2011; Asante, Osofo, & Doku, 2016; Osofo, Asampong, Langmagne, & Ahiaideke, 2014; Quarshie et al., 2017; Sarpong, 2006). Perhaps as found in a recent study from Ghana (see Asante et al., 2016), the fact that boys and young men are perpetrating MPR is an indication that the religious control over the sexual behaviour of young people in contemporary Ghana is very minimal (Anarfi & Owusu, 2011). Additionally, the multifactorial theory of multiple perpetrator sexual offending helps to shed more light on this as follows.

Some members of the perpetrator groups (8.8%) in the media reports analysed for this study attributed their motivation for the offence to peer influence and intention to punish the victim. Within the lens of the multifactorial theory of multiple perpetrator sexual offending (Harkins & Dixon, 2010, 2013), these attributions are consistent with and interaction among the individual, situational and the socio-cultural context. At the individual level, some of the instigators and their group members showed distorted cognition in believing or adopting the offence – which is an inappropriate behaviour – as a means to redressing (a threatened or real) breakup by the victim (Harkins & Dixon, 2010; Porter & Alison, 2001, 2005). At the situational context, members of the group yielded
to the influence by the instigators in order to enhance the male bonding within the group. In addition to conformity, doing things together tend to bond members of male groups (Sherrod, 19987). Thus, male dominance and bonding in the perpetrator group of MPR are enhanced through participation in the act of MPR and humiliation of the victim (Harkins & Dixon, 2010; Ullman, 1999). The socio-cultural level relates to the internalised rape myth and the pervasive idea of male dominance held in the Ghanaian society (Ampofo, 1993; Boakye, 2009a, 2009b; Boateng & Lee, 2014). In most African contexts, males see sexual violence as a tool for controlling and punishing females (Ampofo, 1993; Boakye, 2009b; Jewkes et al., 2012; WHO, 2002). Thus, unsurprisingly, in the current study some of the perpetrators (5.3%) intended punishing the victim with the act of MPR.

Limitations, implications and conclusion

Although the media reports on MPR analysed in this study were drawn from all the 10 regions of Ghana, the generalisability of the findings may be limited by the following facts. First, not all incidents of MPR get media attention. Next, it is usually the most extreme and sensational cases that are reported in the media and frequently there is important information missing, or sometimes untrue information (Paulsen, 2003; Quarshie et al., 2015, 2017). Again, it also seems that many cases were related to situations where a substantial number of the perpetrators had not been caught or identified. Finally, as shown in the tables in the findings section, there were many missing data (i.e. relevant information not reported) in respect of several key variables in the news stories included in the analysis. These limitations underscore the need to exercise caution in the interpretation, extrapolation and adoption of the findings and conclusions drawn.

In spite of these limitations, the study has a few useful implications for policy, practice and future research on MPR in Ghana. Given that most of the victims and perpetrators were in-school youth and the school setting was the location for some of the incidents of MPR, schools may consider incorporating issues of appropriate sexual behaviours and interpersonal conflict resolution into the school curriculum and programmes of instruction. This recommendation is anchored in the fact that not all perpetrators of sexual offences understand that their actions are criminal and multifariously inimical to their victims (Jewkes et al., 2010).

On practice, the Ghana Police Service and public safety based non-governmental organisations should collaborate with the media to heighten public safety campaigns on precautions (especially, for girls and women) to prevent MPR. Parents and teachers can repeat this safety education at home and in the classroom, respectively. More importantly, government must consider investing in the setting up of community counselling centres and school counselling units to help victims and their families with the amelioration of the trauma and other negative mental health effects of MPR.

To foster research on the phenomenon of MPR in Ghana, the Ghana Police Service must streamline their rape surveillance system and maintain an independent database on MPR offences. As done elsewhere (e.g. Gidcyz & Koss, 1990; Ullman, 2007), future research may consider exploring MPR in Ghana by examining the views of victims with regard to the effects of the offence on their health and well-being and their treatment needs and support. Other future primary studies may solicit the views of (convicted) perpetrators in terms of the motivations and mechanics of the offence, and assessment of the mental health status of the perpetrators (Chen, Chen, & Hung, 2014). Evidence from these primary studies may inform intervention and prevention efforts in Ghana.

It is also worth mentioning that although detailed investigative media reports may represent a source of data for systematic analysis (e.g. as applied in this study), the explicit reporting of the identity and related situational details about the victims and perpetrators of MPR (and other forms of sexual violence) in the Ghanaian media has the potential of unwittingly fostering shame, stigma and other forms of psychological discomfort (Byerly, 1994; Kitzinger, 2013). Hence, media houses in Ghana must adopt best reporting practice so not to militate against the (psychological) recovery and the general mental health of victims, perpetrators and their families (Byerly, 1994).
Whilst the limitations of this study must be allowed to guide the interpretation, conclusions and applications of the findings, this study represents the first research attempt aimed at presenting some useful scoping insights into MPR in Ghana and underscores the need for further primary research efforts on the phenomenon in order to build a nuanced understanding of the key characteristics of the victims, offenders and the offence of MPR in Ghana. This study has shown that the patterns and characteristics of MPR in Ghana are fairly and comparatively similar to those found in other parts of Africa and LAMICs.

Notes

1. Section 101 of the Criminal Code of Ghana (1960) amended by Act 458 section 2(a) defines defilement of a female under 16 years of age as follows:

   Whoever carnally knows any female under fourteen years of age, whether with or without her consent, shall be guilty of a second degree felony and shall be liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term of not less than twelve months or more than ten years.

2. ‘Gala’ is the popular term used within informal circles in Ghana by students and young people to mean gang rape, group rape or MPR.

3. Adolescents is defined in this study based on WHO’s (2011) definition: individuals aged 10–19 years.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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