UNDERSTANDING CONSENSUAL UNIONS AS A FORM OF FAMILY FORMATION IN URBAN ACCRA

BY

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own research carried out in the Department of Sociology, University of Ghana, under the supervision of Prof. Akosua Keseboa Darkwah and Dr. Peace Mamle Tetteh. All references have been duly acknowledged.

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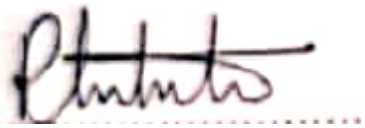

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July 2018.

DEDICATION

To my father, Mr. Zac Obeng-Hinneh, for believing and investing in me.

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ABSTRACT

Consensual unions as an alternative form of family formation is a growing phenomenon in especially urban centres in Africa, including Ghana. This qualitative study was aimed at exploring the lived experiences of persons in consensual unions. The research was conducted in the urban space of Accra and the target population was all persons who at the time of the study were in consensual unions. With the use of purposive sampling technique, a total of thirty-one participants were selected for the study. The life history interviewing approach was used in primary data collection. The data was organised and analysed by doing a thematic network analysis. Further analyses were done with secondary data obtained from journals, books, newspapers, and related websites.

It was revealed in the study that there is a gendered experience of consensual unions. For female research participants their unions served the purposes of livelihood strategy, an escape route, an avenue for intimate relations and a way of rehearsing for marriage. Male participants, entry into their union was primarily a mark of their maturity and masculinity. Whilst women mostly conceptualised their unions as a precursor to marriage, their partners were more likely to conceptualise it as an alternative to marriage. These different realities translated into the lived experiences of persons in such unions. The experiences include, pressures from the family, church, friends and neighbours to convert the unions into marriage, intimate partner violence and sanctions from extended kin. The study showed that based on these experiences, persons in consensual unions accordingly devised management strategies. The contribution of this thesis to knowledge is that it has shown the gendered conceptualisation of consensual unions either as a precursor or an alternative to marriage and the everyday experiences of persons in these unions.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

1.1 Background

On April 20, 2016, *Graphic Online* reported an incident that had taken place at Gbawe, a suburb of Accra. The story had the caption; 'Man Kills Himself over Bridewealth Payment'. The story behind the caption as reported by *Graphic* was this: Two young lovers who had migrated to Accra from a town in the Northern Region of Ghana had been living together like husband and wife for close to five years. The young woman was said to have on several occasions impressed upon her partner to go back to their hometown and perform the customary rites. Sensing that the man was not addressing her concerns, she decided to invite some relatives of hers from her hometown to talk to him. The meeting between relatives of the woman and this man in question turned confrontational. It was amid the verbal exchanges that the young man reportedly entered his bedroom, picked a gun and shot himself dead.

Just a day after this report, the *Daily Graphic* newspaper published another story titled; 'Man Buries Wife in Residence: Claims has no money for funeral' (see figure 1). This incident had happened at Bortianor New Town near Weija in Accra. Efo Kobina Chawudi, the man at the centre of the story had admitted burying his 'wife', Daavi Esi Avorkpor, near a septic tank in the house in which he and Daavi lived as caretakers. This was three days after Daavi had died of an illness. His reason for such an action? Efo said he did not know any family member of the woman he had been living with for twelve years prior to her death. Although he knew she hailed from Akatsi in the Volta Region, for the period that they lived together, she never visited home. Neither had they received any visits from her relatives. So, although the report referred to Daavi as Efo's 'wife', as

was the thinking of their neighbours, the couple were only living together as a married couple. No marriage rites or ceremonies had been performed.

Figure 1.1 Newspaper Report of a Man Who Secretly Buried His 'Wife'

20 News

Man buries wife in residence

• Claims has no money for funeral

By Emelia Ennin Abbey, ACCRA

RESIDENTS of Adawienman, a suburb of Botianor New Town, near Weija in Accra, woke up to a report that a resident of the area had buried his wife at his house because he could not afford a fitting burial and funeral for her.

The news, which spread through the community, led to the arrest of the 48 year-old man, who is believed to have buried the woman near a septic tank in his house, after some neighbours who described themselves as concerned citizens had made an official report to the Weija Police.

The suspect, Kobina Chawudi, popularly refered to by neighbours as Efo, allegedly kept his wife's body in their bedroom in a house in which they lived as caretakers for three days after she had died.

The wife, identified as Esi Avorkpor, 41, affectionately referred to as Daavi, was a native of Akatsi in the Volta Region.

Although the two are said to have lived together for the past 12 years, Chawudi is said to have told the police that he did not know any of Esi's relatives, hence his inability to inform them about her death.

The two had no children together, but Chawudi has five children.

Chawudi is a mason, while his wife was unemployed.

The police are yet to obtain a coroner's inquest from the court to enable them to employ the services of a pathologist to exhume the body.

Neighbours

Briefing the *Daily Graphic*, the Public Relations Officer of the Accra Regional Police Command, Mrs Alia Tenge, said Chawudi was arrested after some residents had reported to the police that they suspected he had buried his wife in the house.

Esi is said to have fallen ill for some time, but after a while neighbours who tried to find out how she was doing could not get any positive response from Chawudi.

He said after monitoring the house, the neighbours realised Esi was not in the house, leading to the suspicion that she might have died.

Chawudi is said to have told the police during interrogation that his sick wife died on April 13, 2016 but because he did not have money, he kept the body in their room for three days.

Later, the police said Chawudi claimed he decided to bury the body in their house.

Personal effects

Sources close to the Weija Police told the *Daily Graphic* that Chawudi had disposed of Esi's belongings.

It is, however, unclear whether Chawudi burnt the personal effects or he buried them.

A neighbour who spoke to the *Daily Graphic* said Chawudi usually weeded around the house "and so no one would have suspected him if he was seen digging a grave to bury his wife".

He said the two were the only persons who lived in the house but they maintained a good relationship with all their neighbours and "that is why most of us wanted to know that she was sick".

emelia.ennin@gra

Quick Read

A 45-year-old mason, Kobina Chawudi, is in the custody of the Weija Police for allegedly burying his wife, three days after her death, near a septic tank in their house at Adawienan, a suburb of Botianor New Town, near Weija in Accra

Tipper truck crushes trici

Source: Daily Graphic, 21st April 2016, p. 20

Though these two situations narrated above appear quite different, they both point to a segment of people in the Ghanaian society who live in 'marriage-like' unions characterised mainly by the absence of the fulfilment of the requirements for the establishment of marriage.

There are three types of legal marriages in Ghana, namely, the Customary, Islamic or Mohammedan and the Ordinance marriages. Each of these marriage types constitutes a complete marriage. In some jurisdictions, however, customary marriage is considered as inadequate for constitute a complete marriage. In many Pentecostal, Charismatic and the Roman Catholic

Churches, for example, the 'church wedding' is required in addition to a customary marriage to make a marriage complete. With the Presbyterian Church, a 'church blessed marriage' is an important criterion for ordaining Reverend Ministers and presbyters (Meisher, 2005). These are, however, doctrinal positions and do not diminish the value of customary marriage. Indeed, these doctrinal stands have been criticised for resulting in the duplication of marriages (Sarkodie, 2017). In Islam, however, the adequacy or not of customary marriage rites does not arise in the establishment of marriage as marriage is contracted under the norms of Islamic traditions and laws (Osei-Tutu, Dzokoto, Oti-Boadi, Belgrave & Appiah-Danquah, 2019). Given these three major types of marriage, a union that falls short of their requirements but characterised by the couple conducting themselves as married, would constitute the practice, which is referred to as consensual, cohabiting or informal unions in the family studies literature.

Marriage and family are two significantly related institutions that exist in almost all known societies. The relationship between them, borders largely on the fact that historically marriage is recognised as the basis for the process of family formation (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 1996; Bell & Vogel, 1960; Cohen, 1998; Lesthaeghe, Kaufman & Meekers, 1989; Murdock, 1949; Nukunya, 2003; Sam, 2009; van de Walle & Meekers, 1994). The family, which is considered the basic unit of society, continues to be a fundamental aspect of the lives of Africans. This is principally because it functions as the centre of well-being in African societies. The family functions as an economic unit and an important agent of socialisation. It is also through the family that kinship ties are established (Assimeng, 1999; Nukunya, 2003; Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi, 2007).

Over the last few decades, specifically since the 1970s, however, nuptiality trends in Africa have been characterised by marked changes. Factors of social change such as urbanisation, modernisation, individualisation, Christianity and Islam, have, over these years, resulted in these tremendous changes in the structure and function of marriage and consequently the family. Some aspects that have particularly been transformed are mate selection processes as well as marriage payments and ceremonies (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2007; Boateng, 1995; Meekers, 1992; Nukunya, 2003; Parkin & Nyamwaya, 1987). Other aspects of change are the increase in age at first marriage for women especially the increasing numbers of never-married adults (Calvès, 2016; Mokomane, 2006). As is the case in many other parts of the world, African societies have socially and culturally sanctioned rules and procedures for marriage and family formation including who can get married and to whom. The recent nuptiality trends, however, are pointing to the violation of these approved procedures. The trends show that this violation phenomenon is becoming more commonplace notably in urban spaces in Africa where consensual unions are emerging as a variation of marriage (Calvès, 2016; LeGrand & Younoussi, 2009; Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi, 2007; Russel, 2003).

With few exceptions, like South Africa and Botswana, many African countries do not have long trend data on consensual unions. These two countries are, however, known to have some of the highest rates on the continent (Mokomane, 2006). According to Calvès (2016), the considerable rise in the prevalence of consensual unions in African societies has made it a policy issue which has also generated intense public debates in some countries on whether or not to regularise it. Whilst in some countries there are efforts to legalise it, in some others, there are steps to curb it altogether. For example, Kenya's Marriage Bill of 2013 attempted to legalise the status of unmarried couples living together as married; a practice commonly known as 'come-we-stay'

unions by the Kenyans (Chigiti, 2012; Mureithi, 2013; Onyango, 2012). On the other hand, in Cameroon, the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family has been seeking to encourage the formalisation of such unions by organising 'collective wedding ceremonies' for such couples (Tambenkongho, 2010). In Ghana, the Property Rights of Spouses Bill, seeks to revise the Intestate Succession Law, PNDC Law 111, to include persons in consensual unions among others. The Bill proposes that when a consensual union has lasted at least five years and there is evidence of jointly acquired property, such property must be shared between the partners upon dissolution of the union.

In so far as what constitutes marriage differs from society to society, the dynamics of a consensual union would also be contingent on the society in question. Several studies have examined consensual unions in Western societies. Wu (2000), describes the phenomenon as one that has been practiced for centuries and according to Kiernan and Estaugh (1993), in Great Britain, it can be traced back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Trends in many parts of the developed world, however, point to increasing rates of such informal unions, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s when marriage rates were observed to be declining sharply (Baker & Elizabeth, 2013; Farmer & Horowitz, 2015; Moore & Govern, 2013). For instance, according to Wu (2000, p. 43), "between 1981 when Canada first collected national data on cohabiting couples and 1996, there had been an increase of 158 percent". In the United States, the past twenty-five years has seen a doubling of young as well as middle-aged people who are cohabiting. This resulted in a percentage increase of 20 percent in the 1980s to 40 percent in 2015 of children born into cohabiting unions (Manning, 2015). Between 1996 and 2006, the numbers of cohabiting couples in Ireland had almost quadrupled for opposite sex couples and doubled for those of the same sex (Tobin, 2013).

The most cited reason for such increasing rates is that the phenomenon seems to be a reaction to increasing rates of divorce which has resulted in lowered interest in the marriage institution. Rather than get married and divorce and be included in the statistics of divorce cases, people in Western societies would prefer opting for a consensual union from which they can easily break off.

Similar to what Wu (2000) described as the case in some Western societies, consensual unions are not such a recent phenomenon in African societies. The circumstances under which it happens are, however, significantly different from what pertains in the West. Scholars, therefore, have called for more rigorous studies of the practice, as an alternative form of marriage and family formation in African societies (Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi (2007).

