

**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**

**COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES**

**EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN MARRIED THROUGH ABDUCTION  
IN THE UPPER WEST REGION OF GHANA**

**BY**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is the result of my own research work carried out in the Department of Social Work, University of Ghana, under the supervision of Dr. Emma Seyram Hamenoo and Dr. Kwabena Frimpong-Manso. The thesis has never been presented, either in part or in whole, for the award of any other degree.

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### **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to all girls and women in Ghana and the world over, who have been victims of bride abduction. Again, I dedicate this work to people who are fighting to promote consensual marriage.

*May God strengthen all of you!*

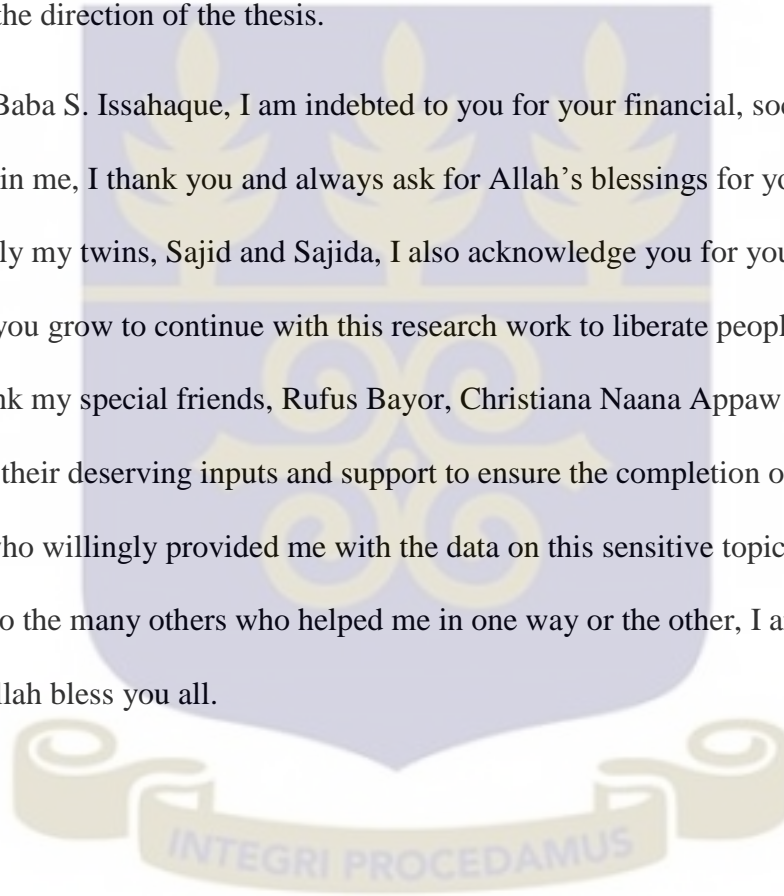


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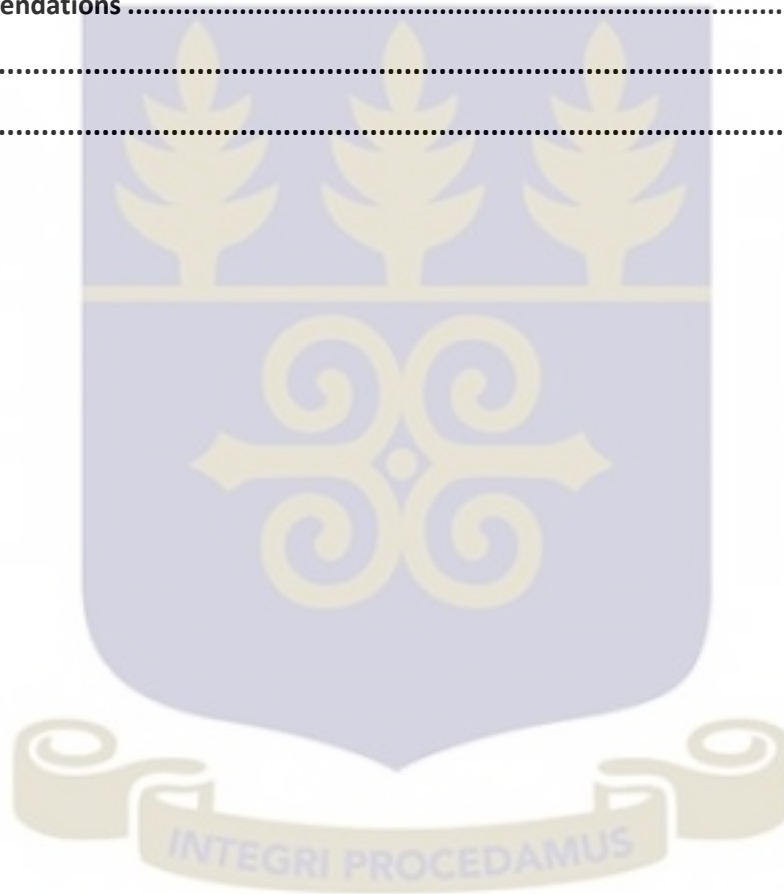
To my husband, Baba S. Issahaque, I am indebted to you for your financial, social and emotional support and faith in me, I thank you and always ask for Allah's blessings for you. To my children, especially my twins, Sajid and Sajida, I also acknowledge you for your comfort and company. I pray you grow to continue with this research work to liberate people. Finally, I would like to thank my special friends, Rufus Bayor, Christiana Naana Appaw and Emmanuel Asare Owusu for their deserving inputs and support to ensure the completion of the work. For the participants who willingly provided me with the data on this sensitive topic, I am very grateful to you. To the many others who helped me in one way or the other, I am indebted to you. I say may Allah bless you all.



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## ABSTRACT

Universal to every society is the institution of marriage. How partners are selected, however, varies. While some selection procedures adhere to the human rights of the women involved, others such as bride abduction do not. Bride abduction has been considered as the carrying away of a girl by total strangers to a young man's home with the aim of marrying her. Whilst the number of girls affected by this practice is not known, evidence from Central Asian and South Africa suggest that bride abduction is wide spread. In Ghana, since studies have not focused on the experiences of the women married through abduction, this study was conducted to explore the experiences of women married through abduction and the factors that sustain it in the Jirapa district. The study employed a qualitative approach. The target population was all women married through abduction, men who abducted and community leaders in the Gbari and Vinning communities in the Jirapa district. Using purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques, the study selected a total of twenty participants for the research. The study found out that all participants indicated that they grew up knowing and accepting the practice and due to tradition and peaceful coexistence they do not follow up to make trouble when girls are abducted. This study found out that the abuse of ancient traditions has resulted in young women being kidnapped and raped in our society. The study recommends that chiefs, elders and opinion leaders of the communities experiencing bride abduction must re-examine and redefine the culture surrounding marriage practice. Redefining the tenets of the culture will mean altering aspects of the culture that infringe on the wellbeing and happiness of the individuals in the community.



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Background to the Study

Universal to every society is the institution of marriage. How partners are selected, however, varies. While some selection procedures adhere to the human rights of the women involved, others such as bride abduction do not (Chabaya, Rembe & Wadesango, 2011). Bride abduction has been defined and understood by different scholars from different cultural contexts.

In Central Asia, bride abduction is called ‘ala kachuu,’ referring to the widespread act of kidnapping a woman for marriage. Abduction in Asia includes a variety of actions such as treats, beating and rape (Kleinbach, Ablezova & Aitieva, 2005; pp. 191). Kidnapping implies the non-consensual process where a young man and his friends take a young woman by deception or force to the home of his parents or near relatives and convince her to wear a marriage scarf (Kleinbach, Ablezova & Aitieva, 2005).

In Africa, Nkosi and Buthelezi (2013) define bride abduction as “the carrying away of a girl by total strangers to a young man’s home with the aim of marrying her” (pp. 161). Previously, Nkosi (2009) provided a descriptive definition of bride abduction as the process of forcibly carrying away a young woman by a group of young men, who in most cases comprise of her abductor and his peers with the intention to marry her. These positions suggest that abduction is conducted with aggression and compulsion in a way that the victim does not condone.

Handrahan (2000) categorizes bride abduction into two; a genuine one known as force abduction or non-consensual where the bride is forcefully abducted without her consent and that of her family and a mock one referred to as consensual in which the woman has prior knowledge and agrees

with a man to participate in imitating an abduction. Despite the two distinct categorizations in theory, it is however difficult in reality to make such a distinction, since the act is a public show of force ( Borbieva, 2012).

Statistical data is not readily available on the number of women abducted each year for the purposes of marriage, but anecdotal evidence indicates that globally thousands of women are abducted into marriage. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, 11,800 women and girls are estimated to be abducted into marriage every year (Nogoibaeva, 2012; Sloth-Nielson, 2011). In Georgia (USA), activists estimated that hundreds of women are kidnapped and forced into marriage each year (Kokhodze & Uchidze, 2006). In South Africa, the media reported that in 2009 more than 20 Eastern Cape Province girls were forced to drop out of school every month due to bride abduction (Mwabene & Sloth-Nielsen, 2011). From a gender perspective, it can be seen as one of the cultural practices that vividly portrays the inequality between the two sexes when it comes to selecting one's life partner.

An observation of the Asian and African perspective of the phenomenon reveals that the practice of bride abduction is widespread and outlawed. Besides, it is considered as an abuse and a violation of the human rights of a woman. Nkosi and Buthelezi (2013) stated that, in bride abduction, “there is gross violation of the girl's rights in terms of beatings, rape, and emotional abuse” (pp. 163).

Bride abduction has several human rights infringements. Legally, its continuous practice is in spite of both national and international instruments outlawing it. A major international Convention that outlaws bride abduction is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). For example, article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states:

“Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses”.

This points to the fact that marriage practices that involve kidnapping or any form of force is unacceptable and a violation of many legal frameworks (Chabaya, Rembe & Wadesango, 2011). In Ghana, there are legal frameworks that make bride abduction unacceptable and illegal. For example, Chapter 5 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana guarantees the individual’s enjoyment of the fundamental human rights. Specifically, article 14 (1) of the said chapter states that no one shall deprive the other of his/ her personal liberty except by law. Article 15 (2) of the same chapter also states that no one shall be subjected to inhumane treatment. Similarly, section 109 of Ghana’s Criminal Offences Act, 1960 (Act 29) makes it clear that marriage entered into through the use of force to procure consent is criminal.

According to Borbieva (2012), despite the fact that the practice is prohibited by law, it is still being practiced in some places in the world perhaps because the culture of these places discourages victims from going to the authorities. This makes victims of the practice endure the consequences without being able to access help from anywhere. This study is an attempt to bring the experiences of women married through abduction and the factors that sustain it to the fore in order to help build advocacy around challenging the normative or structural assumptions of the practice.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Bride abduction violates women’s fundamental human rights, which includes the rights to choose a life partner or enter into a consensual marriage, their economic rights, their rights to dignity, and their reproductive rights, among others (Chabaya, Rembe & Wadesango, 2011). Some studies have been conducted on bride abduction but most of them fall outside the domain of the abducted women’s experience and factors that sustain it. In Central Asia and South Africa, it is mainly on

the effects of abduction on girls education (Handrahan, 2000; Leo, 2013; Nkosi, 2009), human rights perspective of the practice and corruption of the custom of bride abduction (Bernet, Chinara & Nugul, 2011; Chabaya, Rembe & Wadesango, 2011; Nkosi & Buthelezi, 2013).

In another study, Marburg (2012) was interested in women's views on bride abduction and why it still happens in time of legal justice. He recorded about 65 interviews mostly women but he did not state whether they were all abducted women. In the study, Marburg (2012) discovered that bride abduction was as a result of gendered social behavior and moral norms prescribed by society. Under bride abduction, society expects abducted women to be subsevient and uphold individual and family honour.

Nkosi (2009) on the other hand conducted an ethnographic study on a single abducted girl over a two-year period. Though, it is a long-term study, it was skewed towards the impact of abduction on girls' education. Nkosi (2009) found out that the girl, Zola, who was abducted at the age of 15 years was forced to drop out of school. Zola was married by a man who was polygamous. The challenges of the polygamous marriage in which she was abducted into compelled her to resort to cheating and spouse pleasing to prevent marital conflict, quarrels and strained relationship (Nkosi, 2009). However, years after, several interventions were made to ensure that she returned to school to pursue her education.

A study conducted by Action Aid Ghana (2012) in Ghana focused on the historical perspectives and how the practice is carried out. However, it did not include the experiences of abducted women and the factors that sustain the practice. Though, all of these studies were conducted to understand the experiences of abducted women, the long term experiences have not been studied in Ghana.

My study sought to fill this important research deficit by providing in-depth information on the practice and how it is affecting the women. It explored the experiences of women married through abduction and the factors that sustain it in the Jirapa district. It also sought the views of community members including men who abducted as well as that of community leaders in Gbare and Vinving communities; both in the Jirapa district.

### **1.3 Main Objective**

The aim of the research was to explore the experiences of women married through abduction in the Jirapa district and the perception of other community members regarding the practice.

### **1.4 Specific Objectives**

1. To explore the experiences of women married through abduction in Jirapa district.
2. To identify factors that sustain bride abduction in Jirapa district.
3. To find out participants' perception of abduction in Jirapa district.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

1. How would women who marry through bride abduction describe their experience?
2. What factors sustain bride abduction?
3. How do participants perceive bride abduction?

### **1.6 Significance of the study**

This study is significant because it contributes to knowledge in the area of bride abduction in Ghana. The experiences of victims married through abduction have not been given sufficient attention in our academic and policy discourse. This study would ensure that the dynamics of bride abduction is made public for further deliberation.

In the academia, the study would undoubtedly provide grounds for further research. Many scholars would consider this research work as a starting piece to conduct other researches in this area. For example, a quantitative study, trend or panel studies to consider numerical and or other dimensional aspects of the subject under study.

The study would also inform policy, especially child welfare policy in Ghana. State agencies would find the findings and recommendations of this study very helpful in planning and formulating policies that will help refine and reshape cultural practices such as bride abduction. The study will also bring to bear the causes and consequences of bride abduction for consideration by policy makers. Also, useful will be the findings of the study to local and international NGOs and Human Rights Organizations in their quest to promote social justice and gender equity.

