



Commentary: Letter to the Editor regarding Tetteh & Markwei (2018)

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To cite this article: Emmanuel Nii-Boye Quarshie (2023) Commentary: Letter to the Editor regarding Tetteh & Markwei (2018), Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 32:1, 130-131, DOI: [10.1080/10538712.2023.2167681](https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2023.2167681)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2023.2167681>



Published online: 20 Jan 2023.



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Commentary: Letter to the Editor regarding Tetteh & Markwei (2018)

“Gbεkεfɔ̃ns” means “bad nights”: Problematic use and inappropriate meaning

I commend Dr. Tetteh and Dr. Markwei for their article describing child sexual abuse (CSA) among the Ga in Accra, Ghana (Tetteh & Markwei, 2018). The authors shed interesting and insightful light on how both female and male adults’ belief in “gbεkεfɔ̃ns” – a disturbing myth and faulty reasoning and interpretation of CSA – has the potential of deepening further the already-vulnerable and weaker emotional well-being of CSA survivors.

Unfortunately, “gbεkεfɔ̃ns” – the watchword which also appears to be the fulcrum of the paper – is problematic and has inappropriate and irrelevant meaning in the context of the paper. It is instructive to note that there is no such standard word as “gbεkεfɔ̃ns” in the Ga language (Kropp Dakubu, 2009). In fact, “gbεkεfɔ̃ns” means “bad evening” or “bad night,” differently from the authors’ interpretation as “children of bad character.” “Gbεkε” means evening or night; “fɔ̃n” means bad or wicked (Kropp Dakubu, 2009). On page 516 of the article the authors state thus: “*They are called ‘gbεkεfɔ̃ns.’ ‘Gbεkεfɔ̃ns’ in the Ga language refers to children with bad character traits such as being disrespectful, promiscuous, seductive, and dishonest.*”

In the Ga language, pluralization of nouns and adjectives is done through reduplication and affixation (Caesar & Ollenu, 2018; Kropp Dakubu, 2009). Unlike the English language, the letter ‘s’ is not used to pluralize nouns and adjectives in the Ga language. Thus, whereas it is doubtful that the participants used “gbεkεfɔ̃ns,” it is more conceivable that “gbεkεfɔ̃ns” is the authors’ own coinage perhaps to Anglicize the plural of “gbεkεfɔ̃n.” The Ga language does not easily lend itself to being Anglicized.

The appropriate term should be “gbekεfɔ̃n.” Etymologically, gbekεfɔ̃n is derived from two Ga words: “gbekε” which means *a child* (generically referring to a girl or boy), and “fɔ̃n” which means *bad* or *wicked* (Kropp Dakubu, 2009). The plural of gbekεfɔ̃n is “gbekεbiifɔ̃nji”; it is not, and it cannot be “gbekεfɔ̃ns” (unless one wants to Anglicize the term or perhaps one seeks to engage in stylistic writing, in which case a footnote/endnote is needed for clarification). Therefore, a key line of the article (on page 516) could be correctly rendered thus, “In the Ga language, *a child with bad character traits such as being disrespectful, promiscuous, seductive, and dishonest*” is described as “gbekεfɔ̃n.”

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

The author(s) reported there is no funding associated with the work featured in this article.

Notes on contributor

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