1.2 Problem Statement

Studies show that there are two sets of rules, which guide the establishment of marriage in Africa. These are the rules of alliance and the rules of the marriage process (Goody & Goody, 1966). The rules of alliance define how marriage mates can be selected, whilst the rules of the marriage process prescribe the rites and ceremonies required to establish the marriage. The African family literature speaks to the subject of mate selection and the experiences that come with the violation of the rules that apply to it. Marriage prohibitions in terms of the rules of clan and lineage exogamy and endogamy, prescribed and preferred marriage (Fiawoo, as cited in Nukunya, 2003, p. 44; Fortes, 1949; Goody, 1956) have been examined. Another area of mate selection that has been studied is arranged and free choice marriages (Ankomah, 1966; Darkwah & Adomako Ampofo, 2008; Meekers, 1995; Okonja, 1992; Opuogulaya, 1975; Sam, 2009; Takyi, 2001; Takyi, 2003; Takyi, Miller, Kitson & Oheneba-Sakyi 2003). These studies discuss the varying degrees of family

and societal support as well as the sustainability of such marriages. According to Okonja (1992), arranged marriages amongst the Okirika in Nigeria enjoy high levels of family support and are more likely to last compared to free choice or love marriages.

There is a second set of literature which focuses on the variety of marriage rites and ceremonies on the continent. The variations notwithstanding, a central element which studies have found in most societies is the exchange of items and services, particularly the payment of bridewealth. There have also been studies looking at the changing nature of marriage payments. (Fortes, 1950, Lesthaeghe, 1989, Nukunya, 2003). In addition to the recognition that there is now a growing number of free choice marriages, some scholars such as Oware-Gyekye et al (1996) point to the fact that there are also cases now where people violate the rules of the marriage process by not fully carrying out the recognised ceremonies, rites and payments that create marriage. This practice often leads people to consensual unions where individuals who conduct themselves as married when they have not gone through the prescribed processes required for the start of a family.

Since in Ghana, marriage is considered the ideal means to family formation, it is interesting to investigate what life is like for persons in consensual unions. Some studies based in the West have discussed the quality of consensual unions and have concluded that they are often characterised by violence, lack of commitment and instability (Brown, 2000; Brown & Booth, 1996; Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Nock, 1995). There has been little scholarly work to give credence to this assertion as regards the Ghanaian and African situation. This is a gap in the literature that needs to be addressed. Moreover, the African context presents some unique possible consequences for persons in consensual unions. For example, the practice is a violation of customary marriage procedures.

This can further have cultural implications for the partners in the union as well as their children, in terms of assigning naming rights and defining their positions when it comes to inheritance and succession. In addition, all the major religions in Ghana have a stand against consensual unions. Since most Ghanaians profess one religion or the other, religion is a potential source of repercussions for persons in such unions. Again, not much has been done to ascertain these impressionistic ideas about consensual unions. This sociological research, therefore, focused on addressing this knowledge gap, which is the lived experiences of persons in consensual unions.

1.3 Research Questions

The consensual union phenomenon as a growing practice in many African societies raises some questions that require exploration to understand it. The decision to enter any kind of intimate relationship, be it, marriage, a cohabiting or consensual union, often depends on a multiplicity of factors. Whilst some of these are personal, others may be from external sources. Gierveld (2002), for example discusses push and pull factors which influence older men and women to enter intimate relationships. The individual needs and the qualities of a prospective partner are often the push and pull factors, respectively. Beyond the individual, however, other external factors such as societal expectations and pressures may also come to play in decisions to enter such relationships. In Ghana, like many other parts of Africa, although consensual unions as a route to family formation exists, it is largely not considered the model way for which reason, such unions constitute a different form of family formation with their unique complexities (Okyere-Manu, 2015).

Every relationship has its peculiar challenges and, therefore, necessitates ways of handling such challenges. Couples or individual partners may, therefore, make personal adjustments or seek external intervention in handling relationship issues (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Shannon & Cole, 2006). From this background, the broad research question that the study sought to answer was that, what are the experiences of persons or couples in consensual unions? Three specific questions were deduced from the main research question and these were: what factors influence people to enter consensual unions? What implications does this union type bring to the couple involved and their children? Lastly, how do people negotiate any such implications?

1.4 Research Objectives

The research questions as raised above guided the study and translated into the research objectives. The overriding objective of the study was to investigate the experiences of persons have violated the rules of the marriage process and are thus in consensual unions in Accra. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Identify the circumstances that lead to the formation of consensual unions as a form of family formation.
2. Determine the implications of being in a consensual union for the partners and their children.
3. Find out the ways in which persons in consensual unions negotiate the implications of their union type.

1.5 Definitions of Key Concepts in the Study

Some key and commonly used concepts used in this study are defined as follows:

Marriage – Any union in which the couple has gone through all the procedures recognised in the society for the purposes of sexual intercourse, raising a family, or companionship. The union must go through the necessary procedures to be legal (Nukunya, 2016).

Family – This could be described as a group of individuals related to one another by ties of consanguinity, marriage or adoption, the adult members of which are responsible for the upbringing of children. A family could be localised or not (Nukunya, 2016).

Couple - Two people who are romantically and sexually involved and may be married or not.

Ethnic Group – A group distinguished by cultural similarities, shared among members of that group, and differences between that group and others. Ethnic group members share beliefs, customs, and norms, and often a common language, religion, history, geography, and kinship (Kottak, 2004).

Patrilineal Group – Group adhering to a kinship system in which ancestral descent is traced through maternal lines (Narayan, 2009).

Matrilineal society – Group adhering to a kinship system in which ancestral descent is traced through paternal lines (Narayan, 2009).

Bridewealth – Payment which may include livestock, clothing, fabric, beads, household goods, imported products, drinks and money. During African marriages, the families of the couple negotiate the bridewealth which is paid by the man's family to that of the woman (Aborampah, 1999).

1.6 Significance of Study

The family is widely accepted as the bedrock of society. As a result, several studies have looked at this institution and the permutations that there are to it. Consensual unions are one of the ways

in which the family presents. Much of what is known about consensual unions in Ghana is largely impressionistic. This impressionistic information indicates a widespread incidence of the practice. The few studies which have attempted to examine the subject have emphasised the factors responsible for it. This scientific study which focused on the way such relationships play out provides further knowledge of consensual union. Findings from this study shed more light on the phenomenon in urban Accra.

Ghana is still in the process of taking steps to establish the place of consensual unions within the legal framework for marital unions. The introduction of the Property Rights of Spouses Bill is an attempt to redefine the concept of 'spouse' to include partners in consensual unions and also address property sharing issues upon the dissolution of the relationships. The insight from this study is, therefore, useful to contributing to the discourse on the place of consensual unions as an alternative form of family formation in Ghana. The findings could inform the inclusion of other factors such as child custody and intimate partner violence in the discussions on this attempt to regularise consensual unions. Moreover, the results of the study serve as a useful basis for further research on the subject and other related matters.

1.7 Organisation of Chapters

This thesis is organised into seven chapters. The first is the introductory chapter which provides a background to the study and states the research problem. The chapter also covers the research questions and objectives, the definitions of key concepts, and finally the significance of the study.

In chapter two, existing literature on consensual unions is reviewed. It discusses the factors that contribute to consensual unions, the forms that it takes and issues about the quality of such unions. The chapter also provides an overview of the theoretical framework within which the research was framed and through which the research findings are interpreted. The methodological approach to the study is provided in the third chapter. The chapter details the philosophical underpinning of the research approach, the study area, the sampling procedures, data collection and methods of analyses, and the ethical considerations during the research process. The chapter concludes with a reflexive assessment of the research process. Chapters four, five and six discuss the empirical findings of the study. The three chapters respectively cover the circumstances that lead to the formation of consensual unions, the implications for persons involved and the strategies for managing the implications.

Chapter seven is the final chapter and it presents a summary of the key research findings, the study's contribution to knowledge, recommendations for future research and a general conclusion to the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

Available literature on the family in Africa has over the last few decades focused on the transformations that have been taking place in African marriage and family systems. Transformations have particularly been observed in areas such as mate selection and marriage processes, especially when it comes to the nature of marriage payments or prestations. Consensual unions have, however, not been a central theme in much of the intellectual discourse on the family. Discussed as either consensual, informal, or cohabiting unions, it is often mentioned in passing in discussions on the changes in African family life (Moore & Govender, 2013). In this regard, different sets of literature both directly and indirectly shed some light about consensual unions. Together, this literature provides insights into three major aspects of consensual unions; the forms of consensual unions, the factors that contribute to the incidence of consensual unions as an alternative to family formation and the theoretical perspectives in explaining the phenomenon. This Chapter, therefore, discusses marriage and family forms within the African and Ghanaian contexts and organises the pockets of information on consensual unions under relevant themes.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the theoretical framework within which this study was situated and explains how the theory is relevant for this study.

2.2 Marriage and Family Forms

Marriage is generally seen as type of domestic partnership and is of enormous importance to both the individual and society. The institution has persisted over the years, even in the face of social

transformations particularly since the colonial era (Harrell-Bond, 2019). The most common form of marriage in African societies is the traditional or customary marriage, although the religious and civil types are also quite widespread.

2.2.1 Customary, Ordinance and Religious Forms of Marriage

Traditional marriage rites are typically performed a man who seeks the hand of a woman in marriage and these rites differ from one society to the other. A common practice which is, however, central to traditional marriages is the exchange of gifts and services between the families of the prospective bride and groom. The payment of bridewealth, that is, those items or services transferred from the groom's family to the bride's is perhaps the most significant and enduring aspect of the traditional marriage process. (Ferraro, 1983; Gros-Ngate, 1988; Horne, Dodoo & Dodoo, 2013; Solway, 1990). It is estimated that in about 80 percent of African societies, bridewealth is paid (Anderson, 2007; Mwamwenda & Monyoe, 1997; Oheneba-Sakyi, 2006). The terms and conditions attached to bridewealth payment, however, differ significantly from society to society. According to Solway, (1990), for example, amongst the Bakgalagadi society in Botswana, the payment of bridewealth, which is called *bogadi*, is not done in the early stages of the marriage process. Payment may take place after a divorce or after the death of a wife. Indeed, he discusses instances where sons grow up to pay bridewealth for their mothers on behalf of their fathers. In some other societies, payment may be done in installments and in some cases transactions could be outstanding for as long as twenty years (Meekers & Kaufman, 2003). The divergent terms of payment of bridewealth notwithstanding, it remains a fact that bridewealth payment plays a significant role such as legitimising children, defining inheritance and succession rights and even a partner's social identity (Horne, Dodoo & Dodoo, 2013).

With regards to ordinance and religious marriages, studies have shown that they tend to be the preference of the elite, except for Islamic marriages which are done in accordance with Islamic laws (Yeboa, 1993; Samwini, 2012; Anderson, 2013**).** Oppong (1980), observed that marriage among the elite in Ghana is a highly valued institution that is symbolised by expensive church weddings which are often held in large towns and have exhorbitantly high cost of refreshments and regalia. In more recent times, Oppong's assertion is supported by other scholars in Ghana and other parts of Africa (Falen, 2008; Nukunya, 2016; Harrell-Bond, 2019). For instance, Harrell-Bond (2019) who studied modern marriage in Sierra Leone among the professional group, who are highly educated people, found that there was a high preference for ordinance marriages which represented monogamous unions. Indeed, the study showed a significant relationship amongst Christianity, education, and statutory marriage.

2.2.2 Arranged and Free-Choice Marriages

Available literature on marriage in Africa societies shows that historically, marriages were largely arranged (Van Dijk, 2004; Fokuo, 2009; Adinkrah, 2011). Arranged marriages could take the form of child betrothal, which is on the decline in many societies and typically involves the engagement to marriage of a young girl to an adult man or sometimes of two children, a boy and a girl (Mair, 1969; Mensch, Grant & Blanc, 2006; Laird, 2002, Paulme, 2003; Phillips, 2018). Marriages may be arranged for financial benefit. This usually happens between two rich families who want to their children to maintain that social class. Other factors include preserving family friendships, to prevent premarital sex amongst teenage girls and sometimes as a religious obligation, particularly in some Islamic communities (Kapata, 1994).