In terms of practice, this study would inform social workers on the areas to build advocacy in relation to cultural practices that have social and economic implications for women. It will provide knowledge that social workers can use to reorient the minds of people and convince them to alter inhuman cultural practices. Similarly, in the arena of social work education and sensitization, the findings would serve as guidelines for developing educational materials on the effects of bridal abduction and how it violates the human rights of women and children.

### **1.7 Study Organization**

The study is organized in five chapters. Chapter one treats the background of the study and highlights the problem and objectives of the study. Chapter two examines the theoretical framework used to guide the study and reviews literature on the problem of the study. The review of literature relates to the experiences, causes and effects of bride abduction. Chapter three presents the methods of investigation adopted for the study. Chapter four presents the findings and analysis of the study and finally, chapter five illustrates the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0. Introduction

This chapter examines the theoretical framework used to guide the study. It also entails a review of literature on earlier work regarding the experiences of women married through abduction. The literature focuses on the concept and nature of bride abduction, the motivation or factors that sustain abduction, the experience of women married through abduction and perceptions about the practice. Under the experience of women married through abduction, the literature concentrated on the psychological, physical, economic, health and educational experiences.

#### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

To understand abduction of women for the purpose of marriage and the factors that sustain it this study draws on the feminist framework of Patriarchy. The Theory of Patriarchy is a social and ideological construct which considers men as superior to women. One of the major contributors to the feminist framework, Walby (1990) states that patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. Embedded in the patriarchal system is power relations which are hierarchical and unequal: where men control women's production, reproduction and sexuality (Sultana, 2011).

The theory of patriarchy does not have an established founder. However, many great scholars have contributed to shape the theory. Others have linked the theory to different fields of study. Some of these scholars are Aristotle, Frederick Engels and Malvin Harris. Aristotle for example, believes that patriarchy is as a result of the biological differences between men and women. He is of the view that women due to how they were created makes them inferior in their capacities, their ability

to reason and therefore their ability to make decisions. He refers to women as “mutilated men” and that men are born to rule and women to be ruled. Frederick Engles on the other hand linked it to the acquisition of private property. Engles believes that the development of private property brought about the subordination of women where men desired to retain power and property and pass it on to their own children. To ensure this inheritance mother-right was overthrown. In order to establish the right of the father women had to be domesticated and confined and their sexuality regulated and controlled (Sultana, 2011). The theory underscores the fact that men are elevated in the social structure because of their presumed ability to exert control while women are devalued for the supposed lack of control.

From the framework of Patriarchy, we can see that abduction, like violence against women results from men’s exercise of power as ascribed to them in relation to women. Furthermore, the theory presupposes that women are subordinates to men in areas of access to resources and decision making. This, according to Human Rights Watch (2006) and Kleinbach (2003) limit the political, economic and human rights of women in the society. Consequently, men make marriage decisions and partner selection without seeking the consent of the women.

The theory of patriarchy has been used in several studies, including studies on bride abduction. In a study conducted in South Africa on the causes of bride abduction, Nkosi and Buthelezi (2013) used patriarchy to explain the motivation behind abduction. Bride abduction was considered as a patriarchal weapon employed by men to suppress the interest and initiative of women. In the study, the theory explained that men abduct women who have jilted them (Nkosi & Buthelezi, 2013). This is done to make it clear that men wield power over women including power to exert themselves over women as husbands. Similarly, it sends an indication that the society belongs to men to control. Ukuthwala or bride abduction is carried out by powerful men to demonstrate that

they have enough resources and money to control and care for a woman of their choice (Nkosi & Buthelezi, 2013).

In another study, patriarchy was adopted to explain how society use forced marriage to deliberately create obstacles to women's advancement and development (Sultana, 2011). Structures and customs of society are therefore used to halt women's empowerment and deprive them development. In doing this, women are suppressed and remain perpetual subordinates to their male counterparts. One of such elements of exerting male control and dominance is bride abduction. Not consulting or seeking their consent during marriage procedures make them voiceless and disentitled from marital properties. Women are therefore silenced in the public decision making process concerning marriage (Werner, 2009). Bride abduction makes way for the creation and maintenance of systemic inequality in the family and society (Werner, 2009).

Also, patriarchy defines women as a weaker sex and as maidens for the strongest of men (Action Aid Ghana, 2012; Nkosi, 2009). As a result, men demonstrate to confirm their strength and power by abducting maidens for marriage. According to Jewkes, Jonathan and Loveday (2002) "ideologies of male superiority legitimate the disciplining of women for transgressions of conservative female gender roles. They construct women as legitimate vehicles for the reconfirmation of male powerfulness through...[abduction], since this is a demonstration of male power juxtaposed against the lesser power of women" (p. 1615).

The theory is relevant for the current study because bride abduction is seen as a means of reinforcing the patriarchal system of oppression (Borbieva 2012).

## 2.2 Literature Review

Bride abduction entails the use of force and lack of consent in the process of marriage. It is a traditional practice which is wide spread and perpetrated to allow men marry any woman of their choice. The meanings people make of bride abduction vary. It is therefore imperative to explore exactly what the tradition entails, because authors like (Wood, 2005, Nkosi, 2009: Wadesengo et al 2011) see it as a negative practice that violates women's right whilst authors like Seleone (2005) view it as a positive tradition meant to open up marriage negotiations.

### **Nature of Bride Abduction**

Nkosi and Buthelezi (2013) contend that traditional bride abduction is a custom to open up marriage negotiations whereas the contemporary bride abduction is an abuse of the custom and illegal. The tradition does not involve beating of the woman and rape unlike the contemporary one which violates women's rights in terms of beating, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse and non payment of lobola (bride wealth). Traditional bride abduction is seen as a bridge that leads to marriage negotiations but not a marriage in itself (Nkosi & Buthelezi, 2013). The tradition allows a young woman to be carried away by a man to his home with the aim of marrying her. The abductor's family and the girl's family then seek the woman's consent thereafter they negotiate and when they reach an agreement, any form of marriage can be selected either customary or civil law. The practice also allows parents to arrange the marriage of their children, but was never intended to violate children or women's rights.

Writers like Handrahan (2004), Kleinbach et al. (2005) and Werner (2004) view bride abduction today as radically different. Although some abductions are mutually agreed upon more often, the new form is abusive and carried out without the woman's consent. When bride abduction occurs

with the full consent and knowledge of the woman, the tradition is said not to be detrimental though illegal. However, according to Borvieva (2012), it is not easy to distinguish between abductions that are forced and those that are with the consent of the woman and the abductor. Werner (2004) further argues that though bride involvement in abduction varies from society to society and the context, there is usually no distinction between the forced and consented abduction.

Kleinbach and colleagues' (2005) study on abduction or kidnappings in Kyrgyzstan showed that, although each woman's experience of kidnapping was unique, there are some elements that were common to most abductions. At the time of the kidnapping the mean average age of the women was 20 years and of the men 24 years (Kleinbach, Ablezova & Aitieva, 2005). A young woman, below the age of 25, is typically taken through force or deception by a group of men, including the intended groom. Sometimes, the men are people who the women had met prior to the incident; sometimes they are complete strangers. The men are usually drunk while the woman is usually alone. She is taken to the home of her principal abductor, the intended groom, and is put in a room and surrounded by his female relatives. These women use physical force and a variety of psychological coercion to compel her to "agree" to the marriage and submit to having the marriage scarf placed on her head, the sign that she consents to marry her abductor (Shoira, 2005).

If the kidnapped woman resists, this process can last for hours or days. Her abductor often rapes her, sometimes prior to her coerced consent to the marriage as a means of pressuring her to stay. The kidnapped woman or girl's relatives sometimes rarely do much to help because it is an accepted tradition (Nkozi 2009).

### **Motivations for Bride Abduction**

Studies on bride abductions cite a variety of social and economic factors that sustain the practice

in various societies. The factors are mainly cultural, social or economic in nature and intended to remove barriers in the conventional marriage process. The following section of this chapter describes several of these; patriarchal traditions that lay emphasis on male power and ethnic identity while girls are seen as objects, betrothal and the culture that allows parents to arrange the marriage of their children, strict society, socialization, abducting to avoid consent of the girl or her parents; to determine time of marriage, avoid competition and monetary cost and the lack of social and legal consequences.

Though the motivations behind bride abduction or kidnapping vary by region, the cultures with traditions of marriage by abduction are generally patriarchal with a strong social stigma on sex or pregnancy outside of marriage and illegitimate births. To be married is therefore regarded as the norm and as a part of being a successful man. Rodriguez (2005) states that one of the sustaining factors of bride abduction is the social structure of the society itself. To the author, bride abduction occurs in strict societies where premarital contact between men and women is discouraged and it is difficult to identify potential spouses. For instance, in the Kyrgyz context where there is no opportunity for people to meet and date, the only route to marriage is often through kidnapping (Kleinbach et al., 2005).

Handrahan (2004) argues that kidnapping is an assertion of ethnic identity and male domination. He further argues that abduction of a woman is a violent expression of men's dominant position in some communities like Kyrgyz. Some men view themselves as "entitled" to the women they have selected to marry, regardless of the women's wishes (Handrahan, 2004). Also, he states that, abduction defines cultural identity and manhood thereby reinforcing "male hegemony". This reveals that the root causes of marriage by abduction are enshrined in the patriarchal attitudes of the communities and emphasized by the perceived inferiority of women (Stormorken et al., 2007).

Men who kidnap do not want to let go of their power or authority over women in order to court a woman and win her acceptance to marry. Some men do not know how to relate to women, they think it's easier to just kidnap. Other experts like Aleksandra Eliferenko says that kidnapping is in part the result of Kyrgyz men's objectification of women: "Men do not give flowers, or follow other courtship rituals, they just take a woman like a thing and rape her and that is it" (Human Rights Watch, HRW, 2006).

The above is exemplified in the inferior status of women where girls are seen as objects. This tend to aid abductions where families arrange for girls to be abducted in settlement of debt bond. Young girls are abducted to settle family debts and as a compensation for pledging (UNICEF 2003; Malawi Human Rights Commission 2005; Hanzi 2006). This practice is prevalent in Malawi and Zimbabwe. A family in need typically receives help from another family on condition that the family receiving assistance commits to giving a girl child. In this regard, a girl is provided in a form of debt bondage (Malawi Human Rights Commission 2005). The girl can be as young as 9 years old and the man could be as old as 40 years or older. The girl in this condition ends up attaining puberty while staying with the husband. The girls reluctantly accepts this bargain because they are threatened that some curse would befall them if they tried to run away (Stormorken et al., 2007; Juru 2003). The young women do not have much choice, parents and other clan members decide who they marry, hence abduction.

Aside the patriarchal tendencies of the society there is also the acceptance of the culture as a legitimate custom and other practices that encourage abduction (Action Aid Ghana, 2012; Kleinbach & Salimjanova, 2007; Nkosi & Buthelazi, 2013; Werner, 2009). There is betrothal where babies or girls at young age are given to prospective husbands and at any time such girls can be abducted. Also, parents reserve the right to arrange their girls marriage. Nkosi and Buthelazi

(2013) argue that where a betrothed young woman meets another young man whom she loves more than the one who had paid her bride price, bride abduction becomes the only way of breaking such a bond and the one who abducts is made to refund the bride price.

Additionally, sociologist Medina Aitieva, in a study of abduction in central Asia points to socialization as a factor of practice of abduction. He argued that parents' own behavior, how they met and married, and pressure from family members can leave a lasting impression on male children and their ideas about marriage. As with the known phenomenon of generational repetition of domestic violence, many men are raised by mothers who were victims of kidnapping and fathers who committed kidnapping, and as such receive signals from them that kidnapping is a normal and acceptable behavior (Kleinbach, Ablezova & Aitieva, 2005).

Further, historical explanations of bride abduction is varied, from one society to the other, but it all points to one thing the ability of a man to get married to a woman of his choice and on his terms to the glory and support of culture. In Kyrgyzstan, one of the countries where bride abduction is prevalent trace the practice to ancient times where a poor man fell in love with the daughter of a rich man and unable to pay the ransom he had to kidnap his beloved. Thus through kidnap he was allowed to marry a woman he otherwise would have been unable to marry. This is confirmed by authors like (Ahearn 2001; Borbieva, 2012; Handrahan, 2004) who are of the view that abduction allows for the circumvention of the marriage process. Some of the obstacles to marriage which kidnapping mitigates according Nkosi and Buthelezi (2013) include woman's parent's unwillingness to let their daughter marry at a particular time or a particular man.

Kleinbach & Salimjanova (2007) argue that social constraints such as deformities or medical conditions make men prefer to abduct to avoid rejection. Prejudice against the physically or

mentally disabled is rampant in some communities and often goes unquestioned (U.S. Department of State, 2006). Mental illness also carries a great deal of stigma in some societies like Kyrgyz. As a result, a man who is disabled or ill faces greater challenges in finding a spouse or convincing a woman's parents to agree to allow him to marry their daughter.

Another motivating factor is the fact that the abducted girl will not have the chance to refuse the abductor or the abductor is able to out stage other competitors. This is seen in Borbieva (2012) where a girl was kidnapped by her former boyfriend to prevent her new suitor from marrying her. Borbieva again in his ethnographic study cited an instance where a man kidnapped a girl few months to her graduation because the girl will not agree to marry him before her graduation party and the abductor on the other hand was afraid to lose her to other admirers during the graduation party. In many cases, kidnappings and the violence that accompanies the act are carried out by men in retaliation against women who have rejected them romantically, women they fear would reject them, or women they may perceive as independent (Kleinbach, Ablezova, & Aitieva, 2005).

NGO leaders who follow the problem of bride abduction shared with Human Rights Watch anecdotal evidence of kidnapping as retaliation against women. The men take advantage of kidnapping to punish the women for refusing their marriage proposals. Turganbubu Orunbaeva observed that in most abduction a man wants to show a woman who has rejected him who is boss (Stakeeva, Kartanbaeva & Djanaeva, 2011). Maya Kaparova of the NGO Diamond said that in many cases the man is unwilling to risk rejection from a woman whom he fears may be too good for him (Stakeeva, Kartanbaeva & Djanaeva, 2011). She said, men want to avoid spending money on courtship and other marriage expenditures. The man does not think she would choose him, so he does not want to take the risk, or he thinks even so maybe he can win her over in the end.

A number of scholars (Borbieva, 2012; Handrahan, 2004) have noted that the monetary cost of marriage, which is often high for the groom's family, is another reason for kidnapping of brides. Kidnapping is, therefore, a rational strategy allowing those with limited resources to get married (McLaren 2001). Ahearn (2001), Borbieva (2012) and Handrahan (2004) concur that abduction allows men to pay less by way of bride price.