Although arranged marriages in African societies were in times past more prevalent (Antoine, 2002), companionate marriages which are characterised by romantic love and freedom of partner choice is also not an entirely recent phenomenon among Africans (Sam, 2009; Smith, 2010). Africans, including conservative Islamic societies that practiced arranged marriages, have demonstrated high degrees of freedom when it comes to making decisions on emotional attachments (Decker, 2015). Around the world and in Africa in particular, however, research shows that more and more people prefer love-based relationships and marriage (Cole & Thomas, 2009; Padilla, Hirsch, Munoz-Laboy, Parker & Sember, 2007). Several studies across the continent have given credence to this claim of increasing self-choice marriages. The works of Mondain, LeGrand and Sabourin (2007) among the Sereer of Senegal, Isiugo-Abanihe (1995) among the Igbo of Nigeria, Grosz-Ngate (1998) in the Sana province of Mali, Locoh (1994) in Togo and Mouvagha-Sow (2007) in Gabon are all cases in point.

Urban spaces where individuals are more likely to be educated are also sites for the increasing acceptance of free choice marriages. The urban elite, according to Nukunya (2003), through their exposure to mass media and books, better appreciate the benefits of romantic love and courtship before marriage. They would therefore often want to select their own spouses. Fair, Tully, Ekdale and Asante (2009) also indicate that particularly amongst the upwardly mobile urbanites romantic love has indeed become the basis for the choice of marital partners. This development, however, seems to have gone beyond just urbanites and elites as Smith (2001), claims that in contemporary Igboland, the idea that marriage should be based on romantic love and free choice has spread even beyond urban elites. He continues that young people across a wide range of socio-economic statuses increasingly stress on choosing their own spouses.

An appreciable body of work focuses on both the incidence of free choice marriages as well as the implications of this for the couple involved. Sam (2009), for instance, sides with the argument that the idea that marriages in Africa are characterised by the lack of free choice is misleading. Using evidence from his study of the Okrikans of Nigeria, he shows that self-choice marriages exist alongside arranged marriages. It is, however, the case that these two forms of marriage are not considered on the same level. *Ya* marriages which are the arranged marriages operate within clans and as a patrilineal system. These marriages are permanent in nature. Indeed, it is only upon the death or divorce of a spouse in a *ya* marriage that one could contract a free choice marriage which is known as the *igwa* marriage. *Ya* husbands continue to be recognized as the social fathers of the new children of their wives who may contract an *igwa* marriage after either a divorce or death. *Igwa* marriages as opposed to *ya* marriages are between clans and operate as a matrilineal system. An important distinguishing feature is the fact that *igwa* marriages are seen as transitory. In the situation where the full marriage rites for a *ya* marriage are not performed, the union reverts to an *igwa* union.

With reference to Ghana, Takyi (2003) found that in 1992 and 1993, most Ghanaians, that is, 79 percent, chose their own spouses. Whilst the percentage of men who chose their partners was 75 percent, that of women was slightly lower, being 67 percent. He found this drift to be in support of the modernization thesis. He identified, three specific factors; urbanization, education and earned income as factors accounting for this. Takyi's study further revealed that persons who were with Pentecostal religious groups were more likely to choose their own spouses compared to those of other denominations. He also discovered that it was easier for people to contract intra-ethnic marriages than it was to contract an intra-religious marriage.

Meekers (1995) also makes the case that in Togo, by the late 1980s, 11 percent of marriages could be described as Western in the sense that there was the free choice of partners. On the other hand, 31 percent of the marriages were arranged. A third category of people was identified who represented 58 percent. These were those who made individual choices of partners but still needed the consent of their extended families to proceed with the marriage. There seems therefore to be a combination of elements of both arranged and self-choice marriages.

Sam (2009) has pointed out that there are three key essential components of arranged marriages. The first is that either one or both parties involved in the marriage is not included in the process of decision making. Secondly, there is the control of the marriage transaction by the family, that is, negotiations of bridewealth and other exchanges are done between the families of the couple and not the couple themselves. The third feature of arranged marriages, Sam mentions, is the interfamily linkage. The union becomes one between the families and not just the individuals. It is in this context that some marriage prohibition rules such as the incest rules are applied. Sam concludes, therefore that, although the second and third essentials of arranged marriages continue to apply, the same cannot be said of the first given the fact that increasingly, individuals are able to choose partners for themselves.

2.2.3 Polygyny and Monogamy

Both polygynous and monogamous marriages are widespread forms of marriage is Africa with the former attracting the greater attention of scholars. "Africa is, par excellence, the home of polygyny and is the most distinctive feature of sub-Saharan African marriages" (Karanja, 1994, p. 99). The practice of polygyny, the type of polygamy in which men have multiple wives (Falen, 2008, p. 53)

has been characterised over the years by both change and persistence. Dalton and Lueng (2014) attempt a historical explanation to the prevalence of polygynous marriages especially in Western Africa. They argue that, the transatlantic slave trade saw the exportation of more male slaves from West African societies leading to an imbalanced sex ratio and thus encouraging polygyny. According the Brown (1981), people who enter polygynous marriages do so consciously for several reasons. For example, women may choose polygynous unions because co-wives can share in tasks such as farmwork, childcare, food processing and sale. Indeed, Anderson (2000), has critiqued the Western literature on women's choice of polygynous as overly emphatic on a man's attributes as the main factor polygynous wives consider. With evidence from South Africa, he argues that their relationship with a man's female associates which includes his kin and wives is a critical factor in influencing women's choice of a polygynous marriage. Men, on the other hand, have been found to be most motivated by the high economic status, a sense of prestige and the quest for many children (Brown, 1981; Naksomboon, 2013).

Over the years, however, some scholars have observed that polygyny is on the decline and monogamy is being a more preferred form of marriage. Several factors have been attributed to this supposed trend. Scholars have pointed out factors such as westernisation, modernisation, formal education and high cost of living as having in diverse ways contributed to polygyny's decline in Africa (Dorjahn, 1988; Luke & Munshi, 2006; Solway, 1990 Nukunya, 2016; Adedini &Odimegwu, 2017). Commenting on the case of Botswana Solway (1990) states that:

> Today's socially necessary standards of education, dress, health care, household furnishings, etc and the need to purchase food as a result of changing tastes and declining local production make running a household and raising children much more cash intensive ventures than they were in the past……Today a man's greatness is measured not by whom he leaves behind but by what (p. 51).

Studies have shown that, the work of Christian missionaries and the spread of Christianity across the continent has promoted monogamy while condemning polygyny as unchristian, immoral and even uncivilised (Meekers & Franklin, 1995; Notermans, 2002; Falen, 2008; Thobejane & Flora, 2014).

There are, however, debates on the factors that are responsible for changing views and decline in polygyny. Oppong (1977) for instance argued that in Ghana, there did not seem to be a correlation between increasing education and changes in views on polygyny with succeeding generations. Westernisation as a cause of decline in polygyny, according to Brabin (1984) was not a proven fact. Other scholars have also said that although it is a fact that polygyny is waning in many African societies, what is sometimes described as a decline in polygyny is actually a transformation of polygynous marriages into having concurrent sexual partners (Muchabaiwa, 2017).

2.2.4 Nuclear and Extended Family Forms

The family is a difficult concept to define in Ghana and indeed Africa because people may define it in terms of their lineage, conjugal relations, or both (Addai-Sundiata, 1996; Nukunya, 2016). Marriage, however, remains a critical route for family formation as it creates two forms of families: the nuclear and the extended families. The nuclear family typically consists of a married couple and their children. Where the family is defined in terms of marital unions, there is a bilateral family system with the nuclear family as the starting point. In this case, an individual defines his family from both parents' side. In the same vein, couples also gain a family in the form of the in-law relations which is created by marriage (Russell, 2004). In the context of the nuclear family,

monogamous marriages translate into monogamous nuclear families, whilst polygynous marriages also translate into polygynous nuclear families (Smith-Greenaway & Trinitapoli, 2014).

The extended family system is also one of the main forms of family in African societies. Nukunya (2003) describes it as a collection of nuclear families and usually operates on the principles of residence and responsibility. An extended family could be a residential unit where a string of closely relatives live together within the same space. This may be in the context of the 'family house' (Amole, Korboe & Tipple, 1993) or clusters of relatives in a village or town. Extended family members also hold responsibilities towards one another. These include the socialisation of children and contributions for livelihoods (Nukunya, 2003). In Ghana as elsewhere in Africa, extended family systems are more pronounce in the rural settings than in the urban spaces. Indeed, there are arguments, the extended family system is breaking down with much more concentration on the nuclear family, where households are likely to comprise of only a married couple and their children who may often not feel a strong sense of responsibility towards their relatives (Price & Thomas, 1999; Amoateng & Ritcher, 2003; Annim, Awusabo-Asare & Amo-Adjei, 2015). The nucleation of the extended family has been attributed to westernisation, urbanisation, and education (Korboe, 1992; Takyi, 2011; O'Connor, 2013; Chirisa, Mukarwi & Matamanda, 2018).

2.3 Factors Contributing to Consensual Unions

Although the literature affirms that consensual unions are not an entirely new phenomenon in African societies, it is evident that this form of family life is becoming more and more widespread with greater levels of tolerance particularly for societies in which the practice is not an

institutionalised part of the marriage process. This section reviews some of the pertinent factors responsible for this trend.

2.3.1 Increasing Autonomy in Mate Selection

A significant body of literature has focused on the increasing autonomy in mate selection as responsible for informal unions. Although urbanisation is a relatively recent phenomenon in sub-Saharan Africa (Luke & Munshi, 2006), its effects on the family has been significant. Rural-urban migration, for example, creates the avenue for people to live away from the moral scrutiny of their families and communities (Smith, 2010). Since towns and cities often become centres for the convergence of migrants, traditional principles and norms that regulate sexual behaviours tend not to be firmly applied. The highly individualised nature of urban centres creates the environment for individuals of the opposite sex to interact more freely and engage in various forms of domestic partnerships. Consequently, the role of parents and other kin in the mate selection process of an individual becomes significantly diminished (Takyi, 2001). Starting family life without necessarily going through the recognised customary marriage rites is therefore more commonplace in urban spaces (Anderson, 2007; Bishai & Grossbard, 2007; Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi, 2007; Russel, 2003).

Smith (2001) agrees with Nukunya (2003) and others who have cited courtship as a practice which has been embraced by many young people. He notes, however, that courtship periods have become rehearsals for marriage in which case family formation is more likely to begin even before the marriage itself takes place.

Increasing rates in the freedom of partner choice has also been found to be influenced by the fact that the burden of raising bridewealth has become the sole responsibility of men who intend to marry. Given this fact that parental and family assistance in paying bridewealth is fading, their say in the choice of potential spouses for their sons also diminishes (Adams & Mburugu, 1994; Ferraro, 1991; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1995).

It is clear therefore that family involvement in the marriage process in African societies is diminishing particularly at the mate selection stage. This tendency has been found to be a contributory factor to increasing rates of informal unions (LeGrand & Younoussi, 2009; Thiriat, 1999). While there is the fusion of elements of both arranged and self-choice marriages, there is, however, not much interest shown in the implications of such changes, particularly, the aspect of free choice, for couples involved. An exception is the work of Sam (2009) who looks at the implications of free choice marriages among the Okrikans of Nigeria.

For some scholars like Takyi (2001), however, this autonomy in mate selection and its resultant effects on processes of union formation may also give an indication of social disorganisation, in that, whenever cultural norms are bypassed and alternative processes pursued, it alters the make-up and structure of society.

2.3.2 The Commercialisation of Marriage Payments

The second cause of increasing rates of consensual unions which the literature points to is the commercialization and monetization of bridewealth which in many instances leads to some people dispensing with it altogether. The establishment of marriages in most African societies often

requires a series of processes and not just an event (Ardayfio-Schandorf & Sam, 2011; Hertrich, 2013; Meekers, 1992; Radcliffe-Brown, 1953). A common practice which is central to the marriage process is the exchange of gifts and services between the families of the prospective bride and groom. The payment of the bridewealth, that is, those items or services transferred from the groom's family to the bride's is perhaps the most significant and most enduring aspect of African marriage processes (Ferraro, 1983; Grosz-Ngate, 1988; Horne, Dodoo & Dodoo, 2013; Solway, 1990). It is estimated that in about 80 percent of African societies, bridewealth is paid (Anderson, 2007; Mwamwenda & Monyooe, 1997; Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi, 2006). The terms and conditions attached to bridewealth payment, however, differ significantly from society to society.