In practice, despite the law against kidnapping, there are no negative social or legal consequences for men who kidnap or abduct brides. They are not prosecuted for the crime. Among most elements of society no stigma attaches to abducting a woman for marriage or serving as an accomplice to such a crime. On the contrary, men who abduct women for forced marriage are congratulated by their family and peers and embraced by the broader society as successful men. Observers point out that, in the eyes of the general public, the abductor has done nothing wrong. Turganbubu Orunbaeva summed up this view: "People don't understand that kidnapping is a crime" (HRW, 2006).

Those involved in abduction are therefore often impervious to the effect of causing a woman pain and suffering. "If a girl attempts to leave and cries, some people will say that it is 'fake crying' or that the crying is just parts of showing you are a proper girl," (Kleinbach, Ablezova, & Aitieva, 2005).

### **Experiences of women married through bride abduction**

There is indication that girls kidnapped for the purpose of marriage suffer a wide range of effects including physical, sexual and psychological abuse. The experience of abducted brides involves their forceful capture by men with the intention of compelling them and their family to endorse marriage or marriage negotiations (Handrahan, 2000; Modisaotsile, 2013). They are deprived of the right to choose their own life partners. This is seen in their lack of involvement in the marriage

arrangement and lack of consent or knowledge of the groom and their confinement (Nkosi, 2009). This view is supported by Borbieva (2012) who stated that forced abductions go hand in hand with brutality, assault, physical abuse and rape of women by abductors.

Wood (2005) argues that the process of bride abduction involves having forced sex with the girl or lady. This form of sexual encounter marks the girls' union with the man, and according to their tradition, the act is not in any way regarded as rape (Wood, 2005). Although some abductions are consensual and arranged, there are reports of the abductors or future husbands raping the abducted woman in order to make the marriage irreversible and shame the women into staying (Andrea & Cummings, 2008; Kiryashova, 2005). Even if she is not raped, her virginity will forever be questioned after being abducted. Given the confines of the community, tradition, and social stigma, the woman finds little choice but to stay. Even if the woman does escape the abductor's home, she often faces disgrace and is ostracized by her family and the community.

Handrahan (2000) referring to the abuse that occur in abduction argue that all the violations committed against women in the world, bride kidnapping stands out as a primary assault that produces a progressive de-legitimization of women in society and retards their social development. Commenting on the adverse effects of marriage by abduction, Tshabalala-Msimang (2009) stated that abduction reinforces gender-based violence against girls.

Inherent in the act of bride abduction is physical abuse. The carrying of the kidnapped and her delivery to the family of the kidnapper is characterized by the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion like deception or fraud. The kidnapper and his friends literally snatch the bride to be, usually by carrying her and forcing her into a getaway vehicle or any mode of transport. Once

inside the vehicle, the kidnappers ignore the young woman's efforts to resist and effectively curtail her efforts to move or break free (Handrahan, 2000; Handrahan, 2004).

Women have reportedly been dragged down the street, dragged into the car having their hands broken, being beaten or having their mouths and heads covered (Handrahan 2004). The use of physical force is not limited to the initial stage of kidnapping, upon arrival at the groom's home the young lady is dragged out of the car and handed over to the women of the family who put her in a room holding her tight by the arms to prevent her from escaping. According to Wadesango et al. (2011), abduction increases women's vulnerability to domestic violence.

#### **a) Psychological and Emotional Trauma**

Women who are kidnapped can suffer psychological and emotional trauma (HRW, 2006). A lot of psychological pressure is put on the girl upon arrival at the abductors home. The abductors employ threats, curses and also do not hesitate to remind her of the shame that will befall her parents and stigma that awaits her in the community if she runs away (Marburg, 2012). Furthermore, the abductees suffer from social isolation as she is abruptly taken from her natural family to a hostile environment. This is confirmed by a study in Kyrgyzstan in 2011 to assess victims of bride kidnapping access to justice (Stakeeva, Kartanbaeva & Djanaeva, 2011). The study also identified the girl's parents consent to the marriage as one of the psychological factors (Stakeeva, Kartanbaeva & Djanaeva, 2011). Girls find it difficult to comprehend how their own family could be against them at the time they need them most. Nkosi (2009) captures this in her in-depth study of Zola the tiny 15 year old school girl of Kwazulu-Natal who was captured on her way to school into marriage. She laments how her mother alone could not act and had to consult the elders when she heard of the abduction for them to only say that she must be left alone since she was betrothed.

Others, perhaps as a coping mechanism, begin to identify with their abductor. Just as the initial encounter with their husband is violent and traumatic, continued domestic violence throughout the marriage is particularly prevalent in marriages that begin with kidnapping. Moreover, many young girls marry into ongoing families as second or third wife where they face competition and related strain and stress at very young ages (Jonas, 2006; UNICEF, 2007; Committee on the Status of Women, 2007).

According to UNICEF (2003), “the hardship of dealing with a polygamous marriage and parenting is often beyond the capacity of an under-age wife”. Malawi Human Rights Commission (2005), states: “In a family where the young girl was not the first wife, she was treated like a slave by the older wives who assign her various tasks. This bordered on servitude”. They experience various obstacles to their physical, psychological and social development (Iyanuolu 2008), bearing children at tender age putting their lives at risk (Jonas, 2006).

Children forced into marriage who fall pregnant before the age of 18 risk getting complications such as prolonged or obstructed labour because of underdeveloped pelvis, leading to loss of life or maternal complications like obstetric fistula (UNICEF, 2003; Iyanoulu, 2008). Not only this, Iyanoulu (2008) observed that birth complications that lead to obstetric fistula may also result in husbands abandoning their young wives thus causing devastating psychological torture. It has also been observed that young girls often face food taboos that deprive them essential nutrients. Notable among the long list of foods include eggs, liver, kidneys and certain vegetables (UNICEF 2007). Deprivation of nutrients from certain foods results in impairment of physical and mental development of both the young mother and her baby.

Evidence, also indicate that the consequences of bride abduction are grave and has devastating long term psychological effects on women aside the initial physical abuse (Handrahan, 2000;

Nkosi, 2009; & Borbieva 2012). The brutality and rape sometimes lead to depression, suicide and murder of abducted brides (Stakeeva, Kartanbaeva & Djanaeva 2011). Examples of bride abduction that resulted in the death of abducted brides have been reported in Karakola City in Kyrgyzstan where four suicides by girls occurred within weeks of being kidnapped (3 in 2010-2012 and 1 in 2006) for marriage (Klenbach et al., 2013).

#### **b) Disruption in Girls' Education**

The effects of bride abduction on girls are devastating (UNICEF 2003). The marriage deprives girls of the opportunity to obtain education, which would be helping them live an economically rewarding life in future. According to Human Rights Watch (2006) and Iyanuolu, (2008) after marriage few women continue their education feeling consumed and above all trapped by the household duties, farm work and child bearing. Zola is however, a rare exception to this experience, as she was able to go back to school after five years of marriage (Nkosi, 2009). This decision was not easy for her as she was faced with a lot of challenges. Thus the heavy work load, marital conflict, quarrels and strained relationships forced her to adopt unconventional coping mechanisms like cheating and spouse pleasing to survive (Marburg, 2012; Nkosi, 2009).

#### **c) Abducted brides' economic dependence**

Aside the above effects of the act of bride abduction, there are others that are derived from the ripples of the act or associated with it and the reciprocal relationships within the new family. One of these repercussions can be gleaned from the economic sphere according to Werner (2009), where victims tend to depend wholly on the abductor for sustenance.

Also, in instances where the abductor is unemployed as Mfono (2000) intimated in the case of Funeka; an abducted girl who was left with her children became economically desperate. Without

education and skills, it was impossible to get a decent job and therefore difficult for her to support herself and the family financially (Mfono, 2000). Often, the economic status of the abductor influences the woman's decision to leave the marriage or not, but in most cases no matter the man's economic status, she decides to stay since there is usually no escape root or destination (Nkosi, 2009). In the case of Funeka, she ran away leaving behind three children at age 19 to become a house help (Mfono, 2000).

Restrictions on land ownership rights and the resulting economic dependence on men and their families also contribute to women staying in abusive situations. (Chabaya, Rembe & Wadesango, 2011). It is a general knowledge that men become custodians of family lands that are usually distributed to family members. Very often, the lands are given out to male members of the family, neglecting the female in the family. When this happens, women do not get the opportunity to own lands to cultivate on. This brings their prospects of economic independence to a halt. The consequence is that they remain subordinates to men for their economic survival; this includes remaining helpless victims of their abductors.

**d) Increase in undesirable marriages/motherhood.**

In Albania, some families encourage girls to marry young to prevent them from being kidnapped on their way to school (HRW, 2006). This has come about due to the undesirable nature of the practice. Once a lady is married she cannot be abducted as the abductors target girls that are unmarried. Without this practice parents will not encourage their young ladies and men to marry irrespective of their preparedness. Aside this the woman does not have control over her body or decisions concerning reproduction (Chabaya, Rembe & Wadesango, 2011). This leads to teenage pregnancies, poor motherhood, high female illiteracy rates and high maternal and infant mortality rates during birth. (Action Aid Ghana, 2012). Many of the girls leave their parents too early with

little nurturance and reproductive education to take up life challenges coupled with underdeveloped pelvis (Action Aid Ghana, 2013). Hence, they face a lot of health challenges.

Some girls run away from their marital homes to cities in search of a better life. Such girls also end up in poverty and live degrading lives as head porters, menial workers in chop bars and restaurants and even are sometimes trafficked to practice prostitution. Abduction does not lead to a happy or successful marriage. Most of such marriages end up in divorce, increasing the country's divorce rate with its associated negative impact. Socio-economic hardships are characteristic of divorced women who have to cater for children as single mothers. This has the tendency to increase female poverty and juvenile delinquency coupled with the indulgence in undesirable works like prostitution, armed robbery among others (Andrea & Cummings, 2008).

**e) Abducted brides as servants to their in-laws**

Another stressful and depressing fact is that upon becoming part of the new family the bride is placed under the supervision of her mother-in-law who exerts extensive control over her (HRW, 2006). The new brides are often treated harshly by their in-laws and particularly are regarded as, and function much like, servants to their mothers-in-laws (HRW, 2006). According to Marburg (2012) mothers-in-law control includes prohibiting their son's wife from working but rather concentrating on taking care of the whole family and giving birth.

The new bride is expected to do the mother-in-law's bidding while often suffering physical and psychological abuse by her and other members of the family. In cases of abduction, especially abduction by strangers, when the woman's natal family has little or no connection to her marital family, she appears to be particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation by her mother-in-law and others in the extended family, as well as by her husband (Mfono, 2000). This is especially true

also in cases when the woman is kept in isolated circumstances or forbidden to leave the house (Luong, 2004).

### **Violation of Human Rights**

Bride abduction, as any form of forced marriage, is a violation of human rights and deprives women of other fundamental rights, including: freedom of movement, the right to education, the right to work, the right to be free from forced or compulsory labor, as well as a woman's right to liberty and security of person, and right to life and physical integrity, especially if it involves battery and/or rape (UNPF, 2006; Luong, 2004).

Human rights are rights that everyone has and entitled to enjoy by virtue of their humanity (UN Charter on Human Rights, 1945). Human rights are inherent in all human beings by virtue of the fact that they are human beings; human rights are inalienable within legal boundaries and applicable to all human beings. The responsibilities of protecting and promoting human rights do not fall on the individual but the state and public authorities; thus laws must protect human rights to enable everybody to exercise their rights fully. Marriage by abduction therefore infringes on the fundamental human rights of women involved irrespective of their age. However, in Ghana, the legal age for marriage is 18 years.

Chapter 5 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana as referred to earlier guarantees the individual's right specifically, under articles 14(1), 15(2) and 26 states that:

No one shall deprive the other of his/her personal liberty except by law (Article 14 (1)).

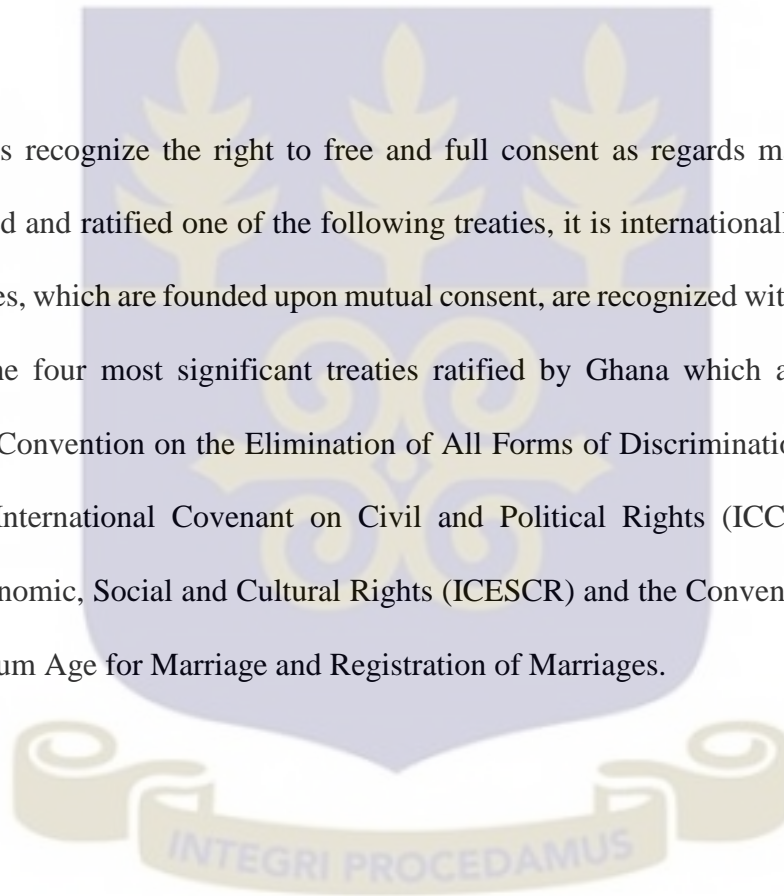
No one shall be subjected to inhumane treatment (Article 15 (2)).

Article 26 also has it that;

1. Every person is entitled to enjoy, practice, profess, maintain and promote any culture, language, tradition or religion subject to the provisions of this Constitution.
2. All customary practices, which dehumanize or are injurious to the physical and mental wellbeing of a person are prohibited.