Historically, bridewealth for patrilineal societies has been higher than among matrilineal groups (Goody, 1973). This is typically the case with societies where cattle are required (Beswick, 2001; Posel & Rudwick, 2014). Expensive bridewealth for most other societies is, however, quite a new phenomenon. In his study of the law and constitution of the Ashanti of Ghana, Rattray (1929) observed at the time that the most significant item of the marriage payments amongst this group was what was termed the *aseda* literally translated as *thanking drink*. This *thanking drink* could even be a pot of palm wine and the essence of it was basically to be distributed amongst the people who come to witness the marriage ceremony. Over the years however, new developments have emerged.

In a study, Parkin observed four features of change in bridewealth in Kenya. These are "monetisation, increase in cost, shortening of time for payment and a more rigid definition of the rights secured through its settlement" (Parkin, 1972, p. 63). Although Parkin's study was

conducted among the Kikuyu of Kenya, aspects of it also apply to many other parts of Africa. A key one is the monetisation or commercialisation of bridewealth, whereby families are expected to pay sums of money in place of or in addition to the marriage items (Grosz-Ngate, 1988; Hertrich, 2013; Horne, Dodoo & Dodoo, 2013; Nagashima, 1987; Onyango, 2016; Posel & Rudwick, 2014). A number of reasons have accounted for this. Isiugo-Abanihe (1995, p. 152), for instance, explains that among the Igbo of Nigeria, bridewealth is viewed as returns for the investment on a well-educated daughter. Given the fact that girl child education has considerably improved, bridewealth has also correspondingly increased.

Using in-depth quantitative and biographical survey methods, Hertrich (2013), looks at trends in organising first marriages and men's premarital life in rural Mali, specifically among the Bwa ethnic group of Southeast Mali. He studies the trends from 1987 to 2010. In this study he compares what pertained in traditional Malian societies to what the situation is in contemporary times. According to him, the marriage process which hitherto had been described by elders as a complicated matter which often did not have a ready formula, has become simple. His study revealed that the average number of years for farm labour which served as a part of the bridewealth had reduced to 0.9 years from 1.2 years. In about 60 percent of the unions studied, both the farm labour and the gifts of grains previously required are now requested in the form of cash. Hertrich (2013) points out, however, that the cash payments remain moderate. He concludes, therefore, that the monetised bridewealth in Mali has not necessarily made it more expensive as has been the case in some other parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

In an attempt to understand the transformations that have occurred in bridewealth payment among the Iteso of Kenya, Nagashima (1987) found that what used to be the case in the marriage process was that the bridewealth had to be negotiated and at least settled in part before a suitor could commence living together with his wife. The practice has, however, changed with girls running off to live with their prospective husbands even before negotiations could be completed. A major factor for this development was the introduction of cash in addition to the traditional cattle and goats. It therefore took longer periods for negotiations to be concluded. According to Nagashima (1987), even when a girl's parents discover that she lives with her suitor, they literally do nothing to bring her back home. Writing on bridewealth payments in contemporary Kenya, Onyango (2016) supports Nagashima's observation. Onyango (2016) adds that, the commercialisation of bridewealth in Kenya has resulted in what she terms as the 'come-we-stay' marriages. This is where partners go ahead to live together as married often without the knowledge of their respective families in order to avoid the payment of the bridewealth. For the same reason, a similar practice exists in Cameroun where it is referred to as 'viens on reste' (Tambenkongho, 2010)

Among the Zulus of South Africa, the commercialization of bridewealth, *ilobolo*, in contemporary times is not unusual. Not only has bridewealth been commercialised, but parents also expect full payment rather than payment in instalment which was the usual practice. Traditionally, bridewealth served as compensation to a bride's family for the loss of her domestic and reproductive services. However, in contemporary times, families seek to use it as a way out of poverty. Whilst this commercialisation of the *ilobolo* makes it unaffordable for young men, payment is also widely considered as what distinguishes an African marriage from other existing ones and as such more desirable. The effect of these two opposing realities has been found among

other factors to be the increasing numbers in delayed and non-marriage (Posel & Rudwick, 2014a). In their exploration of incidence of non-marital cohabitation among the urban isiZulu speakers, however, Posel & Rudwick, (2004b) found that there were low rates of cohabiting unions which is termed *ukukipita*. This was because despite the difficulty in raising the *ilobolo,* the Zulu culture and tradition is considered disrespected when unmarried partners cohabit.

The challenge of costly bridewealth in many societies is further worsened by the fact that increasingly the burden of raising whatever monies and goods required has literally shifted to the groom alone (Abdul-Korah, 2011; Ferraro, 1983; Hertrich, 2013; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1995; Mensch, Grant & Blanc, 2006; Posel & Rudwick, 2014a), a phenomenon Adams and Mburugu (1994) describe as the privatisation of bridewealth. The practice among the Zulu of South Africa for example, where fathers would contribute cattle from their herds towards the bridewealth payment of their sons has almost become a thing of the past. From these discussions, Oppenheimer's (2000) theory on marriage timing may be relevant. According to this hypothesis when men have poor economic conditions, a cohabiting union becomes more attractive than marriage. This, she suggests, is because the commitments and responsibilities expected from a married man are much more enormous than for men in a cohabiting union. In this sense, cohabitation becomes the "poor man's marriage" (Kalmijn, 2011, p. 288).

2.3.3 The Practice of 'Informal or Private Polygyny'

Many Africans have accepted monogamy as a more sophisticated form of marriage which has evolved from other types of marriages including polygyny (Mianda, 2002). The contest between polygyny and monogamy, especially amongst elite monogamously married men has therefore

resulted in some inconsistencies in the marital and family lives of many Africans (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2007). Evidence of such inconsistencies is the practice of private or informal polygyny where monogamously married men keep consensual unions with women outside of their marriages, a phenomenon Dinan (1983) describes as an institutionalized system of girlfriend relationships.

Karanja (1994), however, argues that African men are often of the view that polygyny rather than monogamy, resonates better with African traditional cultures. Monogamy, on the other hand, though seen as a foreign concept has become attractive to mostly educated Christian women (Falen, 2008). This, however, does not suggest that all African marriages prior to the stated factors of social change were polygynous. Mali, which has one of the highest rates of polygyny in the world, that is, 45 percent, is also recording increasing rates of informal polygyny as an effect of social change (Madhavan, 2002). The striking point that comes up is that polygyny will not be eliminated anytime soon. The practice has only taken on different forms. The arguments made by Oppong (1977) and Brabin (1984) suggest that in reality and in practice, factors of social change have not necessarily contributed to reducing the actual practice of polygyny.

The ‘outside wives’ phenomenon, exemplifies the situation where consensual unions exist with no intention on the part of the couple to get married. This system of an ‘outside wife’ and in some cases an ‘outside husband’, as the name suggests often operates where one of the couples is already married, making the intention of marriage almost non-existent. Karanja (1987), discusses the concepts of ‘inside wives’ and ‘outside wives’ in the Nigerian context in his bid to explore the

changing perceptions of marriage especially in the face of a supposed shift towards monogamous marriages.

Employing ethnographic methods of participant observation, tape recordings and informal conversations, Karanja (1987) describes the 'inside wife' as the one who is "frequently, but not always, an elite woman who has been married in a church wedding or through statutory law and usually subscribes to the Christian ideology of a monogamous marriage, at least as an ideal". "In Nigerian local parlance", he continues, "she is sometimes referred to as the ring wife'. The 'outside wife' on the other hand, has five features that define her, which are:

1. A woman with whom a man has regular sexual relations for a relatively long period, usually several years.
2. A woman who is financially maintained by a man on a regular basis throughout the duration of the relationship.
3. She usually has children whose paternity is acknowledged by the man in the relationship.
4. She will have limited social recognition and status because her husband, for whatever reason, refuses to publicly declare her as a wife.
5. Since no bride price has been given and no marriage rites publicly performed, the 'outside wife' has considerably less social and politico-jural recognition than an 'inside wife' (p. 251-253)

According to this study, men considered the keeping of 'outside wives' as a way of dealing with the seeming change from polygyny to monogamy as many of them agreed that it was only natural for the African man to be polygynous. A number of women, particularly female undergraduates,

on the other hand, expressed their preference for being 'outside wives' rather than 'inside wives'. Some of these informants explained that the 'Mr. Available', as they called the men, were in a better position to start them off right in life after school, in terms of the material provisions like apartments, cars and sponsored trips for themselves and their children abroad.

Christianity has been identified as a major factor which has rendered polygyny debatable in some African countries, for example, Benin. Like other African men as Karanja (1987) has noted, Beninois men believe polygyny is a tradition. This belief finds expression in the Fon saying that "a man's children are not born of only one woman" (Falen, 2008, p. 63). This belief faced with the emphasis on monogamy by Christian teachings forces many elites to practice disguised polygyny, where men have outside wives. The phenomenon of outside wives in Benin according to Falen is known as '*deuxieme bureaux*' which translates in English as second office. Although women generally prefer to be in monogamous marriages, some Beninois women in need of financial support opt to enter into consensual unions with married men and become their outside wives.

Christiansen (2013) observed a similar phenomenon in Zimbabwe where there are 'main houses' and 'small houses'. According to Christiansen (2013), these concepts have their roots in Zimbabwe's history, where polygyny was more prevalent, and men had senior wives and junior wives who occupied the small houses. Upon the lessening rates of polygynous marriages in contemporary times, however, many men have one formally married wife and have an informal or outside wife. The 'small house' is, therefore, used to refer to a young woman who keeps a relationship with a married man whilst the 'main house' represents the married woman whose

husband has an informal junior wife. These informal wives, however, do not have public recognition, like the outside wives in Nigeria described by Karanja (1987). Similarly, monogamous marriages in Cameroun often end up being informally polygynous (Notermans, 2002). According to research participants, Christianity had only made them hypocrites as many men keep outside wives. It is in view of this that some have called for the establishment of what they call Christian polygyny.

Whilst men pursue polygyny, women viciously resist it. For example, amongst the Swahili Muslims of coastal Tanzania, men think of polygyny as an expression of their rights and privileges as Muslims, while the women define love in terms of monogamy (Keefe, 2016). These contrasting views amongst the Swahili have had implications for their marital relationships. The focus of Keefe's study was to examine the role of informal entrepreneurial work of women in a Swahili coastal fishing village she called *Peponi,* in creating opportunities for them after a divorce. To do this, she used both quantitative surveys and qualitative techniques. Her study revealed that most married women tended to choose divorce over becoming co-wives, especially in the case where the women were economically independent of their husbands. Divorcees were often unlikely to remarry as many of them preferred being in informal unions with other men. This trend, Keefe (2016) discovered, was common because according to the informants, the Islamic instruction that women should not have children out of wedlock is more directed towards women who are newly married or are yet to get married. The instruction seemed not to be as strict on widows and divorcees. Secondly, divorced women enjoyed the freedom that came with consensual unions rather than the restrictions that came with marriage. Divorce, known in the local parlance as *talaka,*

in *Peponi* is seen as a normal part of marriages and relationship life cycle because of the unwillingness of women to be in polygynous marriages (Stiles, 2002).

The phenomenon of 'outside wives' as a way of dealing with monogamy in societies that were once polygynous is also influenced by issues of fertility and not only for the sake of having multiple partners. In many African societies, there is a remarkably high premium placed on children such that marital unions are almost always expected to produce children. Marriages have indeed been thought of as unions primarily for producing children and consequently continuing lineages (Anarfi, 2006; Oppong, 1981; Salm & Falola, 2002) the African woman often wishes to not just have children but to have many of them (Calvès & Meekers, 1995). Childless marriages in Nigeria, for instance, are seen as incomplete as children are considered central to the definition of a complete marriage and of womanhood (Karanja, 1987). In most East African societies, the child-bearing role of women is even seen as their very purpose for existence. In other words, the purpose of women is essentially to have children (Obbo, 1987). Amongst the Swazi, childlessness is seen as a serious problem and could be grounds for dissolving a marriage or taking a second a second wife (Ferraro, 1983).