Further, Article 29 of the Criminal Code (1960), also makes it an offence in section 109 where it states that ‘whoever by duress causes a person to marry against his or her will, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.

Numerous treaties recognize the right to free and full consent as regards marriage. Thus, if a country has signed and ratified one of the following treaties, it is internationally bound to ensure that only marriages, which are founded upon mutual consent, are recognized within its jurisdiction. In this regard, the four most significant treaties ratified by Ghana which address consent in marriage are the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the method of investigation for the study. It highlights the purpose and design that guide the study. It also discusses the data collection and analysis procedures. In each case, a justification is given for the method selected.

#### 3.1 Research Design

Research design can be thought of as the master plan of a research because it throws light on how the study was conducted (Yin, 2003). It shows how all the major parts of the study work together in an attempt to address the research questions. Qualitative approach of data collection was employed to elicit meaning, experiences or perceptions of participants in relation to bride abduction. It is particularly useful in exploring the full nature of a little understood phenomenon like bride abduction (Cresswell, 2013). Specifically, phenomenological tradition was used. According to Cresswell, a phenomenological study focuses on the description of what people experience and why they experience it. This type of enquiry is particularly appropriate to address meaning and perspectives of research participants. It helped understand participants' social world by learning about their circumstances and experiences from their perspective (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). It also helped obtain rich descriptive data from the target group on their experiences and perception of the practice.

#### 3.2 Research Area

The study was conducted in the Jirapa District of the Upper West Region. Jirapa has a total population of 12,313, with females being in the majority (GSS, 2013). Jirapa is inhabited mainly

by the Dagaaba people with a small population of Lobis and Sissalas. They are mainly farmers and pito brewers. The district was selected because it is one of the three districts where bride abduction is prevalent. A survey conducted between 2011 and 2012 by Action Aid Ghana found that 108 girls were abducted for marriage in Jirapa, Sissala East and Lambussie-Karni districts (Action Aid 2013). Another factor that also influenced the choice of the district was that the researcher understood the language spoken by the natives of Jirapa.

### **3.3 Population**

The target population comprised all the people in the Jirapa district of the Upper West Region. The study population comprised all women married through abduction, community members and community leaders in the Gbari and Vinning communities in the Jirapa district. The two communities were selected because they belong to one of the districts where the practice is widespread. Gbari is closer to Jirapa and has a population of 2,086 (GSS, 2013). A good number of marriages are conducted through abduction. Vinning is quite far from Jirapa and has about 1,277 inhabitants.

### **3.4 Sampling Technique**

Sampling is the process of selecting a portion of the population to participate in the study (Polit & Hungler, 1999). Qualitative design calls for small samples that are deliberately chosen to participate based on their first-hand experience of the phenomenon (Tjale & De Villiers, 2004).

Purposive and snowball sampling procedures were used to identify the target groups. The purposive sampling technique was used to in the selection of participants who represented the desired population.

Purposive sampling was used to identify the study groups (women married through abduction, community members and community leaders). Women were included because they were abducted without their consent and below the legal age of marriage. The female participants were asked the age at which they were abducted to ascertain their eligibility for the study. Those who were abducted before they turned 18 years of age were included in the study. Community members were selected purposively based on their knowledge in community customs and knowledge of marriage processes. While some of the community members were abductors, others were not. Community leaders were selected based on their membership in the council of elders for at least four years. Members of the council of elders are considered knowledgeable in the customs and culture of the community. In total, 20 participants were available for the study.

A community member was used in identifying the first two participants. This technique was preferred because it allowed participants with the set criteria or characteristics which the researcher needed to be included in the study. Snowball technique was used to collect data from participants that were available and then sought information from them which led to other participants of the target population. Henning (2004) noted that purposive sampling and snowball sampling are related and have the common aim of selecting participants that are suitable but difficult to identify.

### **3.5 Sample Size**

According to Burns and Grove (2003), quality of data is the focus of qualitative studies instead of the size of the sample. Creswell (2013) recommends a range of 20 to 30 participants as an appropriate sample size in qualitative studies. Guided by this, the sample size for the study consisted of 20 participants. This comprised of 10 women married through abduction, 5 community leaders and 5 general community members.

The participants were generally willing to take part in the study. The anticipated 20 interviews were not exceeded however, due to saturation of data, 4 community members and 3 community leaders were interviewed instead of the intended 5 participants per each group. Then, 13 abducted women were interviewed due to the emergence of new codes. This was in the area of use of charms to get the abducted girl accept the abductor, instances of re-abduction and generational abductions.

### **3.6 Data Collections Procedures**

A topic guide was used during the in-depth interviews to allow participants recount their experiences and perception about bride abduction. Data gathering took place between three (3) weeks to one month during the month of November. The interviews were conducted in the participant's home and other convenient locations of their choice. Aside the Chief of Gbare whose interview was conducted in English, all other interviews were conducted in Dagaari. The interviews mostly lasted for about 45-60 minutes and were tape-recorded.

### **3.7 Data Handling and Analysis**

Data collected from participants was kept safely on a personal computer and copied onto an external hard drive as a backup. Then, the interviews were transcribed into narratives, edited and proof-read. As the interviews were conducted in Dagaari language, they were translated into English.

Thematic analysis was used where data was summarized according to the themes and sub-themes derived in relation to the research objectives and backed by the narratives (Creswell, 2013). The first stage according Creswell, is familiarization with the data, coding to generate important features that might be relevant to answering the research questions, searching for relevant themes,

reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes and writing the report which involves contextualizing the analysis in relation to the existing literature.

The familiarization phase involved reading and re-reading the data set to become immersed with its entire content. During coding, succinct labels were generated. The labels were used to identify important features of the data which were relevant to the objectives of the study. This was followed by the searching for relevant themes. In this phase, the labels were critically examined and collated to identify broader patterns of meaning. These patterns became the themes. The themes were then reviewed by comparing the themes with the data set to determine whether they answer the research questions or help achieve the objectives of the study. The next phase involved developing detailed analysis of the themes and finding an informative name for each theme. Finally, the report was written by weaving together the narrative and data extracts. It also involved relating the analysis to existing literature.

### **3.8 Credibility and Trustworthiness of the Study**

Credibility of the study was ensured by embarking on member checking and confirmability. With regard to member checking, parts of the transcript was taken to participants to get feedback and clarification on some relevant statements made. Statements made that had elements of ambiguity were taken to the respective participants to get their explanations before using them in the study. Similarly, statements in the local vanacular that could not be transcribed into the nearest English word in meaning was taken back for futher clarification and appropriate caption. This helped to validate information provided by participants and to rule out the possibility of the researcher making conjections in the original information provided by study participants (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003).

Further, meaning and relevance of the data was measured against the objectives of the study. In this case, the objectives were compared with the information gathered to ascertain the relevance of the data in achieving the objectives of the study (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). This process was useful in ensuring credibility and ensuring that the data used in the analysis were relevant.

Confirmability was further ensured by the two supervisors who read the work and gave similar conclusions on the it.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

Considering the nature of this study, social research ethics was treated as a core element of the study. In view of this, the following ethical considerations were adhered to:

**Informed consent:** the purpose of the study was explained to the participants and their consent sought before they took part in it. The permission of the participants was sought prior to the interview. To ensure this, consent form was given to one participant who preferred the use of the English language to read and sign. Whilst the consent of the rest of the participants was sort verbally.

**Voluntary participation:** none of the participants was coerced to participate in the study and could withdraw from it at anytime they wished (Rubin & Babbie, 1997). None of the participants withdrew from the study.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity** was ensured by using pseudonyms and interviews were conducted in a secluded area. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, the identity of the participants was not revealed in any part of the study. Descriptions that could lead to the identification of participants were excluded in the study. Plagiarism was avoided by ensuring that all in-text citations are referenced. In this regard, all literature used were duly acknowledged.

Finally, the study was approved by the Graduate School of the University of Ghana through a thorough scrutiny of faculty members at the department of social work where the study was carried out. As a requirement from the graduate school, the research topic went through an approval at the departmental level after which three (3) different presentations were done for further departmental approval.

### **3.10 Limitations of the Study**

The main limitation of this study was due to data loss. This happened because the interviews were conducted in Wali and later transcribed into English. The transcription process obviously ment some data loss as some of the words used by participants had no lexical equivalent in English language hence the close in meaning had to be used. Secondly, the study was conducted in the Jirapa district of the Upper West Region; one out of eleven districts. The inclusion of the remaining districts would have perhaps led to the emergence order themes. Further, the sensitive nature of the topic as a cultural practice of the people makes it difficult to get participants who would easily open up and discuss the effects of the practice on their lives. To some, the practice was handed down to them by their ancestors, hence speaking against it is a sacrilege. Many prospective participants, also felt reluctant and restrained themselves from extensively discussing the negative aspects of the practice. This delayed the collection of data within the estimated time. However, the researcher made sure that the participants finally used were able to discuss issues conclusively.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.0 Introduction

This section is a presentation of the findings from the interviews, which includes the experiences of the abducted women, the factors sustaining the practice and the perception participants have about bride abduction.

#### 4.1 FACTORS SUSTAINING BRIDE ABDUCTION

Bride abduction, in the Jirapa district is motivated by factors ranging from cultural socialization, male dominance, and socio-economic challenges. Generally, these factors, individually and collectively, cause and sustain the occurrence of bride abduction.

##### **Cultural Socialization**

Social groupings have their own cultural practices and beliefs which guide its members on how they should behave. As a social heritage, culture is beneficial to its members but can also be detrimental. The people of Jirapa have been born and nurtured to regard bride abduction as an acceptable marriage process and rite. Apparently, socialization is a reason why the phenomenon has received less opposition. The people of Jirapa see abduction as a preferred route for getting married.

As people grow up and observe this process, they get enthused about it and become socially and mentally prepared to follow suit. The familiarity of this process makes it easy for all to carry it out without much shock. Interestingly, the participants observed that bride abduction is simply an acceptable marriage process. Nobody will be punished for abducting a girl without her consent or

her parents' approval. Apart from the socialization as a motivation, it is difficult for the older generation to justify why people still hold on to this marriage process or even how it came about:

“Abduction (known as Pogyong in Dagaari) is a marriage process which is accepted, though it is a bad practice. We came and met it. It should have been stopped a long time ago since some people said it was justified because we were not schooling. What about today? Though, there is education, yet it is still happening. Look at how education is expensive; you toil to look after a girl in school with high hopes only for her to be abducted half way. But, it is just a part of our life. It happened to our grandparents, it has happened to us and will happen to those coming (the younger and unborn generation)” (Mamaa, abducted woman)

Another community leader recounted the following to batters the fact that abduction is an accepted way to get married in their community:

“For my 67 years of staying in this community, these are the main ways to get married: Through courtship until the bride price payment. Through capturing or abduction /elopement/ through to bride payment.” (Baku male community leader)

Yet another male community leader “Arema” in his narration also mentioned the above as ways to get married in the Gbare community but went ahead to add “pog pee” betrothal leading to marriage.

Also, a community leader stressed the point that abduction is an ancient practice which is widely spread in the area.

“Abduction for the purpose of marriage started before I was born. Even my mother, I was told, was abducted into Gbare community. It is widely practiced around this area” (Kolla, male community leader).

Natives believe that traditional practices are difficult to ignore. Once abduction has become an established practice, it becomes a norm for anyone who wants to marry. It has become a natural process of the community that almost everyone who gets to this marriage stage of life must go through. Even, if the justification for the practice is less convincing, there is no need challenging.

“It is a tradition I grew up to meet, I do not know how it came about. All I know is that if a man is interested in a woman but she is not agreeing, any time they get her, they can abduct. They claim men abduct because they feel shy to propose or due to the fear of being rejected by the preferred bride” (Pogsaa abducted woman).

### **Marital arrangements by parents**

Another socially accepted tradition is marital exchange. The culture of Jirapa allows marriage by exchange of brides between families. Obviously, people cannot marry from the same household or family. In this regard, once a man has come to marry from a household, the males of that household can also marry from the other man’s house. This means that there is an implicit agreement that occurs between families that once a man marries from a particular household, the men of that household can also marry a lady from the other man’s household. The marriage process proceeds even if the bride-to-be does not agree to the marriage.

This cultural practice makes it possible for the women and girls to be abducted and married in exchange of a brother who has already married from that family. Also, the culture allows parents to arrange the marriage of their daughters. Just like giving a girl’s hand in marriage, there is an

implicit agreement that occurs between two families, cemented by the culture of the land and if the girl's consent is not in agreement, the men are encouraged to abduct. In other cases it is only when you are captured that you get to know what the issues are. A female participant described the circumstances which led to her abduction:

“They abducted me because my brother's wife came from their village. It was a marriage exchange. They told me it was compulsory that I marry into my brother's wife's family because the two families have agreed on it. That day I was carried on a bicycle. Though, I was aggressive and insulted the abductors, thinking that they will let me go, my protests yielded no results” (Danaa abducted woman).

Similarly, another abducted woman shared her experience thus:

“My family was supportive of the marriage because it was a marriage exchange. Since my brother married into that family, I was also supposed to marry from that family. There was no way out. I thought running away will help me but no. On all the three (3) occasions that I escaped, they brought me back. It was compulsory that I come back and honour my responsibilities. With the marriage itself, it was not easy at all. I was always arguing and fighting with my husband” (Pogsama, abducted woman).

Further, the tradition of giving young girls' hand in marriage or betrothing also encourages abduction. Abduction becomes the option when the girl in question objects to the family's choice. An abducted woman reported that she was given out in marriage to an old man but when she resisted:

“The man was asked to abduct me. I have six children now the man is no more I am left with the burden of catering for all of them without any help not even from my family” (Kani abducted woman).

### **Pressure on girls to marry early/competition/Elopment**

Further, girls are socialized only for marriage and immediately they see signs of breast the girl is ripe for marriage. A girl’s home is at her husband’s house and has no share in her father’s property. A community leader stated that he was not aware of the minimum legal age at which a girl is allowed to marry but what he knew was a girl was ready for marriage when she developed breast (mwan be ra):

“We hardly know the age of our children, but we know that they can be married off when they have breast” (Turo Male community leader).

Additionally, traditions in Jirapa allow for men to compete for a girl who is a potential bride. Usually, when a girl reaches the “age of marriage” (that is, developed breasts), the men compete for her. One man will have to abduct her, especially when he realizes that the competition is tough for him. In other cases, some members of the bride’s family connive with a suitor of their choice to abduct her.