Takyi (2001) has observed therefore that in Ghana, like other Africa countries, 'outside wives' have been the solution for men to deal with their wives' infertility. This is especially so in a monogamous union. In societies where there is an emphasis on having male children, outside wives may become the alternative solution to an inside wife's inability to bear sons. Women on the other hand, may gain social status from having children, especially sons, even when they are

not married (Lesthaeghe, 1989) which makes their being in informal unions not so problematic for them.

Like the phenomenon of outside wives, outside husbands also exist. Hannaford and Foley, (2015) report of situations where there are men who could also pass for 'outside husbands' in Senegal. The practice of 'outside husbands' is known as *mbaraan* and these are used by women as a marital strategy. Senegal has a civil document that spells out familial rights and responsibilities which is the 'Code de la Famille'. This document states that men must clothe, house and sexually satisfy their wives (Dial, 2008). In view of several years of stagnant economic growth, this study aimed at finding out how love and marriage were negotiated in contemporary Senegal as more and more men found it difficult to fulfil their obligations as stipulated by the country's family code. With ethnographic data from Dakar, Hannaford and Foley (2015), discovered that many women after marriage got disappointed with the poor financial abilities of their husbands as they were often unable to play their roles as breadwinners and meet their material needs. One of the ways out of such situations was for married women to have extra marital partners who were in a better position to act as husbands. It was not strange to find a woman who had as many as five *mbaraans.* The *mbaraan* relationships were also found to be a coping strategy for persons who had been made to contract arranged marriages against their will.

From the foregone, there appears to be a quite a number of contributory factors to the incidence of consensual unions. Some of these cut across cultural borders whilst others can be best explained within the specific socio-cultural context which makes it important for context-specific studies to be able to discover points of divergence and convergence with the existing literature.

2.4 Forms of Consensual Unions

A consensual union is defined in terms of marriage. However, this may be challenging because what constitutes marriage can sometimes be contextual. Ardayfio-Schandorf and Sam (2006) describe a consensual union as one where couples cohabit for a long period without any formal agreement. 'Formal agreement' here means fulfilment of the requirements of the any of the three official forms of marriage in Ghana, that is, the Customary, Mohammedan and Ordinance marriages.

In other jurisdictions, however, the completion of traditional or customary marriage rites is not enough to formalise a union as marriage. In many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Ghana, for example, the marriage process is considered incomplete when there has not been the 'church wedding'. This also holds true for the Catholic Church (Sarkodie, 2017). Indeed, in a personal communication with Rev. Prof. Pobee, a Presbyterian minister and a lecturer at the Trinity Theological Seminary, he insisted that the ideal requirement for Presbyterians is for them to have their marriages blessed in church after the traditional rites have been performed. He added that a 'church blessed marriage' is an important criterion for the ordaining of reverend ministers and presbyters. This confirms Meischer's (2005) observation about the Presbyterian Church in Kwahu. Although these Christian groups may not necessarily refer to a marriage which ends at the traditional stage as a consensual union, they would consider such a marriage as incomplete.

For a man and a woman to conduct themselves as married means that, to a large extent they take up the rights and responsibilities that come with marriage. For example, for most African societies, marriage has been found to be characterised by the transfer of some specific rights and

responsibilities. Men upon marriage become entitled to the woman's domestic as well as sexual services. This is referred to as the *rights in uxorem*. In addition, the marriage may confer on the man, *rights in genetricem*, which is the reproductive services of a woman, whereby the man is duly recognized as the father of the children (Nukunya, 2003). The responsibility of the man towards his wife, on the other hand, is often that he sees to the maintenance of the woman and children mostly in terms of food, clothing and shelter. It is also commonplace to find that couples acquire property together. Although these features may not always exist in the strictest sense, they provide a framework for understanding what married life in Africa looks like.

Available the literature suggests a unitary household conception of consensual unions. Posel and Rudwick (2014a), have identified two forms of consensual unions from the point of view of how the practice relates to marriage. These are consensual unions as a precursor to marriage and consensual unions as an alternative to marriage. Whilst for some couples in consensual unions the union may be an end in itself, others think of it as a means to an end, which is marriage.

Anthropological studies in some African societies have shown that the practice of a would-be married couple being required to live together as married prior to the marriage proper exists. In these societies, pre-marital cohabitation is an institutionalized stage of the marriage process and such unions are allowed for various reasons. Thiriat (1999) found this to be the case amongst the Samo and Goin ethnic groups of Burkina Faso. In these societies, pre-marital cohabitation is a cultural arrangement for the lovers and the purpose is to allow the families of the couple to make plans for the marriage itself. Such premarital consensual unions could therefore last for a couple of years before the marriage takes place. A similar practice was found among the Dagara and Lobi,

also in Burkina Faso, where it is the practice that prospective brides show signs of fertility before the marriage takes place. Cohabitation between the would-be married couple is thus permitted for the purpose of testing fertility (LeGrand & Younoussi, 2009).

Calvès and Meekers (1999) in their study on informal marriages in Cameroon, identified some ethnic groups amongst whom they found different forms of informal unions. They found that among the Bamiléké, for instance, such unions functioned as a form of a trial marriage for the purposes of the couple getting to know each other. Unlike the Samo and Goin, however, this trial marriage is permitted to last for a period of just about two to three months. Among the Asante of Ghana, Fortes (1950) observed that, although it was not a cultural requirement for yet to be married couples to live together, the practice was quite prevalent and was permitted so far as the woman involved had gone through her puberty rites.

Aside these institutionalised forms of cohabitation as a precursor to marriage, there are other forms in which the practice presents. In the face of increasing autonomy in mate selection, consensual unions have been found to be a way in which young people seek to impose their partners on their parents and families in cases where the families do not approve of their choice of a spouse. The unions then become a waiting period for the marriage to take place (Meekers, 1995; Mokomane, 2005b). LeGrand and Younoussi (2009), for example, identified consensual unions as a prelude to marriage which happens through elopement of the couple. According to LeGrand and Younoussi (2009), this practice which is quite prevalent in rural Burkinabe communities becomes an option when a young couple desires to get married but do not get the approval of their families, particularly the woman's family. The woman would therefore run off and hide with the man's

family members. It is during the period of her hiding that efforts are made to convince her parents to agree to the marriage. Most of the time, the woman's family is forced to give their approval to the marriage. This is especially so when the couple begins to have children.

Young people may choose to cohabit before marriage for other reasons. According to Attané (2007), the practice has become an accepted 'intermediary conjugal union' for city dwellers in Africa as many young people in contemporary times feel the need to test the viability of a potential marriage and also to avoid 'surprises' in later marital life. This they do by agreeing to live together in an informal union before marriage for as long as five years and beyond (Attané 2007; Rossier 2007).

In her study on the issue of conjugal labour in some cocoa growing areas in Ghana, Duncan (2010) discovered that in order to facilitate the provision of their marriage payments, women resorted to moving in to live with their potential husbands and assisting them with work on their cocoa farms in order to raise the money for their marriage. Many of her research participants admitted that parental demands of marriage payments were often unaffordable for the young men. Her study further revealed that families which considered themselves poor saw it as a relief when their daughters moved out to the homesteads of other men. While this method of reducing parental financial burdens was encouraged, it was also not discouraged. Women indicated that once they had conceived one child with a man without being married to them, a situation they termed as 'born one', it became more difficult for them to leave that relationship for another.

With evidence from South Sudan, Beswick (2001) shows that there are cases where consensual unions function as a precursor to marriage. This is where bridewealth payment may be postponed and alternative arrangements made. This came up when she investigated polygyny and levirate marriages in South Sudan. Her study was specifically carried out at the Kakuma Refugee Camp with the focus on the pastoral Nilotic Dinka who numbered about 70,000 in 2001, as well as some Azande and Nuer. One of the findings revealed by Beswick's (2001) study was that a new system of marital bridewealth payment which was known as 'credit marriage' had emerged. 'Credit marriage' meant that a man who had no cattle to pay as bridewealth for a wife, is given the woman anyway and documented arrangements made for him to pay later. They resorted to this system because many men had lost their cattle during the country's civil wars. In addition, those who had some cattle were unable to properly keep them in the refugee camp. The South Sudanese arrangement was unlike that of the Ngoni of Tanzania who according to Moser (1987), "changed bridewealth requirements from cattle to eight goats, two hoes and 800 shillings when most of their cattle were lost during the Maji-Maji War of Freedom, in order for men to afford marriage" (p. 324). The credit marriages therefore served as a form of an interim arrangement to the proper marriage where the bridewealth is fully paid.

It has also been observed that consensual unions could be an alternative to marriage for some partners. In these cases, it is often the decision of the couple to remain unmarried for as long as they wish to keep the relationship. A clear example is the concepts of 'outside wives' and 'small houses' pointed out by Karanja (1984, 1978) and Christiansen (2013), respectively where the relationhsips are not meant to end in marriage but exist as substitutes to marriage. The marriage institution is viewed by some women as constraining because for them its inbuilt structures puts

them in a subordinate position to men. In their bid to increase their chances of more independence and control over their lives, therefore, such women opt for consensual unions as a substitute for marriage (Calvès, 2016). Again, for societies which are patrilineal, women may choose consensual unions as a way of gaining better rights of their children (LeGrand & Younoussi, 1999). Consensual unions may also become a substitute for marriage in situations where men are unable to or choose not to pay bridewealth for women they wish to take as wives and yet upon consensus with the women decide to live a married life with them (Onyango, 2016; Posel & Rudwick, 2014; Tambenkongho, 2010).

In Ghana, a consensual union may also be characterised by the couple living together in the same residential space or not. Marriage itself does not always suggest that the couple live together for which reason it is also possible for two people to conduct themselves as married without living together. There are different post-marital residential patterns in Ghana, some of which do not require that the married couple live together in the same residential space. The Ga, for instance, practice the duolocal residential system. Here, although a couple may be married, the husband and the wife still live in the homes into which they were born and grew up. Traditional Ga compounds have two divisions, namely the *hiiamli* and the *yeiamli*. The *hiiamli* is inhabited by the males, both adult and young, whereas the females descended in the female line from a sister or sisters live in the *yeiamli*. The system, therefore, is such that girls continue to live with their mothers even after marriage whilst the boys leave for their father's house before they get married and remain there after they are married (Nukunya, 2003).

Marriage amongst the Effutu of Winneba is also duolocal. Here, there is the male agnatic household called the *prama*. A married man would usually continue to stay with his father and brothers. Women, on the other hand, live with their mothers and sisters in the female household which is known as the *igyiase*. Married women although they cook and do other household activities in their *igyiase* go to sleep in their husbands' prama every night (Hagan, 2000). Indeed, it is also the practice in some typical Akan traditional communities that married couples do not live together (Gott, 2007). This is often the case with polygynous marriages where wives go to sleep in their husbands' rooms in turns. Furthermore, there are trans-national as well as other forms of long-distance marriages where couples live apart.

2.5 The Implications of Consensual Unions

Another set of literature, scanty though, touches on some of the implications of being in a consensual union for the couple involved as well as their children. In many societies, the position of women, especially, in consensual unions is characterised by the lack of legal and social recognition as well as support (Calvès & Meekers, 1999; Karanja, 1994). In so far as marriage continues to be considered as ideally the basis for family formation, other permutations to marriage may not be fully accepted, thus, the consequences. In the Bamiléké society, women in such unions are considered strangers in their male partners' family for as long as their bridewealth remains unpaid. To enhance their acceptance amongst their in-laws, therefore, the women tend to have many children for the man (Calvès & Meekers, 1999).