“Considering how the bachelors were hovering around our house daily, I can confidently say that competition led to my abduction” (Pogsaa, abducted woman).

This was again confirmed by Teani thus;

“I have abducted and also took part in abduction for my friend in 2001. We abducted to secure our interest when all of a sudden we realised that other suitors had come into the picture” (Teani, male who abducted).

A male who abducted share his story thus:

“As regards my own wife I approached her and she accepted and came on her own to live with me. I did not abduct her. She just run away from home and that is it. I however, went back to perform the marriage rites” (male who abducted).

This takes us to elopement another cultural tradition that encourages abduction. From “Teani’s” narration, it was elopement because he knew she was coming and she came on her own volition but to the girls family, it was abduction.

A community elder narrated his frustration and inability to distinguish between abduction and elopement as follows:

“My daughter was abducted and I have not heard from the people, recently they are saying my daughter run away with the man. What ever it is the people responsible have not come to say anything, what can I do? I said I will use a trick to call her to come and if she still goes back then I know that I have lost my daughter” (Turo, male who abducted).

### **Use of girls to compensate for family wrongs**

Girls are seen as belongings to the family and is always expected to save the family’s name or bring honour to the family through their actions or inactions. Thus when one girl puts the family’s name into disrepute by running away from an abductor another girl is quickly ploughed to replace

her in order to restore the good name of the family. This is exactly what happened in the following narration from an abducted woman.

“I was a small girl when I got married, about 15 years old. The family in question came to abduct my sister but she ran away and I was asked to replace her to cover for my family’s shame”(Ayooma, abducted woman).

### **Male Dominance**

The social conceptions of the Jirapa community are gendered and contribute to the fact the bride abduction still exists in the society. Girls are brought up to be modest, respect the decisions of the males of the household or family and act in the interest of the family. They are trained to be home makers or prepare them for marriage. Also, they are seen as a source of wealth to the family and have no property rights. Meanwhile, boys are supposed to act bravely and assertively. They belong to the family forever and have rights to their fathers or family property. The boys grow up knowing that their sisters are inferior to them and that they can even marry them off. Thus when girls are abducted they do not return home. They fear the social consequences and the will to keep up their family’s honour. Therefore, the abducted girl will generally agree to the marriage. This was seen below in an abducted woman’s experience:

“My brother gave me out to his friend in exchange for gifts and encouraged him to abduct me for gifts. I attempted to escape once by going over to my sister’s after a gruesome sexual encounter, my brother came over there and severely beat me up and dragged me back to my husband”(Mamaa abducted woman).

### **Use of charms**

The study identified the use of charm as a recent phenomenon that reinforces bride abduction. Herbal concoctions are used on girls to procure their consent to abduction without a protest. In

cases when such girls are even rescued they tend to side with the abductors claiming they are their husbands. According to an abducted woman, she was at Gbare chief's palace and witnessed parents frustration over two school girls who were abducted but were rescued due to the intervention of Action Aid Ghana (an NGO working to eliminate violence against women in Upper West Region). The NGO provided the girls with their school needs but they returned to the men who abducted them due to the use of charms. An abducted woman narrated her experience to demonstrate the use of charms in abduction as follows;

“Both girls suggested they were not cared for in school but their parents denied this and that Action Aid provided some of the school items but they still insisted on following the men. Even the chief could not persuade them to go with their parents and continue their education. One of the girls travelled to the south with the man and I heard she has delivered. Action Aid was so bitter about this turn of events” (Maalima, abducted woman).

The use of charms to lure the girls into abduction was also confirmed by another community leader, he says;

“I don't know what really I like about marriage through abduction. I can't really tell, those young men who use charms to abduct ladies at the long run have broken homes when the lady gets cleared off the charm. I am not and never in support of marriage by abduction” ( Baku, male community leader).

### **Socio-economic Challenges**

Cost of marriage and challenges of daily living were a few of the social pressures that compelled the society to resort to bride abduction. In a community where people are very poor and parents

cannot fulfill their obligation of arranging their sons marriage. Sons mostly, do not own property, whatever business their fathers are engaged in, they assist them and do not have an income. The youth prefer using an alternative route to marry where they will not be compelled to pay huge bride price. The participants revealed that requirements for marriage was costly and many prospective grooms found it difficult to meet. In the Jirapa District, the common marriage requirements include fowls, cowries, and alcoholic drinks, clothes for the prospective bride and money for the relatives. These items cost between GHC 800 to GHC 1,000. Such costs are unbearable for young prospective grooms in Jirapa, considering the fact that they don't earn incomes. Pogsaa indicated:

“I will say it is as a result of ‘dakonebesoo’ (that is, bachelor desperation). When a person cannot get a wife due to some reasons such as cost of marriage, he just comes and the first girl he points at, they abduct” ( Pogsaa abducted woman).

A man who abducted for marriage confirmed that due the fact that they are mostly peasant farmers and their proceeds barely take them through the next season they have very little by way of savings to do anything.

“My father was to marry for me, after promising me unsuccessfully for about three seasons due to bad harvest I went ahead and abducted my current wife and I presented only the “poro” items that is fowls to tell her family I stole her and when in search of her they should contact me” (male who abducted).

It is also common for a family to support or promote bride abduction when they cannot make ends meet. When a family is very poor, they would encourage abduction by a rich man whom their daughter do not know and approve of a less endowed man. This is arranged between the two families and supposed to happen peacefully without the girl's objection. However, bride abduction

occurs when the girl refuses to marry the suitor. In such an uncomfortable situation, the suitor will have to force and kidnap the girl. This is the way in which the agreement will be complete especially when gifts have already changed hands. Abducted woman who was a victim of this kind of abduction state the following:

“My family allowed me to be abducted simply because my father preferred I married a rich man as opposed to my choice of a young man” (Kolema, abducted woman).

Also, families will support bride abduction not only for the financial gain but the opportunity it may afford them to use such a dowry or bride price to go and marry another woman for their son.

A community leader laments that, even though he did not know of anything about the abduction of her daughter he was expecting the abductor to come and perform the marriage rites so that he can use same to secure a wife for his son who has long reached puberty. He recounted:

“Right now, I do not have money to pay the dowry for my son’s wife and the family that abducted my daughter have not come to dowry her, I am in a fix” (Gaatore, a community leader).

#### **4.2 EXPERIENCES OF ABDUCTED WOMEN**

The experiences of abducted women in the Gbare and Vinning communities of the Jirapa district were enormous. The experiences ranged from lack of consent to high birth rate and poor marital relations. The experiences seem to affect the overall lives of the victims at each stage of their lives had a peculiar experience. Women who have become victims of bride abduction had much to recall and describe.

### **Lack of consent/ age at which girls are abducted**

The findings from the interviews revealed that bride abduction is usually done without the consent of the would be bride. Usually, the abductee is not given the opportunity to express her consent and does not even have the legal and mental capacity to give consent. An abducted woman narrates her experience thus:

“My consent was never sought. It was later I heard my brothers gave my hand out in marriage in exchange of gifts. I was with other young girls when I was being abducted. In their attempt to rescue me they broke my arm. I also suffered chest pains for sometime. I was very young and did not know the way back to my village, so I accepted my fate and did not attempt to run” (Nibania, abducted woman).

Aside the lack of consent that characterizes bride abduction, abductions are also perpetrated on girls that are very young below the legal age of marriage. In Jirapa the chronological age of a girl is less important when it comes to marriage. The determining factor whether or not a girl has reached the marriageable age is the development of her breast (mwan be ra). An abductor confirmed this when he said:

“I think a girl who has breast and about 13 to 14 years is matured to marry. You do not need to ask them whether they are ready or not. The signs are enough indication for their preparedness” (Turo male who abducted).

A community leader added his voice thus;

“Constitutionally, a lady should be 18 years before she can marry. But I know a girl who is about 14 to 15 years and got married and when I sent a threatening letter to

the family of the young man who married her, they brought her back to her parents but she ran back” (Baku, male community leader).

Two abducted women who were all very young when they were abducted shared their experiences below;

“I was not up to 10 years old but 4 men were interested in me and my brothers gave me away to one of them and encouraged him and his family to abduct me” (Nibania abducted woman).

“I was a small girl when I got married about 15 years old” (Ayooma, abducted woman).

### **Abuse**

The women’s abduction experiences included physical, sexual and emotional abuse. In the process of abduction, there is often some resistance from the girls, and they are beaten, dragged and confined in the abductors’ house, resulting in injuries and emotional trauma:

“I was beaten severely and lost a tooth and locked in a room which was only opened to give me food.” Recently I witnessed abduction where about four men did not only molest their captive but grabbed the girl’s mother and threw her away before fleeing” (Maama, abducted woman).

The participants revealed that brides are kept behind closed doors and their every movement monitored for a while depending on how well they behave. Parents-in-law and sisters-in-law keep a close watch over them in turns and they are warned not to attempt an escape. An abducted woman vividly captures this point when she said;

“I was dragged off the bicycle and pushed into a compound house where I was secured in one of the houses without food or water. I was afraid and did not know what to expect, I sat down and wondered till I fell asleep. I was awoken by the turn of the key in the door at down and ordered by an elderly man and woman who I got to know as my parents-in-law to go and take my bath. After which I was given porridge I could not drink I just felt sympathy for myself. They explained to me that it was a marriage exchange that my brother married their daughter and I was chosen to marry into their family. My father-in-law warned me against escaping and that no matter where I go I will be brought back” (Kani, abductee woman).

The initial shock and trauma of the act is carried into the marriage and the brides are not given time to heal before they are introduced to adult roles. Abducted woman intimated:

“Eventhough I was supposed to be marrying a rich man, it was not easy. Less than three days of my capture I was given huge pile of cloths to wash including that of my husband and my other rivals. As if that was not bad enough, after I managed to finish and was about to take my lunch around sun down, the senior wife sent for me and instructed me to go to the market and prepare supper. She claims it was her turn but she was not feeling fine. I simply went out and sat under the big tree outside the compound and wept bitterly. Our husband came back from the farm and saw me crying. When he enquired, I told him I was sick. He ordered the senior wife to get me some food and drugs. That was what saved me. But subsequently, my days were filled with going to the farm, cooking and cleaning. I was more like a maid than a wife” (Kolema, abducted woman).

The use of abducted bride as a house help was also confirmed by this experience;

“For about a week, I slept in my mother-in-law’s room and every day I will perform one domestic chore or the other including washing for my parents-in-law and preparing a size 6 enamel pot of TZ every night after returning from the farm. Do you know how big that pot is? You serve everybody in the household; grandmothers, aunties, uncles, just name it. You have to impress so they say you were properly trained” (Pogsama, abducted bride).

Beside the apparent challenges of trying to cope with domestic responsibilities is a covert challenge of sexual relations at a very young age (10-15 years). Considering that most girls experience their very first sexual encounter without any sex education and with an abductor, they tend to resist intimacy but the abductors go ahead and violate them. Thus, young girls are raped and sexually assaulted in an abduction relationship. An abducted woman who was abducted at age 10 shared her sexual experience;

“I cannot remember when I started entering my husband’s room but it was not too long. Because I got sick after the abduction, I was given time to get well. But I eventually did and it was terrible, we struggled the whole night and I wept uncontrollably from the sexual encounter but no one intervened. He only opened the door to let me out after he realized I was bleeding too much. My mother-in-law took me in and told me it was normal but when the bleeding and pains did not stop after a while, I was told that I had started to menstruate. She then educated me on what to do and gave me some herbs that eased the pains for a while. I thought of running away but I did not have money to pay for transport” (Danaa, abducted woman).

Another abducted woman described her experience of sexual violence;

“All this while he ignored me as if I did not exist, occasionally peeping through her mother’s room to greet now and then. One evening I was invited into his room, I believed it was my turn because I had a rival. I walked into his room that night and came face to face with a complete stranger; he did not talk just tapped on the bed for me to sit down. I sat down but refused to lie down as he instructed, this infuriated him and we quarrelled deep into the night. Eventually, he overpowered me and twisted my arms around my back and pushed me onto the bed and had his way. It was so painful and I had bruises from the forced penetration. The following morning I was unable to walk and almost all eyes were on me in the compound, I was so ashamed and locked myself in doors for the whole day” (Nibania, abducted woman).

Further, the abducted woman’s physical abuse culminated into emotional trauma which affected her life. Nibania, the abducted woman referred to above, indicated that she had not started to menstruate and both the bleeding and the forced penetration was too much. Though, she thought of running away, she stayed because of financial constraints and recounted further:

“Less than a year after repeated doses of similar experience, I became pregnant and gave birth at about age 12 or 13. Life became very tough. I had nothing so it was my sister-in-law who occasionally helped us out. Eventually, I learnt how to make beans cake and that has been my trade, though I help out in the farm. It makes you feel inadequate and not valued” (Nibania, abducted woman).

Another abducted woman recounts how she feels lonely and worthless even though she has 3 sons and a lot of grandchildren;

“Due to the fact that I could not cope with the treatment meted out to me I eventually run away from the marriage and left my 3 sons behind. Up till date, they do not consider me a worthy mother for leaving them. But there was very little I could do, elders have intervened but they do not visit and they do not send me money or even foodstuff. I am just a lonely old lady who survives on the benevolence of other people” (Kolema, abducted woman).

Pogsaama, an abducted woman, vividly portrays the bitterness she still feels at almost age 70 when she narrated;

“I walked about 8 miles to a nearby village in an attempt to escape. I met a good samaritan that took me in over the night but later on reported me and I was recaptured the following afternoon. There was no way out. I thought running away will help me but no. On all the two times I escaped, they brought me back. The stress I had to go through coupled with the fact that I don't like him always get me angry with everybody. The marriage was not an easy one. We were always fighting; every sexual encounter was a big fight. I feel wasted, just console myself with the children, we had 8 but 2 died at birth. He is dead now but I still feel very bad when I think of it.”

### **Disruption of girls education and career**

The women in the study were largely illiterates and helped out in their husbands farm, brewed pito or sold beans cake for a living. They mentioned that at the time of abduction, the women were attending school but after abduction they had to discontinue their education to undertake wifely roles. This severely affected the educational and career progression of almost all the women in the study.

“I had wanted to be a teacher, I pleaded with my mother-in-law to convince her son to allow me continue my education, but that ended in vain. Here I am, can you even

recognise that I have been to the four corners of a classroom?” (Pogsaama, abducted woman).