Being victims of the 'crisis of African masculinity' (Hunter, 2004; Waetjen, 2006) as the post-apartheid labour market conditions offered little opportunities for them, men in KwaZulu Natal

face the challenge of paying *ilobolo* (bridewealth) (Posel & Rudwick, 2014a). As a way out of the inability to pay *ilobolo*, therefore, men choose to pay *inhlawulo*. This refers to the damages that a man pays to a woman's family in the event of premarital pregnancy from an informal union. For a patrilineal society where children belong to their fathers' lineage, the i*nhlawulo* which costs less than the *ilobolo*, enables men to claim rights to their children. However, the men are not allowed to live with them (Hunter, 2010). Similarly, among the Krobo of Ghana, a man's failure to perform customary marriage rites for a woman before having children with her results in the children being taken over and named by the woman's father. Such men are required to perform a rite called the *la pomi*, if they wish to claim their children (Langmagne, 2016). Among the Béti-Fang ethnic group of Cameroun, which is also a patrilineal group, Calvès and Meekers (1999) found that children born into informal unions could not be claimed by their fathers. Rather, they belonged to their maternal grandfather's lineage. However, in terms of social ranking, such children were placed below others who had been born in wedlock.

For a matrilineal society like the Asante, the consequence of being in a consensual union, Fortes (1950) found, was not in relation to the children. Per the principles of the matrilineage children belong to their mothers' lineage whether their parents are 'properly' married or not. Men could, therefore, name their children whether or not they had paid bridewealth for the child's mother. In the case of a consensual union, however, a man was unable to press adultery charges against his partner who had sexual relations with another man or even had a child with another man (Fortes, 1950). The was because the absence of the bridewealth payment also meant the man did not have exclusive rights over the sexual and reproductive services of the woman.

What Beswick (2001) described as the credit marriage system, however, had different implications. The system brought more complexities to the marital life of the South Sudanese it was interpreted by the women as a cheapening and devaluation of their worth. The implication has therefore been that many women do not think of their husbands as deserving of their loyalty and commitment as wives, hence a dramatic increase in the cases of married women engaging in extra marital affairs.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

The overriding objective of this study was to understand how consensual unions as a form of family formation works, by investigating the experiences of persons in such unions. For a study designed from a constructionist perspective, the researcher did not begin the study with a predetermined theoretical framework within which the data would be explained. Rather, the data from the research informed the choice of the theoretical foundation upon which the study could be situated. As a theoretical foundation, therefore, this study draws on Randall Collins' (2004) micro sociological Theory of Situations which he also calls the Interaction Ritual Chains. What he attempts to do with this theory is to go beyond the structure-agency and the macro-micro dichotomies by connecting opposites. The study also uses his concepts of power rituals and emotional energies which emanate from social situations.

Micro sociological analysis is not unique to Randall Collins. Both Emile Durkheim and Erving Goffman also emphasised the understanding of social phenomenon at the micro rather than the structural level in their works. Durkheim and Goffman pointed to the individual as the starting point of analysis. The point of divergence between these two and Collins, therefore, lies in the fact

that Collins' Theory of Situations (Interaction Ritual Chains) is a micro sociological theory which emphasises social situations rather than the individual as the starting point for understanding patterns of human behaviour. He illustrates his position when he argues that instead of saying "every dog will have its day, it should rather be said that every day will have its dog" (Collins, 2004, p. 5). This, according to the Theory of Situations, explains the fact that the kind of social situation in which a person finds herself or himself would determine their social behaviour. As a result, although an individual may be seen to acting on rational choice, Collins argues that the focus should not be the person per se but the situation in which they find themselves which influences their behaviour. These dynamics of the situation, according to Kivisto (2011) can be understood from political, religious, and cultural trends.

Collins (2004) connects both the macro and the micro levels of analysis and goes a step further from the Rational Choice Theory, which is also a micro-level theory of understanding social behaviour. The basic tenet of the Theory of Rational Choice as developed by Howard Becker and James Coleman is that, "social behaviour can be explained in terms of the rational calculations individuals make about the options available to them in order to maximise their benefits". Rational Choice theorists, therefore, refuse the concept of the social structure and so reduce social behaviour to primarily on individual choices" (Agger, p. 156-157). Collins, however, argues that, people do not always plan their lives by calculations and comparing options available to them. In that case, their situations, rather than their calculated benefits would better explain their choices (Collins, p. 144).

According to the Collins (2004), social interactions can also be ritualised chains of interactions. He explains that a form of interaction which has become ritualised, that is, enduring over a period of time, is characterised by four ingredients which are:

1. Two or more people are physically assembled in the same place, so that they affect each other by their bodily presence, whether it is in the foreground of their conscious attention or not.
2. There are boundaries to outsiders so that participants have a sense of who is taking part and who is excluded.
3. People focus their attention on a common object or activity, and by communicating this focus to each other, they become mutually aware of each other's focus of attention.
4. They share a common mood of emotional experience (p. 48).

Collins (2004), continues that when these four conditions are present another set of four outcomes manifest. These are:

1. Group solidarity, a feeling of membership.
2. Emotional energy in the individual, that is a feeling of confidence, elation, strength, enthusiasm and initiative in taking action.
3. Symbols that represent the group, example, emblems or other representations that members feel are associated with themselves collectively.
4. Feelings of morality, which is the sense of rightness in adhering to the group, respecting its symbols, and defending both against transgressors and a sense of moral evil or impropriety in violating the group's solidarity and its symbolic representations (p.49).

He, however, notes that the extent to which these characteristics in an interaction ritual will play out depends on the very nature of the interactional situation. This is because interaction rituals come in many forms like formal rituals or natural rituals, and where rituals are not successful, then there could be failed, empty and forced interaction rituals. There are also power rituals or situations of power relations.

2.6.1 Power Rituals

Collins (2004) argues that, depending on its nature and circumstances, some interactive situations are characterised by unequal power relations, a situation he describes as power rituals. Here, one party dominates the relationship by assuming the position of an 'order-giver' whilst the other party takes the orders. An 'order-giver' by extension could mean anyone who dictates the course of the interaction and the 'order-taker', the one who follows the lead. He cites the example of the military personnel who takes orders form superiors or children who wait on their parents for directions on how to conduct themselves. The ways in which the 'order-giver', who according to Collins is often at the centre of attention, dominates, is determined largely by their understanding of the mutual activity in which they and the other party are engaged. Whilst this 'order-giver' is considered as the dominant and powerful personality in the relationship, the position of the 'order-taker' is characterised by 'weakness'. This form of interactive ritual can lead to group solidarity or alienation depending on whether the 'order-taker' conforms to the lead of the 'order-giver' or decides to rebel against them.

Power rituals produces a complex set of emotions key amongst which are dominance, anger and fear. The fear and anger are often associated with the 'order-taker' and this can produce further

forms of emotional energies. On the other hand, the 'order-giver' through the exercise of dominance could also exhibit other sets of emotional energies.

2.6.2 Emotional Energy

Emotions are a significant subject in sociological enquiry because "emotions are the 'glue' binding people together and generating commitments to large-scale social and cultural structures … experience, behaviour, interaction and organization are connected to the mobilization and expression of emotions" (Turner & Stets, 2005, p. 1). Emotional energy can be described as "a continuum, ranging from a high end of confidence, enthusiasm, good self-feelings; down through a middle range of bland normalcy; and to a low end of depression, lack of initiative, and negative self-feelings….it also includes feelings of what is right and wrong, moral and immoral" (Collins, 2004, p. 108-109). It is, therefore, also the basis of social action, in that, it influences the choices people make when faced with alternative lines of action (Collins, 1993). The kind of emotional energy a person brings into an interactive ritual is not an end in itself but also has repercussions for the chain of situations that would ensue over time.

The link between power rituals and emotional energy lies in the fact that the nature of the power dynamics in a particular interactive situation influences the emotional energies that actors bring to bear in the interactive process. Emotional energies are outcomes of the form of interactive ritual and how these manifest also dependent on how the parties involved interpret the power dynamics.

2.6.3 Relevance of the Theory of Situations to the Study

Collins' (2004) Theory of Situations is useful to understanding consensual unions. With the first objective of the study; exploring the incidence of consensual union, the theory is relevant in explaining how particular situations in which people found themselves led them to opt to be in a consensual union and not marriage. Although ultimately the decisions to enter such unions were made by individuals, this theory allows an analysis of the linkage between their immediate social situations and consequently their rational actions. Furthermore, the theory also helps in explaining how the situations influencing decisions go on to create another situation of unequal power relation in the unions. The gender and class dynamics that underlie people's reasons for opting for a consensual union are well interpreted by the phenomenon of power in everyday interactions.

The theory is useful in analysing the second research objective, which was to find out the implications of being in a consensual union. It explains how following from the situation of power relations where there is an 'order-giver' and an 'order-taker', the power dynamics continue in the course of the relationship in terms of the gendered relations, and consequently influence the attitudes (levels of emotional energies) that the partners bring into their unions. These emotional energies further shape how events unfold in these relationships. In understanding the ways in which persons in consensual unions negotiate the implications of being in such a union; the third objective, the theory of situations or Interaction Rituals further explains how the different negotiation strategies are reflective of the partners' position in the power dynamics and the types of emotions they bring to the relationship. The specific ways in which this theory of situations relates to the data for the study are explained in the empirical chapters (4, 5, and 6).

2.7 Conclusion

Much of the studies which have looked at the transformations in African marriages and families have touched on consensual or informal unions. It is an established fact that consensual unions are indeed increasingly becoming characteristic of family life in many contemporary African societies. It is, however, apparent from the review of the literature, which explores the issue that much of the studies have been skewed towards the factors that lead to consensual unions as a form of family formation. These circumstances often come up from within the general discussions on the transformations of African families in the face of social change. What is left to be explored in the discourse on consensual unions: what are the implications, which find expression in the lived experiences of persons who are involved in consensual unions as a form of family formation? The few studies which have attempted to address this gap are anthropological studies situated within the context of some specific ethnic groups. Life for people of different ethnic groups in consensual unions in urban spaces remains largely unexplored. This study is therefore driven by this gap in the literature.

This chapter has also given an overview of the theory within which the study was framed. In doing so, the justification for the choice of the theory is explained in terms of its relevance to the data and the advantage it has on other possible theories such the Rational Choice Theory and the Social Construction of Reality Theory in analysing the data.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This Chapter presents the methodological approaches of this study. The nature of the research problem, the questions it raised and the objectives the research sought to achieve all influenced the way in which the study was designed. The Chapter, therefore, details the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the research design, the rationale for the choice of the qualitative paradigm, the study site, the sampling procedure, and the methods of data collection, handling, and analyses. The ethical considerations, challenges encountered in the research process as well as the limitations of the study are also captured in this chapter.

3.2 Theoretical Underpinnings of Research Design

Sociological enquiries are basically guided by one of two theoretical perspectives: positivism or constructionism (Marvasti, 2004). Although both standpoints are aimed at explaining social reality, their orientations differ (see Table 3.1) and as such define the methodological approaches, that is, the practical ways in which social research is carried out. Positivism and Constructionism thus translate into quantitative and qualitative methodologies, respectively. The fundamental difference between these two is that "quantitative research focus on using methodological approaches that seek to represent human experiences in numerical terms, whilst qualitative research involves providing detailed description and analysis of the quality of the human experience" (Marvasti, 2004, p. 7). The researcher, in seeking to understand consensual unions as a form of family formation methodologically designed the study from the constructionist

perspective of sociological enquiry. This perspective also finds expression in the ontological and epistemological perspectives of the researcher and consequently the methodological approach.

Table 3.1 below summarises the differences between positivism and constructionism as theoretical backgrounds in sociological enquiry.

Table 3.1 Positivism versus Constructionism

	Positivism	**Constructionism**
Theoretical perspective On social reality	How can we use objective research methods to capture the essence of social reality?	How is reality socially constructed?
Goal of research	What are the universal laws that explain the causes of human behaviour?	How do situational and cultural variations shape reality?
Enduring question	How can we improve the standardized and neutral language used to report research findings?	What are the ideological and practical consequences of writing and research?

Source: Adopted from Marvasti, 2004, p. 8.

The fundamental tenet of the constructionist perspective is that reality is socially constructed and not just a fixed set of knowledge out there to be discovered. According to Guba (1990), for the constructivist:

> ontology – the nature of reality – is that realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experimentally based, local and specific, dependent for their own form and content on the persons who hold them. Their epistemology – the relationship between the inquirer and the inquired into – on the other hand, is that both the inquirer and the inquired are fused into a single entity, such that findings are literally created out of the process of interaction between the two' (p. 27).

Following from the researcher's theoretical and philosophical standpoints, the study was designed as a qualitative study. The relationship between constructionism and the qualitative paradigm lies in the fact that the latter provides the methodological techniques for executing the tenets of the former. "Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world, implying that subjects are studied in their natural settings, and attempts made to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b, p. 4). The qualitative approach comes with its distinct methodologies aimed at producing in-depth accounts of the phenomenon under study. From these standpoints, the purpose of this study was not to use numbers to generate generalisations about how people in consensual unions in Accra conduct their relationships. Rather, it was to explore the realities of persons in consensual unions and the meanings they bring to their experiences. With reference to the research questions and objectives of this study, therefore, it was more appropriate to situate the work within the broad framework of qualitative enquiry. The qualitative approach therefore influenced the processes of sampling, data collection and data analysis.

3.3 Study Area

This study was conducted within the Accra Metropolitan Area of the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The choice of Accra was informed by the family literature which suggests that consensual unions are more prevalent in urban spaces. Aside the high prevalence factor, urban areas are also ethnically diverse making them suitable for sampling people from different ethnic backgrounds. Accra satisfies these two essential criteria thus the decision to situate the study within the metropolis. Figure 3.1 below shows a map of Accra.

Figure 3. 1 Map of Accra

Source: Google Maps, 2018

The Ghana Statistical Service's 2014 District Analytical Report on the Accra Metropolitan Area provided the following information:

"The population of Accra Metropolitan Area (AMA), according to the 2010 Population and Housing Census, is 1,665,086 representing 42 percent of the region's total population. Males constitute 48.1 percent and females represent 51.9 percent. The Metropolis is entirely urban (100%). It has a sex ratio of 93 and youthful population (children under 15 years) (42.6%)

depicting a broad base population pyramid which tapers off with a small number of elderly persons (60+ years) constituting 5.9 percent. The total age dependency ratio is 48.5 percent; the child dependency ratio is higher (42.6%) than that of old age dependency ratio (5.9). The proportion of Ghanaians by birth in the Metropolis is 91.2 percent. Those who have naturalised constitute 1.3 percent and the non-Ghanaian population is 4.0 percent (GSS, 2014, p. ix).

The Metropolis has a household population of 1,599,914 with a total number of 450,748 households. The average household size is 3.7 persons per household. Children constitute the largest proportion of the household composition of 35.5 percent while grandchildren consist of 6 percent of household population. Spouses form about 11.1 percent. Nuclear households (head, spouse(s) and children) constitute 26.9 percent of the total number of households (GSS, 2014, p. ix).

Three in ten (36.3%) of the population aged 12 years and older are married, 48.5 percent have never married,5.6 percent are in consensual unions, 4 percent are widowed, 3 percent are divorced, and 2.6 percent are separated. Among the married, 13.1 percent have no education while 6.0 percent of the never married have never been to school. More than half of the married population (80%) are employed, 3.4 percent are unemployed, and 16.8 percent are economically not active. A greater proportion of those who have never married (50.5%) are economically not active with 6.0 percent unemployed (GSS, 2014, p. ix).

Of the population 11 years and above, 89 percent are literate, and 11 percent are non-literate. The number of non-literate females (98,439) was more than twice that of males (39,567). Five out of

ten people (52.0%) indicated they could speak and write both English and Ghanaian languages. Out of the 533,291 persons enumerated as currently in school, 38.4 percent were at the primary level, 18.2 percent were at the JSS/JHS level while 12.8 percent were at the Senior High School level (GSS, 2014, p. ix).

About 70.1 percent of the population aged 15 years and older are economically active while 29.9 percent are economically not active. The economically active population, 93 percent are employed while 7.0 percent are unemployed. For those who are economically not active, a larger percentage are students (52.0%), 19.4 percent perform household duties and 3.1 percent are disabled or too sick to work. About five out of ten (57.8%) unemployed are seeking work for the first time. Of the employed population, only 1.7 percent are engaged as skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers, 38.5 percent in service and sales, 20.1 percent in craft and related trade, and 17.2 percent are engaged as managers, professionals, and technicians (GSS, 2014, p. x).

Employment with regards to the population 15 years and older 48 percent are self-employed without employees, 2.2 percent are contributing family workers, 2.0 percent are casual workers and 0.9 percent are domestic employees (house helps). The private informal sector is the largest employer in the Metropolis, employing 74.0 percent of the population followed by the private Formal sector with 16.9 percent" (GSS, 2014, p. x).

3.4 Sampling Procedure

Not all persons in Accra are in consensual unions. A conscious effort was, therefore, made to locate individuals in such unions. This process constitutes purposive sampling which "allows a researcher

to select a case because it is illustrative of a particular feature which is of interest" (Silverman, 2011, p. 388). Neuman (2007) also discusses purposive sampling as appropriate where the researcher wishes to select unique cases that are especially informative. As a starting point, people personally known to me were selected. There were six of them. To increase and diversify the sample, there was the need to go beyond the personally known participants. Persons in consensual unions are a category with relatively low social visibility, in that, they are not an easily identifiable group. To enlarge the sample, therefore, the snowballing technique was employed. Snowballing involves asking a study participant or a key informant whether they know anyone else in the community who meets the study criteria and asking them to refer this person to the researcher (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). Not all the first six participants, however, referred me to other prospective participants. The next strategy I adopted was to put up the research topic on two group WhatsApp platforms to which I belong - my Senior High School and drama groups - and ask if I could be led to some potential participants. Additionally, I informed family members and friends, about the research. Through these strategies, several potential participants were contacted. Whether or not these potential participants qualified to partake in the study was determined using an inclusion and exclusion criteria.

3.4.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Any person in a union with another person of the same ethnic group where the customary marriage rites required by their ethnic group have been fully performed was not included in the population and did not qualify to be sampled for the study. The inclusion criterion was where the required customary marriage rites had either not begun or not been completed for two people from the same ethnic group who are in a relationship. Persons in this category were those who qualified to partake

in the study. Additionally, the relationship had to be exclusive to the couple involved. So, for instance, a married man or woman who was in another intimate relationship with someone else was not included in the sample. The focus was on persons from the same ethnic group as their partner because it provided a more definite way of defining consensual union for the purposes of the study. For partners with different ethnic backgrounds the challenge would have been which of the partners' ethnic group's customary practices to use as reference point. In the end, a total of thirty-one participants qualified and constituted the sample for the study. Table 3.2 below shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample.

The thirty-one participants were made up of fourteen couples and three women. Although the researcher was interested in interviewing the partners of the three women, they were unwilling to let their partners know about the study. Their consent to participate in the study was contingent upon me respecting their decision to exclude their partners from the study. I agreed to this condition because the target population of the study was not necessarily both partners of the relationship, but any person in consensual unions.

3.4.2 *Sample Characteristics*

Table 3.2 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Research Participants

Name	Age	Level of Education	Occupation	Ethnicity (Lineage) M/P+	Stage of Marriage	Years in union	Number of children
Alex **Nana Akua**	35 29	JHS Primary	Trader Trader	Akan (M)	Knocking	8	2
John **Korkor**	46 44	JHS JHS	Mason Shopkeeper	Krobo (P)	Not started	23	5
Yaw **Owusuaa**	34 30	SHS Primary	Taxi driver Unemployed	Akan (M)	Not started	8	1
Osei **Yaayaa**	34 32	Tertiary Tertiary	Doctor Businesswoman	Akan (M)	Not started	3	-

Appiah	28	Tertiary	Military officer				-
Akosua	28	Tertiary	Nurse	Akan (M)	Knocking	3	
Amoako	32	Tertiary	Quantity surveyor				-
Maame	32	Tertiary	Sales manager	Akan (M)	Knocking	3	
Owusu	48	Primary	Tiler		Not		
Agyeiwaa	45	JHS	Caterer	Akan (M)	started	24	7
Kwabena	45	Primary	Housekeeper		Not		
Naana	36	Primary	Unemployed	Akan (M)	started	14	4
James	43	SHS	Security man				
Ruth	38	JHS	Shopkeeper	Frafra (P)	Knocking	15	2
Kinsley	45	JHS	Mason		Not		-
Dede	38	JHS	Unemployed	Krobo (P)	started	4	
Charles	34	Tertiary	Contractor				
Doris	30	SHS	Trader	Frafra (P)	Clapping	6	1
Kudjo	37	Primary	Electrician		Not		
Maabena	33	Primary	Trader	Akan (M)	started	7	2
Paa Kwesi	41	SHS	Mechanic		Not		
Awuradwoa	35	JHS	Toll Collector	Akan (M)	started	11	3
Johnson	42	SHS	Taxi driver		Not		
Lucy	40	Tertiary	Seamstress	Akan (M)	started	12	2
					Not		-
Emma	45	Tertiary	Auditor	Akan (M)	started	3	
					Not		
Sheila	39	Tertiary	Police officer	Ga (P)	started	3	1
					Not		
Aku	26	JHS	Unemployed	Ewe (P)	started	10	3

Source: Fieldwork, 2016/2017

****SHS** - Senior High School*
***#JHS** - Junior High School*
*+Lineage type: **M** – Matrilineal, **P** – Patrilineal*

The real names of research participants were replaced with pseudonyms. The mean age of the participants was 34.2 years. Their levels of education (primary, JHS, SHS, tertiary) were somewhat evenly distributed and in most cases with men having higher levels as compared to their partners, though not in all cases. Their employment statuses ranged from unemployed to relatively high-income earning jobs. Ten of the couples were from matrilineal groups and four of them had patrilineal backgrounds. Of the three 'single' participants, two were patrilineal and one was matrilineal. Five couples indicated the commencement of the marriage process with the

performance of the 'knocking' rites whilst the rest were yet to initiate the process. 'Knocking' rites constitute the official engagement of a would-be couple. The processes of 'knocking' rites differ from society to society in Ghana but essentially serve a similar purpose. On the average, the unions had lasted 8.5 years and except for five cases, all unions had children.

3.5 Data Collection

Data collection for this study begun in October 2016 after gaining ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee for Humanities (ECH) of the University of Ghana (See Appendix I). Interviewing, in all the forms in which it comes, is a key data collection technique in qualitative studies and operates on the principles of democratisation of opinions, the researcher-respondent duality and the research subjects as vessels of answers (Marvasti, 2004). For this study, the life history interviewing technique was used. Studies have shown that people's life experiences even from childhood could significantly influence their future intimate partnerships (May & Nordqvist, 2019). For instance, life experiences like failed relationships can result in a 'commitment phobia' where one is insecure or unenthusiastic about committing to long term, stable relationships like marriage (Illouz, 2012). In comparison to other forms of interviews, the life history approach allows for a comprehensive account of a research participant's experiences not only as pertains to the immediate subject of investigation but also goes back to the early stages of their lives and how the story of their lives has unfolded up to the time of interviewing (Miller, 2000). The data gleaned using this interviewing technique provides a broad perspective from which to interpret the research subjects' lived experiences. Burke (2014) proposes a three-session style to interviewing a research participant on their life history. Session one involves an uninterrupted narration of the person's life history. In the second session, based on the research questions and objectives, the researcher

seeks more detailed information and clarification in specific aspects of the participant's life history. In the final session, the researcher double-checks and confirms the information that has been captured from the participant. This third session is also necessary for ensuring reliability of the data. I employed Burke's guidelines in this study. An interview guide was designed to aid the interview process (see Appendix II). The guide was designed in line with the research questions and objectives.

Once a participant had been identified, and all the necessary ethical issues addressed, the interview date and time were scheduled. The interviews mostly took place in the homes of the participants, except for four which were conducted at the workplaces of the participants. These four included two of the female participants who did not want their partners to be interviewed. The other participant who also wanted her partner excluded from the study was interviewed at her mother's house. Where couples were to be interviewed, separate dates and times were arranged in such a way that the interview for each person took place in the absence of the other. Interviews were conducted in either Twi or English depending on the language with which the participant was more comfortable, and the interviews lasted between one and two and a half hours. Where the consent of the participant had been granted, the interview sessions were audiotaped in addition to notetaking. Two male participants, however, did not consent to their voices being recorded. In these cases, only notes were taken.