However, an abducted woman who was abducted while in class 6 indicated that she never thought about education, all she was interested in was just trying to survive. She recounted with indifference:

“At that young age and all what was happening to me, I became confused and could not think straight. I was oblivious of the importance of education and just accepted my fate” (Danaa, abducted woman).

The inability of the women to attend school lead to a dependence on their husbands. The men, usually farmers, used their wives as farm hands. However, when the proceeds are harvested the men provide only food stuff for the family and nothing else. Hence, whilst the abducted woman works on the farm, she is not paid and still have to provide ingredients before she can prepare meals. They do this by planting vegetables on the edges of the farm which they exchange or sell on market days. Others also gather shea nuts or sell beans cake.

“Since I was unemployed I was helping the man in the farm. I cook for them, sow seeds during raining season, harvested and cleared the farm. We also pick shear nuts to sell to get money to buy ingredients and our daily needs. Our husband was not giving us money; he used to give us corn or millet and you are to get the soup ingredients to be able to prepare a meal. It was difficult. And If you dare fetch some of the food stuff and sell “dapari” ancestors will come for you” (Pogsaama abducted woman).

Under the circumstances, abducted women ended up working very hard but earning very little and possessing no property at all. This makes abducted women poor and due to the continue practice

of the tradition there is generational poverty. One abducted woman laments how she had wished her daughters would not have to go through this practice.

“Now, I had nothing to offer my children, my girls also help out on the farm and once a while we brew pito and managed to put them in school. Recently she was abducted and the abductor did not even come back to pay the marriage rites. All the monies you paid as school fees hoping that the life of your daughter will be different or even she can help you during your old age becomes waist” (Pogsaa, abducted woman).

A male community leader who abducted, attested to the fact that abduction contributed significantly to poverty experienced by the women in Jirapa.

“Marriage by abduction contributes to the poverty situation of women. This is because, the ladies after abduction do not have the opportunity to go to school or learn a trade” (Arema, male who abductor).

### **Teenage pregnancy/high birth rate**

The study also identified that abducted women gave birth within the first to second year of abduction. And because abductions happen at a very young age, abducted women tend to give birth while in their teenage years. This exposes them to a variety of health challenges and poor motherhood. An abducted woman shared her experience;

“I went through hell with my first pregnancy. I was always sick and weak but still had to go to the farm, I think it was just God that saved me. As if all what I went through was not enough at the time of delivery, the pain was terrible. I was carried on a bicycle to Jirapa hospital. I was in labour for 2 days but when the baby was not coming they had to cut me before the baby came out. After that I was left like that; they did not sow

my private part. I just got to know that the nurse was expected to sew after they cut you when my daughter-in-law gave birth recently. This can be a cause why we do not enjoy sex and why our men too like marrying more women” (Dapaari, abducted woman).

Further, due to ignorance, immaturity and improper guidance the teenage mothers tend to lack adequate parenting skills. An abducted woman describes how her 3 year old boy died and how her husband still blames her up to date.

“I had 2 boys within 2 years of abduction and they were like twins, actually some people called me twins mother. Before the second boy turned 2 years he had stopped bed wetting but the first boy bed wet until age 3 and beyond. One day when I complained, a rival advised me to always bath him with cold water from the water pot every morning to make him stop. I bathed him with the water religiously until one day when I poured the water on him, he just stressed himself stiff on the floor and when I could not get him to respond to his name I called out for help. When people came, I narrated the story and everybody blamed me for killing my son. Till date, I have not stopped blaming myself” (Ayooma, abducted woman).

Abducted women were also found to have high number of children even though most of them lost a child or two. “Ayooma” who lost a son still have 7 surviving children.

“Now when I look back I cannot complain. I have seven children out of that marriage”

(Ayooma, abducted woman)

Another abducted woman who lost 2 children at birth still have 8 children and 20 grandchildren at age 60.

“I have 8 children 2 men and 6 women” (Malima, abducted woman).

### **Poor marital relations**

According to the finding abducted women experience relational problems and unstable marriages. There is always conflict, quarrels and strained relationships. An abducted woman lamented how she never forgave her husband for abducting her and always quarrelled with him at the least provocation.

“The marriage was one big trouble, I never got along with his mother who criticises almost everything that I do and makes sure that she reports me to him who will scold me like a child. I was only respected when he needs sex and I made sure I take my pound of flesh before allowing him to sleep with me” (Maama, abducted woman).

Another abducted woman who was treated badly by her husband and also her co-wives had this to say;

“Already I was not the favorite wife, if I do not have money I couldn’t cook so the women used to insult me a lot. My rivals were ok, if there was nothing in the house they could go to their families for foodstuff. But I was an orphan and had nobody to rely on. The treatment worsened when I had a problem after delivering. My rivals and almost everybody shun my company. It was one Roman father who came to my aid and took me to Jirapa for an operation and I became fine. I used to drip urine, they said my baby was too big and I forced and delivered on my own and it gave me a bad tear” (Kani abducted woman).

Further, another abducted woman did not only have poor relations but was also abandoned and warned not to go to the police. She narrates as follows;

“If not for the usual quarrels and insults I cannot say what I did to him to abandon me with 6 children and threatened to kill me if I reported him to the police” (Tuorosong, abducted woman).

#### **4.3 PERCEPTIONS ABOUT BRIDE ABDUCTION**

The following are participants’ views on bride abduction in the Jirapa District. Their views include the nature of the practice, how the practice affects them and what can be done about it. In finding out the nature in the Gbare and Vingving communities, two main themes emerged from the data collected. These were traditional bride abduction which is usually done with the parent’s or would be bride’s consent, even though at times it is a coerced consent. And abuse of the traditional practice which is mostly done without the consent of the girl or her parents. Charms are now used to aid the abuse of the tradition and also the abductors do not go back to the abducted girl’s family to perform the marriage rites.

##### **Traditional abduction**

Participants reported on traditional bride abduction and indicated that it takes into consideration the parents’ or family’s consent, the consent of the would-be bride and the application of the traditional requirements of marriage within the community. In the practice of the tradition, there are reported incidents of force. However, participants revealed that this force is not real or non-emotional. The perceived force is a dramatic one staged only to give some credibility to the culture being practised. It therefore, does not violate women’s human rights. This form of bride abduction is the normative practice many years ago but has now transformed into a practice characterized by the use of charms, force, lack of consent of the bride and non-performance of marriage rites in the communities within the District. This was revealed by abducted woman when she said;

“In the olden days, even though we were abducted, they usually sought permission from our parents or family and they in turn consulted us whether we were in agreement before we were abducted. I was consulted, even though I did not like the man for the sake of my parents I agreed” (Hina, abducted woman).

An abducted woman in an answer to a question why she hated being abducted but allowed his sons to abduct brought out the distinction between the tradition and abuse of the tradition which also brought out the fact that both the tradition and the abuse of it are being practiced concurrently, they are not mutually exclusive. She has this to say;

“My sons abducted their wives but the difference is that the women love them and agreed to be abducted I did not love my husband and did not hesitate to show it but I was forced” (Pogsaa, abducted woman).

A man who abducted for marriage but sought the wife’s consent or rather the wife pleaded to be abducted shared his story thus;

“I stole my wife but with her consent. I had wished that I finished courting her and performed all the rites before her family will give her to me officially through “belling”. But due to competition I had to abduct her. One of my colleagues and his friends challenged me over her and I fought them and they could not abduct her. So when we went home the woman told me that if I leave her and come back to meet her absence, I should not blame her. I had wanted her to learn a trade before marrying her later. I even bought her a sewing machine but competition made it difficult. When even other suitors approach her and she says no to to them, they will still abduct. Due

to abduction you don't want to invest in the girl and somebody will come and take her away" (Teni, Elder).

### **Abuse of the tradition**

Bride abduction which is abuse of the tradition is characterized by the use of real force and without any form of consent of the bride or family. However, sometimes it is with the connivance with the family of the girl for gifts. Usually, the abductee is not given the opportunity to express her consent and in most circumstances she does not have the legal or mental capacity to give consent. This form of bride abduction is the forceful type in which brides usually resist genuinely and vehemently. In the minds of the women, it is a clear abuse of traditional practices regarding marriage through abduction. An abducted woman shares her experience to demonstrate the lack of consent on the side of both the abducted and her family;

"I was a small girl when I was abducted. I was innocent and did not know the man neither did my family. About three strong men grabbed me in the bush while I was tending cattle and we had a struggle. I was dragged and beaten and when we came to a bush path there was somebody waiting with a bicycle and they put me on it without any explanation. I was in school but that ended it. I was angry because I did not know what was happening and partly because nobody came to my aid. I tried escaping three times but I was caught" (Mama, abducted woman).

Whiles the following finding demonstrates family conievance in abduction without the consent of the girl;

"I was not up to 10 years old but 4 men were interested in me and my brothers gave me away to one of them without my knowledge and encouraged him and his family to

abduct me. On the day I was being abducted I was with my friends and it was really bad. My arm got dislocated because my friends were pulling me while the abductors were also pulling. They succeeded and brought me to Gbare on a bicycle. For a long time I had chest pains. I did not attempt to run away because I was too young and did not know the way to my village” (Nibania, abducted woman).

Participants perceive the tradition of bride abduction as is being practiced currently as negative and have a lot of consequence for girls, women and the community as a whole. The practice used to be mainly consensual. However, the consent can not always be said to be procured genuinely. All the actors (abductors, abductees and the abductee’s family) used abduction to overcome obstacles to a marriage proposal. However, what happens today is different. The girls’ consent is not sought at all and at times concoctions are used to procure consent. Further, under the normal circumstances after a bride has been abducted, the family who abducted send a message to the girl’s family, indicating that they have stolen from their family/village so if they are searching for their girl they should contact them. In most cases, the message is received in good faith by the lady’s parents. A formal greeting ‘poro’ which goes with an accompanying fowls and guinea fowls is then extended to the lady’s parents/people and permission sought to enable them come back to pay the bride price or dowry at a later date agreed upon by both parties. When the bride price is paid, the lady becomes the wife of the young man. Now, this is not the case. Most of the abductors do not follow up to perform the marriage rites, but continue to cohabit with the women and procreate and when they are fed up or at the least provocation they send the women packing.

An abducted woman shared her daughter’s experience to demonstrate the ills of the practice as follows:

“My daughter was abducted but the abductors never came to perform the marriage rites. Later, she run back home but unknown to her she was pregnant. A different group of young men from another village came and abducted her again. The second group however came back immediately and performed the marriage rites. Shortly, after that she gave birth to a set of twines for the new husband, though they are obviously not his. The first husband never followed up to enquire about her or pay the bride price” (Nibania, abducted woman).

A community leader shared his frustration as to how the custom has now enslaved them and will not let them enjoy the fruit of their labour. He said;

“My daughter was abducted but the perpetrators never came back to pay her dowry. She stopped school and I gave her a sewing machine and she refused but went to her uncle and she was abducted there. I heard she even gave birth but the child died” (Teani, community leader).

A man who abducted added his voice to how the tradition has changed and also the fact that they did not know that it was bad but for the work of Action Aid Ghana they have come to appreciate its negative effects as he recounts some of them below;

“This time it is bad, and not healthy at all. The young men who abduct don’t even come back to follow the tradition that they claim have given them the right to abduct. Sometimes after the woman has delivered a number of times the man will send her packing back to her family without taking responsibility for the children” (Dangoli, a male who abducted).

Aside the tradition being abused to undermine girls and women, participants perceive bride abduction as promoting teen marriages and pregnancies, contributing to high birth rate and unplanned families, disruption of child education/career development, broken marriages and perpetuation of poverty. The fact of bride abduction contributing to the above social problems has been seen in earlier discussions of this work. However, will add few more voices to demonstrate how participants feel about the practice.

Abducted woman expressed her view thus;

“Look at how education is expensive; you toil to look after a girl in school with high hopes only for her to be abducted half way. It is really bad. It is good that we discuss it with the Human Rights people like the Action Aid; it will help for it to be reduced”  
(Dapaari, abducted woman).

One abducted woman lamented that men abduct as if they have what it takes to look after a woman only for you to go into the marriage and become a slave. You work hard without any support and appreciation. She said;

“Men abduct to show that they are men and eligible to marry but mostly they can't take care of the women. It is their mind that tell them they can take care of a woman but they don't have the ability. I was not working I was there helpless. It was later I started following them to the farm to weed and sow This only makes you dependent on the man and increase poverty” (Danaa, abducted woman).

## **Outmoded practice**

Participants are of the view that the practice whether the tradition or the abuse of it is outmoded and not useful but no one has moved proactively to stop or cause the abolishment of the old practice. Participants wish more could be done to eliminate the practice, they kept calling on government and human rights organizations to help stop it. They are also aware that bride abduction is criminal and also privy to all the consequences that flow from it but lack the will power to report abducted cases to the police.

An abducted woman state her views thus;

“Abduction affect children’s education, if anybody can help stop it, it will help us. Community Based Anti Violence Unit (COMBAT) and the Gbare chief are helping in this regard but very little is being achieved. We need others to help Action Aid in this regard. We know is a crime but if you go to the police your husband’s family will sack you. They will call you all sorts of names including the woman who doesn’t respect and they will not let you stay in the village. When a woman has a profession it will help her and the extended family. They spoil the girl and hurt the family. After all this they may decide to say that the woman is old and sack her and she becomes the burden of the family” (Malima, abducted woman).

A community leader added his voice thus;

“I have reported a case to Human Rights which resulted in the girl being brought back to her family but she escaped and ran back to the young man. Marriage by abduction should be banned, we need help now that they are using concoctions we don’t know what to do” (Baku, a community leader).

Further, Baku, a community leader intimated that there is nothing he likes about the practice:

“I don` t like anything about marriage through abduction. I can` t really tell, those young men who use charms to abduct ladies at the long run have broken homes when the lady gets cleared off the charm. I am not and never in support of marriage by abduction”  
(Baku, male community leader).

Another community leader added his voice as follows:

“In my opinion, marriage by abduction should be banned but the problem is the young ladies. They will even plan with the young man on a date and a place where the young man will meet her and run away with her to his house. If it is already banned then we need education to let our people know that it is bad we should stop it. I will not like my daughter to be married through abduction but these days the children do what they want” (Arema, male community leader).

Though, he abducted, he stated that abduction has nothing good and most women do not like it, it is just the men who use it to protect their interest. If it can be stopped, we will all be forced to court the women we love. He said;

“Marriage by abduction has nothing good in it. Why should you want to marry and behave as if you are hiding to do something or force someone to marry you? It is not good, mostly the women do not like it. If it can be stooped it will help” (Turo, man who abducted).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter deals with the discussion of findings, conclusion of the study, and recommendations made based on the findings from the study regarding the experiences of women married through abduction.

#### 5.1 Discussion

##### Abducted women's experience

The findings of the study confirm that bride abduction as a marriage process grossly violates women's fundamental human rights as guaranteed under the Ghanaian constitution. The findings indicate that bride abduction contributes to women's poverty leading to their dependence on men and their overall subordinate position in life.

It was obvious from the interviews that bride abduction in Jirapa was harmful to the young girls and women involved in it. The harmful nature of the practice is similar to the happenings in South Africa and Kyrgyzstan which has compelled some scholars to label it a gross violation of the rights of the girls (Nkosi & Buthelezi, 2013) and abusive and non-consensual (Kleinbach, Ablezova & Aitieva, 2005). Though, in the Ghanaian situation, the law does not specifically outlaw bride abduction. But, it prohibits forced consent to marriage and child marriage which are attributes that make up bride abduction. In the Criminal Code of the Soviet Republic of Georgia (1960), a specific provision: "Kidnapping for the purpose of marriage" (s.134) and Kyrgyzstan Criminal Code (198) s.155 outlaw the practice specifically and also reviewed their sentencing regime in an amendment in 2004 and 2013 respectively from 3 years to up to 10 years, however it is still being practiced.

This study is therefore important because it created the needed conversation to bring the practice of bride abduction to the fore, for appropriate intervention. One thing that became clear is that the law whether explicitly or not is not a good deterrence because the practice is cultural and there are social and cultural restrictions to reporting the violation to the law enforcement agencies. To reduce or eliminate bride abduction, advocacy should be targeted at breaking the cultural underpinnings and exposing the harmful effects of the practice.

The study uncovered that the practice of bride abduction took two forms, the traditional version which is not detrimental to the women and the abusive one which is more prevalent in contemporary Jirapa. This supports Nkosi and Buthelezi (2013) and Modisaotsile's (2013) findings in South Africa, that there is a traditional bridal abduction, which is positive and the contemporary negative one which is the most prevalent form. However, as to what the custom means differs from one society to another. Though Nkosi and Buthelezi (2013) see it as a custom to open up marriage negotiations, the current study found that it is a custom to select a bride with her consent, which culminates into marriage after rites have been performed.

The research findings indicate that the traditional bride abduction whether seen as a process to open up marriage negotiations or as a marriage per se takes into consideration the girls' consent before the negotiations are concluded and does not violate women's rights. The abuse of the tradition however, lacks the consent of the girl or her parents or family and uses force in the abduction. This is highlighted by Kleinbach, Ablezova and Aitieva (2005) when they stated that due to lack of consent and use of force, women are married against their will as a result of bride abduction. Further, it emerged from the data that mostly the abducted girl's consent may not be sought but it is done with the connivance of the girls family in exchange of gifts. This finding is

confirmed by Wood (2005) assertion that abduction may occur with or without the consent of the woman, but is often done with the consent of the family in exchange of a gift.

The process of abduction was also found to be abusive, where women are beaten, dragged and sexually violated as confirmed by Nkosi and Buthelezi (2013) and Modisaotsile, (2013) that contemporary bride abduction violates women's rights in terms of beating, sexual abuse, and emotional torture. This finding is in line with Thulo (2003) assertion that the abuse of ancient traditions has resulted in young women being kidnapped and raped in our society. The study supported Stakeeva, Kartanbaeva and Djanaeva's (2011) findings of rape but was quick to add that considering the fact that most abducted girls were below the age of marriage, it can better be described as defilement. In addition, it came out that the use of force and threats are employed to scare them from escaping. This supports Shoira's (2005) assertion of the variety of psychological coercion used to compel her to agree to the marriage.

On the basis of the age at which girls were abducted, the findings revealed that most of the women who were married through abduction were abducted at early age; that is, between 10 and 17 years. This contradicts Kleinbach, Ablezova and Aitieva's (2005) assertion that, at the time of the kidnapping, the mean average age of the women was 20 years and that of the men is 24 years. It however fall in line with Nkosi and Buthelezi (2013) study that the most common nature of bride abduction to include lack of the girl's or woman's consent, the age at which abduction takes place is below the legal age of consent to marry and the place where abduction occurs is usually outside girls home where she is caught performing gender roles.

The average age at which girls are abducted differs significantly as compared to Kleinbach, Ablezova and Aitieva's (2005) findings in Kyrgyzstan. One reason for this difference could be the perceived African's interest in marriage. This interest and respect for child bearing and

marriage as an institution motivate people to begin the marriage process very early in life. This includes marriage by abduction. Another reason could be the linkage between child betrothals and abduction, both of which are used as means of marriage. Child betrothal is done early in a girl's life, usually soon after birth, to link her to a marriage partner. This gives the chosen suitor an informal license to own the girl. Hence, the man takes advantage of this license to capture the girl at his own determined, convenient time. So, in Jirapa, the maturity of the girl is not a primary concern of the abductor.

The assumption, which was revealed in the research is that, age does not matter once the abductor has the license to own the girl. This right or license makes it needless to seek consent of the girl. The failure of their consent being sought makes most of them try to escape from such marriage; some continue to stay on the basis of having children with the man. Some expressed an agreement between the families involved and due to the threats or competition from other suitors make them to opt for such marriage by family consent.

Further, on the experiences of abducted women, it was found that all the women interviewed had to drop out of school due to the abduction. Also, they could not go back to school due to the wide variety of household chores they had to perform and the new families' unwillingness to sponsor or welcome the idea. Other abductees were too young to appreciate the importance of education. The disruption of girls education is one of the findings that corroborate Iyanuolu's (2008) assertion that education of girls is disrupted since they have to take care of their new families.

It also emerged that the experiences of abducted women include working for their husbands without pay whiles they still have to contribute to the running of the home. This puts a lot of pressure on women and make them work very hard with few returns. They mostly work in their husbands' farms, doing petty trading or farming vegetables on the side. This affirms Human

Rights Watch (2006) study findings that women are often forced to work as unpaid servants.

On the experiences, it was found that young girls marry into polygamous marriages and they are used as maids by their co wives and the whole family which usually include parent-in-laws and grand parents-in-laws. This finding is similar to Jonas (2006) and UNICEF (2007) findings that many young girls marry into ongoing families as second or third wives where they face competition and related strain and stress at very young ages.

Research findings on abducted women's experience include teenage pregnancies, poor motherhood, relational problems, broken homes and poverty. Most women who participated in the study were abducted between ages 10 to 15 years and averagely it took each of them less than two years to get pregnant. This shows that girls are getting pregnant in their teens, which has a lot of health implications for them. Besides the health challenges, the young mother is not able to take good care of their children leading to deaths of most of their children. All the women interviewed lost a child or two. It also came out that the quality of marriage through abduction was not the best as it was full of quarrels, strain and stress. The initial violence, both physical and sexual persist in the marriage. In addition to the violence and acrimony characterizing the abduction relationship, the marriage becomes more susceptible to separation at the least provocation.

The experience of abducted girls and women makes their lives quite challenging and unbearable. After being abducted at a tender and immature age for marriage using force, an impression is already created that they are powerless and work for their abductors. This experience is reinforced by their denial of formal education and employment. Abducted wives remain in abject poverty, insignificant in their marital homes and community, and unwelcomed in their family homes. They are treated as objects not worthy of care, sympathy and humanity. This argument deserves attention

because, for an innocent human being to be dragged, beaten and not given empathetic attention because she disagrees with being married to a wrong man, is simply inhumane and barbaric. It can be inferred that this sustained chain of experience widens the poverty gap between men and women, and hence affirms the principle of feminization of poverty.

In essence, bride abduction is found to promote poverty as girls are not allowed to develop their full potential and are made dependent and stooges of their husbands where they tend to adopt coping mechanisms like spouse pleasing and tolerance of domestic abuse to survive. They do this as a result of the psychological trauma associated with the abuse they suffer. These behaviours they exhibit have their own consequences on the dignity and humanity on the girl or woman.

### **Contributing or Sustaining Factors of the Practice**

The findings affirm the cultural background and patriarchal attitudes supporting the practice and also the abuse of it. All participants indicated that they grew up knowing and accepting the practice and due to tradition and peaceful coexistence they do not follow up to make trouble when girls are abducted. This gives credence to Chabaya, Rembe and Wadesengo's (2011) assertion that marriage by abduction and other harmful practices take place as part of traditional culture, ignoring changes in social context. Due to socialization, the practice is still seen as a way of marriage as it used to be consensual, similar in some ways to an arranged marriage. However, what has happened is that this marriage form that used not to have negative consequences on the woman has now taken a different turn because of its non-consensual nature.

In addition, the study found that some cultural practices like giving girls hand in marriage, betrothal, arranged marriage and competing over a girl for marriage contribute to sustaining the practice of bride abduction. Suitor's competition, a finding in this study was in agreement with

Borbieva's (2012) study discoveries, where the former boyfriend of a girl prevents her new suitor from marrying her by kidnapping the girl.

Also, the findings suggest the patriarchal and gendered nature of our traditional practices (e.g., FGM and trokoshi) where women are still being seen as possessions and second class to men is a contributory factor. The finding was in agreement with Handrahan (2004) assertion that, for men, kidnapping is an act of violence against, and dominance of women and an act that defines cultural identity of manhood. Handrahan (2004) says kidnapping reinforces "male hegemony," that is, dominance of women. It also supports Stormorken et al. (2007) findings, which reveal that the root causes of marriage by abduction are enshrined in the patriarchal attitudes of the communities emphasized by the inferiority of women. This finding corroborate some assertions made by the studies of UNICEF (2003), Malawi Human Rights Commission (2005) and Hanzi (2006). Their studies revealed that young girls are seen as objects and are forced into marriage or abducted to settle family debts or use as compensation for pledging.

The interplay of cultural practices, traditions and socialization lead to the promulgation and continual perpetration of abduction for the purposes of marriage. The communities had an old cultural practice where girls were abducted for marriage. This practice, in addition to other marriage practices such as child betrothals and competition over marriage were acceptable practices. Through socialization, generations adopted these practices that were harmless and non-abusive. However, improper protection and reformation of the cultural practices have left them vulnerable to adulterations and abusive use. Consequently, the infusion of violence and violations have made them unacceptable within the confines of the law and contemporary human rights law. The study has revealed that it is even considered wrong and has been receiving doses of opposition within customary practices in Jirapa.

Also, there is the social perceptions of gendered behaviour and moral norms within the communities in which these harmful practices are still going on. In the communities, girls are brought up to be modest and aware that their parents can give them out in marriage and that the training they get at home is supposed to prepare them for marriage. Whilst the boys are supposed to act bravely and assertively and have rights to their fathers property.

Further, the study found that participants were either not aware of the laws prohibiting bride abduction or knew that when they went against it nothing would be done to them because of culture of silence among victims and lack of enforcement by the required agencies. The study revealed that even where perpetrators are reported to the authorities, they are rarely held accountable since after reports and being called in the presence of elders and the police, they only seek for the return of the abducted girl. It is true that the accountability level is seen to be very weak and it is in agreement with Handrahan's (2004) study which revealed that 73 percent of the men are not held accountable for their actions.

Furthermore, the study found the usage of concoctions or medicine (charm) by the perpetrators to sustain the practice. The charms make it difficult for the girl to recognize her predicament and therefore tend to side with the abductor. Even when she is rescued, she goes back to the abductor. This finds expression in the Nkosi and Buthelezi (2013) findings of use of herbs targeted at their victims to blind and confuse them to accept things they will not accept in their normal senses.

### **Perception of Participants on Marriage by Abduction**

Majority of the participants perceived abduction as a bad tradition that needs to be banned or stopped due to various problems it creates within the community. The fact that it creates and perpetuates poverty is in agreement with Andrea and Cummings's (2008) study findings that

marriage by abduction has the tendency to increase female poverty and juvenile delinquency coupled with the indulgence in undesirable works like prostitution, armed robbery among others.

Responses from participants (victims, perpetrators and elders) revealed that marriage by abduction causes disruption to the girl or women education and career. This finding was in agreement with the study findings of Action Aid Ghana (2013) study, where participants in a focus group discussion asserted that marriage by abduction disrupts the girl child education. It affects the girl's dreams, aspirations and future careers.

Marriage by abduction has a lot of effects on both social and the family setting. Abducted ladies at the long run have broken homes when the lady gets cleared off the charm according to participants. Another revelation of its contributing to teenage pregnancy was confirmed by participants. In addition to this, its effect in resulting to maternal mortality was also identified. This finding proves to support Action Aid Ghana (2013) survey assertion that many of the girls leave their parents too early with little preparation to take up life challenges coupled with underdeveloped pelvis.

There seems to be a general distaste for abduction as a marriage process. The positions of opinions of community members and leaders unanimously challenged the practice. The justification for their distaste points to the effects of abduction on the abductees. It was discovered that the members of the community had explicit knowledge on the physical, social and emotional effects on the abductees. What many did not know was the fact that abduction is an abuse on the girls' human rights whiles the forceful nature of abduction is against the tenets of the laws of Ghana.

It can easily be assumed that the awareness of the physical, social and emotional effects of abduction for marriage would have discouraged people in Jirapa from perpetrating this practice. But, no, the practice continues, perhaps due to the cultural underpinnings and the personal gains

of the few, usually men. The study reveals that the people of Jirapa do not enjoy the practice. They do not consider the practice of abduction for marriage a good thing, even if it serves a good purpose. What they know is that, it is a practice that will be difficult to bring about change when community efforts or internal resources are solely relied on.

A new finding in the study is the revelation that though abduction in the olden days was purported to be consensual, it was discovered that there were elements of compulsion in the abduction. What was considered to be consensual abduction was not entirely consensual as there were instances of coercion and parental persuasion. It was found out that though this kind of abduction was devoid of force and aggression, the consent was rarely and passively sought. The consent was usually in the form of information, rather than permission.

What happens is that, the prospective bride and the parents will be informed of the intended marriage and the prospective groom. One would expect that the prospective bride will be given the right to agree or refuse. However, in instances where the prospective bride intends rejecting the marriage proposal, her parents intervene and persuade the girl to accept the man and the marriage. In essence, this kind of marriage is a ploy to indirectly force the girl into marriage, though physical force is not applied.

In addition, an emerging finding was the fact that bride abduction led to numerous child marriages. This phenomenon also led to the unthought of consequences of teenage pregnancy, poor motherhood and broken homes. Many of the participants were abducted at tender ages when they were not matured enough to make informed marriage decisions or know much about the dynamics of marriage. In such a situation, getting pregnant at such young age can have have challenging reproductive health effects on the girl child. Similarly, they are unable to manage their pregnant

situations properly and find it difficult caring for their babies. Moments like this could be very challenging for the unprepared abducted wife.

### **APPLICATION OF THE THEORY OF PATRIARCHY**

The theory of patriarchy can be applied to the study to delineate the underlying causes of abduction and the experiences of abducted women. In the Jirapa district, bride abduction is seen as a practice used by men to express or demonstrate their superiority to women and children. Through abduction, society comes to realize that men are in charge of decisions and they determine how institutions should be run and what choices must be opted for.

Further, bride abduction is used to suppress the decisions and opinions of women and girls. As pointed out in the theory of patriarchy, bride abduction is carried out in a way that challenges and oppresses women against their will. They are forced to marry at an age they usually disagree with and are not given the opportunity to decide on the spouse to get married to. It is characteristics or typical for women to decide on some qualities of their prospective husbands before deciding to marry them. However, in bride abduction, these decisions are not allowed as spouses are imposed on them, even if the spouses do not possess the preferred qualities.

After the successful abduction and compelled marriage, the rights and voice of the woman or girl is forfeited. Socially, she ceases to be a person of right or privilege in the marriage. Decisions in the marriage continue to be imposed on her. When to have sex, when to get pregnant, and how many children to give birth to rest in the bosom of the man alone. The woman remains an object to be used by the man. In such a case, the woman or girl is only exploited and used for the personal gain of the man.

The theory of patriarchy explains vividly how bride abduction is used to indicate that the structures, systems, and all institutions of society are controlled by men and not women. Controlling the marriage institution as well clearly reveals that all institutions are in the hands of men, the patriarchs of society. Similarly, resources in the marriage also remain in the hands of men. Just as a captured slave does not have power in the distribution and control of resources, so will a woman or girl captured or abducted lose her power in the accumulation or control of resources. Hence, bride abduction is a symbolic indication that an abducted girl is a slave and cannot own, control or take part in the distribution of marriage or community resources.

In conclusion, bride abduction shows how men exhibit their superiority in the control and domination of women and societal resources. It also instils in women and girls the fact that women must be submissive and silent objects to be suppressed and dominated.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

Universal to every society is the institution of marriage. How partners are selected, however, varies. While some selection procedures adhere to the human rights of the women involved, others such as bride abduction do not. Nkosi and Buthelezi (2013) defined bride abduction as the carrying away of a girl by total strangers to a young man's home with the aim of marrying her. Whilst the number of girls affected by this practice is not known, evidence from Central Asian and South Africa suggest that bride abduction is widespread (Handrahan, 2000; Mwabene & Sloth-Nielson, 2011). Besides, it is considered as an abuse and a violation of the human rights of a woman. In Ghana, since studies have not focused on the experiences of the women married through abduction, this study was conducted to explore the experiences of women married through abduction and the factors that sustain it in the Jirapa district.

With the study area being the Jirapa district of the Upper West Region of Ghana, the study employed a qualitative approach. The target population was all women married through abduction, men who abducted and community leaders in the Gbari and Vinning communities in the Jirapa district. Using purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques, the study selected a total of twenty (20) participants for the research. This comprised of ten (13) women married through abduction, five (4) men who abducted women and five (3) community leaders. Using a topic guide to collect data, Creswell's (2013) thematic analysis approach was used to reduce data and analyze them. The study found out that all participants indicated that they grew up knowing and accepting the practice and due to tradition and peaceful coexistence they don't follow up to make trouble when girls are abducted. This gives credence to Chabaya, Rembe & Wadesengo's (2011) assertion that marriage by abduction and other harmful practices take place as part of traditional culture ignoring changes in social contexts.

This study found out that the abuse of ancient traditions has resulted in young women being kidnapped and raped in our society. This abuse confirms Nkosi & Buthelezi (2013) and Modisaotsile's (2013) assertion that contemporary bride abduction violates women's rights in terms of beating, sexual abuse, and emotional torture.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made to help address the instances of bride abduction in the Jirapa District and other communities in the country that this phenomenon is going on:

1. Chiefs, elders and opinion leaders of the communities experiencing bride abduction must re-examine and redefine the culture surrounding marriage practice. This is because the

study discovered that the practice persists because it has been merged with the culture of the communities. Redefining the tenets of the culture will mean altering aspects of the culture that infringe on the wellbeing and happiness of the individuals in the community. This includes altering the aspects of the culture that condone bride abduction. It is recommended that the chiefs and elders of the community organize community fora to discuss publicly and effect these changes for the benefit of the people. Focus should be on promoting practices that are in the best interest of humanity

2. To make the cultural reforms easier, social work educators must sensitize and teach people about the effects of harmful cultural practices and how such practices can be modified and eventually changed. This education should be sustainable and directed more at victims and perpetrators of bride abduction. It will empower the women, especially the victims of bride abduction, to voice out and play active roles to ensure the cultural reforms or modification. Educational and sensitization programmes must be developed in local languages and must be administered by professionals who are natives of the communities. However, the department of social welfare officers, community child protection teams that are often on the ground and NGOs such as Action Aid can help in this regard. The programmes must be culturally sensitive and must adopt a progressive approach, rather than a radical approach. Educators must take advantage of media coverage to inform policy makers, lawmakers, Council of State, and academicians of the dangers that bride abduction presents. This can be done through insightful research on the subject and presenting papers to the stakeholders through effective lobbying.
3. Another recommendation is to consider a macro approach of addressing the high level of poverty in the Jirapa District. Creation of environment-specific jobs will ensure that the

businesses thrive. It will also ensure that the jobs are patronized by the community members. Encouraging investors to establish businesses and invest in already existing ones will play a double positive effect. First, it will drastically help reduce poverty, especially among the youth who have attained the age of marriage. It will enhance modernization in the communities and encourage people to reorient their perception and conceptualization of some attitudes, values and culture they uphold. Considering the fact that poverty is a factor that sustains bride abduction, socioeconomic empowerment of people in the communities will have a positive impact in bringing an end to the practice.

4. With the already existing national laws sanctioning kidnapping, state security agencies such as the police, DOVVSU, Department of Social Welfare (DSW) and the courts must remain committed to the process of enforcing the laws, especially laws that protect the rights and dignity of women in our societies. Forceful marriage and kidnapping are serious fundamental human rights abuse both in the national laws of Ghana and in the international conventions such as CEDAW and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). With these well-defined legal frameworks, the state security agencies must be charged to enforce these laws. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) must have the mandate of holding accountable the police, DOVVSU and DSW in the fight against bride abduction. The Ministry must provide the agencies with the necessary logistical support to be able to discharge their duty successfully. In addition, violators of the provisions sanctioning bride abduction must be compelled to face the full rigor of the law. Undoubtedly, this will deter others from engaging in abduction of girls for marriage against their express will.

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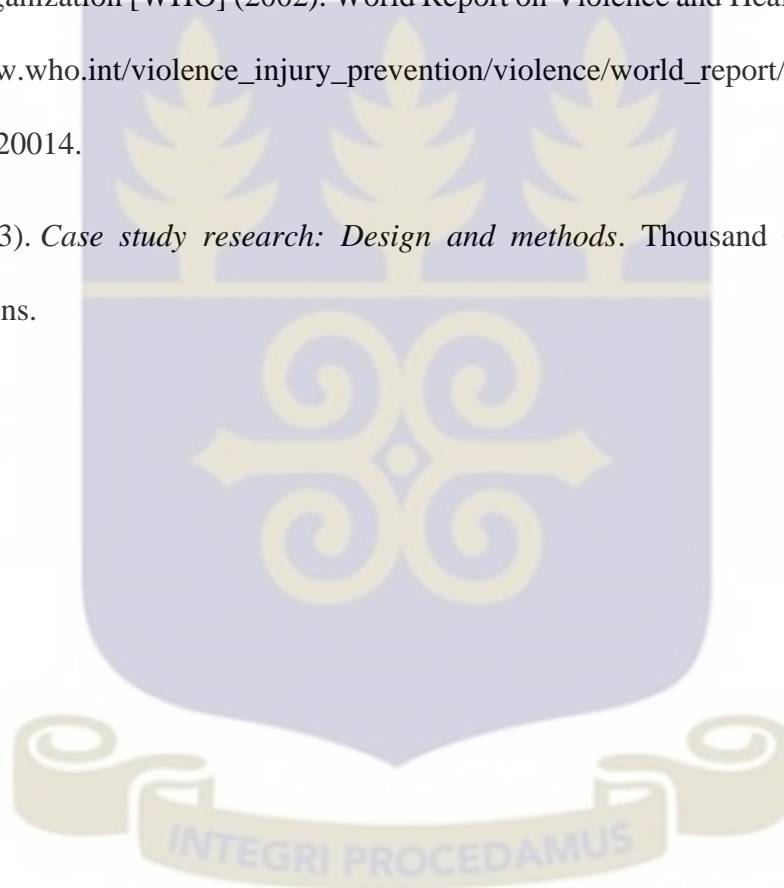
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## APPENDICES

University of Ghana

Department of Social Work

### **Topic Guide for marriage through abduction**

This study is only for academic purpose and relevant information provided will be treated as confidential as possible.

The purpose is to explore the culture, values and marriage system of the community. This information will inform the type of intervention and policies the government and NGOs will adopt to help in the development of the community. I will appreciate your full participation in this exercise but you do not have to answer all the questions if you do not want to.

#### **A. Women married through abduction**

##### **Knowledge of abduction**

1. At what age did you get married?
2. How important is marriage in this community?
3. How many types of marriage do you have in this community?
4. What was your occupation before you got married, or were you in school?
5. What was the circumstance surrounding your marriage (was it an arrangement between you and the man; or you were taken unaware)?
6. What are the factors that promote this type of marriage? (Issues of tradition/culture, cost of marriage, compensation for family debt, men are not good match, pressure from family to marriage, etc).

7. Do you know of other communities where this is practiced?
8. What is the origin of this type of marriage?

### **Experiences and Perception**

1. I would like you to share your experience of marriage by abduction with me so that I gain a little more understanding of this practice. How did it happen to you?
2. Please can you talk about what you like and dislike about it?
3. In what other ways would you have preferred to get married rather than through abduction?
4. Do you think you would have agreed to marry your current husband if not for this kind of marriage?
5. How many women do you know to be married through abduction?
6. Has abduction affected you in any way?
7. Did you attempt an escape?
8. Do you think the process of abduction course you any pain or psychological abuse?
9. How do you feel about the fact that you were married through abduction?
10. In your opinion, why will a young man use abduction as a means to marry a maiden?
11. How did your family react to the abduction?
12. What do you do to help with managing the home?
13. In your opinion, what should be done about abduction as a mode of marriage?
14. Do you report cases of bride abduction to the law agencies?
15. Would you say that bride abduction contributes to poverty among young women in your community? If so, in what ways does this happen?

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**Department of Social Work**

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**B. Community Leaders**

**Knowledge of abduction**

1. What is your position in this community?
2. Have you ever heard of the type of marriage where the woman is captured?
3. Is this the only form of marriage practiced in your community?
4. Do you know of other communities where this is practiced?
5. What is the origin of this type of marriage?
6. Describe the process?
7. Why do men marry this way or what promote such marriage?
8. What is the age range of the preferred females for marriage by men?
9. Can anyone be married this way?
10. Do men let the women go free when they resist?
11. Is the abducted woman or her family put on notice about the abduction?

12. How many women do you know to be married through abduction?
13. What are the factors that promote this type of marriage? (Issues of tradition/culture, cost of marriage, compensation for family debt, men are not good match, pressure from family to marriage, etc).

### **Experiences and Perception**

1. I would like to learn something from you about marriage in this community. First what is the place of marriage for you in this community; I mean how important is marriage for you in this community?
2. Can you talk about the ways in which young men and women court in this community? I mean what is the usual practice of getting married?
3. Please can you talk about what you like and dislike about marriage by abduction?
4. In what other ways could people get married rather than by abduction?
5. What are your views on bride abduction?
6. Do you receive reports from family members indicating that their women have been abducted?
7. Do you report cases of bride abduction witnessed or reported to the law agencies?
8. If 'No' what prevents you from reporting?
9. In your opinion, why will a young man use abduction as a means to marry a maiden?
10. Would you say that bride abduction contributes to poverty among young women in your community? If so, in what ways does this happen?
11. In your opinion, what should be done about abduction as a mode of marriage?

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The purpose is to explore the culture, values and marriage system of the community. This information will inform the type of intervention and policies the government and NGOs will adopt to help in the development of the community. I will appreciate your full participation in this exercise but you do not have to answer all the questions if you do not want to.

**C. Community Members**

**Knowledge of abduction**

1. What was your experience with abduction?
2. How did you get married?
3. Describe the process?
4. Why did you marry this way or what promoted this marriage?
5. Do you have other forms of marriages in this community?
6. Do you know of other communities where this is practiced?
7. What is the age range of the preferred women for marriage by men?
8. Can someone else abduct for another person?
9. Do abductors let the woman go free when she resist?
10. What is the origin of bride abduction in this community?
11. How many abducted cases have you witnessed or aware of?

## Experience and Perception

1. I would like to learn something from you about marriage in this community. First what is the place of marriage for you in this community; I mean how important is marriage for you in this community?
2. Can you talk about the ways in which young men and women court in this community? I mean what is the usual practice of getting marriage?
3. Please can you talk about what you like and dislike about marriage by abduction?
4. Do you think your wife would have agreed to marry you if not for this kind of marriage?
5. How old was she when you married her?
6. Was she in school, learning a vocation or gainfully employed?
7. What was she doing when she was abducted?
8. Did she attempt an escape?
9. Do you think the process of abduction course her any pain or psychological abuse?
10. In your opinion, why will a young man use abduction as a means to marry a maiden?
11. How did her family react to the abduction?
12. How old is she now?
13. What does she do to help you with managing the home?
14. In what other ways could people get married rather than through abduction?
15. What are your views on bride abduction?
16. Would you say that bride abduction contributes to poverty among young women in your community? If so, in what ways does this happen?
17. In your opinion, what should be done about abduction as a mode of marriage?