To stimulate a more relaxed atmosphere for the interviews, I would often start by raising an issue which was not necessarily related to the subject of consensual unions. The first ten to fifteen minutes of interviews were usually on such unrelated matters which could be a recent incident in

the news. This was particularly necessary for participants whom I had been referred to but had to conceal the identity of the 'informants'. There were three of such. In these cases, the challenge was how to raise the subject of consensual unions without letting them know that I had prior knowledge of their relationship status. Brannen (1988), however, prescribes a way around this dilemma and suggests that in such a situation, "the topic of the research should be allowed to emerge gradually over the course of the interview" (Brannen as cited in Lee, 1999, p.103). This strategy has, however, been criticised on the grounds of inadequate informed consent. To address that, I would start the preliminary conversations on the broad subject of marriage and gradually steer the conversation towards consensual unions. When the topic of consensual unions finally emerged from preliminary conversations, I then seized the opportunity to explain to the person that it is actually what was of particular interest and asked whether the participant was willing to continue with the interview and also share their personal experiences. In all three instances where this approach was used, the participants were willing to process with the interviews.

Being a young married person and also mindful of the fact that consensual unions come with some level of stigma in the Ghanaian society, I did not want to approach the participants as 'the married person' who was coming to find out about why others were not married and what their experiences were. I, therefore, took off my wedding ring, which is a well-known marriage symbol during the interview sessions. This decision was further driven by a concern one potential female participant raised during negotiations for an interview date. She was going to grant the interview if only I was not going to be judgmental because of my marital status. I saw this as a genuine concern that needed to be addressed. The question of my marital status, however, hardly came up when interviewing women. However, during interviews, male participants often wanted to know about

my marital status and questioned the absence of the ring when the marital status was made known to them. Their rationale for inquiring about the marital status was based on their assumption that, a married person was in a good position to conduct this research, as they would better understand issues on intimate relationships.

In their article, *Do You See What I See? Examining a Collaborative Ethnography*, May and Pattillo-McCoy (2000), argue that in the data collection process, the personal and intellectual characteristics of the researcher influence the kind of data they collect from the field. This could be what and how much they observe in the field or what they pick up from interviews with research participants. The gender of a researcher is one of those characteristics which can influence the kind or depth of data to be gathered. In this study, May and Pattillo-McCoy's (2000) arguments played out but in a somewhat reversed manner. Men and women reacted differently during the interview sessions partly because of who they saw the researcher to be. Through the various interview sessions, I observed that the women saw me as 'one of their own' who could easily identify with some of the issues they talked about. It was common to hear female participants pass the comment, "you are also a woman, so you understand what I am saying". Seeing the researcher as their fellow woman, the female participants often spoke more freely and gave detailed accounts of their experiences. Male participants, on the other hand, for the fact that I was not a man, did not see in the researcher what their female counterparts did. I was not 'one of their own' as some of them asked if being a woman put me in a good position to appreciate some of the stances they had taken regarding their relationships. As compared to the women, therefore, the men were not as forthcoming with information although they were satisfied that my marital status put me in a good position to research on the subject.

In some cases, some male participants sought to find out about my personal marital experiences. It was observed that giving out such information made such participants more relaxed and willing to share their own experiences. This 'give and take' happened to be the remedy for dealing with a downside of interviewing as identified by Valentine (2001), which is the reluctance on the part of participants to freely talk about their experiences particularly when it is on a sensitive subject. Aside the life history interviewing itself, I also paid attention to the ways in which participants said what they did, the facial expressions, tone of voices and general body language. These form an important part of the primary data and added meaning to what was being said.

After the thirty-first interview, I reached saturation point. At this point no particularly new things were coming up from the interviews. I, therefore, concluded the data collection.

3.6 Ensuring Rigour

Rigour, which is expressed as reliability and validity in quantitative methodology, is considered that factor, which gives credence to social science research (De Wet & Erasmus, 2005; Mavarsti, 2004). Whilst reliability involves the accuracy of one's research methods and techniques, validity suggests that one is observing, identifying or measuring what they say they are (Mason, 2003). Quantitative research is often thought of as more amenable to the process of ensuring rigor. This is because the instruments of data collection and analysis employed in quantitative work are defined as more consistent making it possible for generalizations of data. Indeed, "qualitative researchers are sometimes described as journalists or soft scientists who do only unscientific, exploratory and subjective work, whilst quantitative work is believed to be more positivistic" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 2). This supposed limitation of qualitative research raises concerns

about reliability and validity of qualitative data. Qualitative researchers have, however, suggested ways of ensuring rigor in their research. According to Guba and Lincoln (2005),

> Rigour in qualitative work can be ensured through factors of trustworthiness, authenticity, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Whilst credibility and transferability replace internal and external validity respectively, dependability also becomes the alternative for reliability in the quantitative approach (p. 196).

It was for the purpose of credibility and transferability that a working definition for 'consensual unions' was developed to guide the study. In addition, a clear inclusion and exclusion criteria was defined to ensure that the research participants fit the working definition of being in a 'consensual union' and that it was that phenomenon which was being studied. Silverman (2003) argues that for reliability (dependability) to be ensured in qualitative work, much depends on the researcher. He or she would have to take certain steps in the research process to make their findings reliable. For instance, in writing field notes on observations or transcribing interviews, these should be done in a careful, detailed, and transparent manner. Again, in coding data, the inter-coder approach can be employed. This is effective as different people see aspects of a phenomenon. A clearer picture of a phenomenon under study could therefore be achieved when the analysis is done from several angles.

The three-stage life history interviewing method for this study had an inherent capacity of enhancing reliability. At the last stage of the interview session, I recounted the key information collected back to the research participants for them to confirm if I had accurately captured their responses. This was a system of double-checking the data to make it reliable. Notes which were taken in addition to audio recordings also served as a backup for ensuring that there was consistency in what was being recorded. Also, careful observation of the body language of

participants during interviews was an important approach which added rich data to the verbal data being collected. In many instances, the non-verbal cues which were observed formed the basis for further probing to ensure confirmability of the data. The use of a linguistic expert (see Appendix VII) to also transcribe interviews from Twi to English made it possible for me to compare the different meanings and representations in the data. In a few cases, I went back to participants to seek further clarity on some aspects of the information they had given to avoid misrepresentation. Again, in using the inter-coder approach, I submitted the transcribed data to first year PhD students of the Sociology Department of the University of Ghana to use for their qualitative research methods lesson on coding and doing thematic network analysis. I then compared their results to mine. Finally, through extensive discussions with the thesis supervisors and seminar presentations at the Sociology Department of the University of Ghana and the department of African Studies and Anthropology of the University of Birmingham, I received feedback and suggestions on how to accurately interpret the data. All of these efforts improved the reliability of the data.

3.7 Data Handling and Analysis

Data collection and analyses were done concurrently. After each audiotaped interview session, the interview was first transcribed verbatim. For interviews which were conducted in Twi, I translated them into English as I played the recordings and transcribed. To ensure that what those participants said in Twi was being transcribed correctly and verbatim, I also employed the services of a linguistic expert to also translate and transcribe such interviews. Notes taken were also written more elaborately as often times they were written in shorthand during the interviews. I used the same process for two of the interview sessions which were not audiotaped. When the full transcript of an interview had been produced, the next step was to clean the data. The essence of the cleaning

was to make the data more concise and focused on the subject under investigation. During the interviewing, it was common to find participants digress from the subject matter and talk about unrelated issues and later return to the substantive. Cleaning the data, therefore, involved not completely deleting but putting aside such unrelated information.

After cleaning, I organised the data into relevant themes to make meaning of it. At this stage, the thematic network analysis technique was used. Thematic network analysis as a tool for handling qualitative data is useful in unearthing the salient themes in a text (Attride-Stirling, 2001). What constitutes a theme, according to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 82), is any idea that "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set." Arrtide-Stirling (2001) suggests that:

> …. Thematic networks systematise the extraction of: (i) lowest-order premises evident in the text (Basic Themes); (ii) categories of basic themes grouped together to summarise more abstract principles (Organising Themes); and (iii) super-ordinate themes encapsulating the principal metaphors in the text as a whole (Global Themes). These are then represented as web-like maps depicting the salient themes at each of the three levels and illustrating the relationships between them (p. 388).

I employed this step by step process of breaking down the text for further analyses. The first step in doing so was to design a coding frame. The recurring ideas in the text formed the basis for the coding frame. Subsequent interview texts were fed into the frame and anytime new codes emerged they were included in the frame. This was done until each line of each interview had been assigned a relevant code. The research questions and objectives were instrumental in the generation of the codes and subsequently the themes. Diagrammatical representations of the connections amongst the basic, organising and global themes which were derived through this process. (See Appendices III, IV, V and VI). Further analyses of these themes were done with relevant literature. The themes

which were derived were in response to the research questions and objectives and therefore form the basis for discussions in the empirical chapters (chapters 4, 5 and 6).

3.8 Ethical Considerations

According to Marvasti (2004, p. 135), "when working with human subjects, certain steps must be taken to protect the dignity and safety of research participants". From this perspective ethical principles were earnestly adhered to in the research process. The first step to ensuring that all ethical issues pertaining to the study were duly addressed was to seek ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee for Humanities at the University of Ghana. This process involved presenting a completed protocol submission form which outlined the objectives of the study and how the researcher intended to go about conducting the study. A consent form which requested an indication of the ethical considerations – risks of the study, confidentiality, and withdrawal from the study- was also completed and submitted to the committee. Approval for the commencement of the fieldwork was given after the committee was satisfied with the information I had given.

After completing the paperwork for ethical clearance, the ethical issues had to be addressed in the field. During the fieldwork, the principle of informed consent as indicated on the consent form was adhered to very strictly. The nature and purpose of the study was thoroughly explained to research participants for them to make the decision as to whether or not to participate in the study. They were made to understand that the research findings would be for academic purposes only. Participants were also notified of the potential harm that granting interviews could cause them. This envisaged harm was the emotional stress that the recounting of their experiences in consensual unions could bring to them. The need for the interviews to be audiotaped was also

explained to the participants. Having thoroughly explained these issues to them, they volunteered to take part in the study. To further ensure the voluntary participation of participants it was made clear to them that there was not going to be any form of reward, either in cash or in kind, for their participation. Participants were thus, not coerced in any way to grant an interview. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point in time.

For anonymity purposes, participants were not required to provide their real names during interview sessions. Pseudonyms were used to represent them. In addition, where their socio-demographic background needed to be described, it was done in such a way as to conceal their identity. In this study, another form of anonymity had to be dealt with. This was the anonymity of informants. In a few instances, informants who had pointed the researcher to a potential participant did not want their identities to be revealed to the latter. In such cases, the researcher approached the potential participants without reference to the informants.

Confidentiality of the information collected from participants was ensured. Recorded and transcribed interviews were kept private in password-protected file documents. This password was produced by and known only to the researcher. The file documents were further saved in the researcher's Gmail account which is also password-protected. Participants were assured that these documents will be deleted in due course. They were also informed that it might became necessary for the interviews conducted in Twi to be made available to some experts from the linguistics department to assist with their translation. Those experts were, however, to be considered as part of the research team.

Where couples were interviewed, both partners were assured that information they gave out would not be made known to the other partner. Although this was made clear before the commencement of interviews, there were instances where some people sought to find out from me what their partner had said about them or how they had responded to a particular issue. Such participants had to be reminded of the commitment not to leak each other's information. In this way confidentiality was strictly enforced.

3.9 Positionality of the Researcher

There are debates concerning the advantages and disadvantages of a researcher's position as an 'insider' or 'outsider' in the qualitative research context. Some hold the view that a researcher's position as an 'insider' could be problematic as he or she is often at risk of taking some important aspects for granted and overlooking them and also stands the chance of not being as objective as needed. Others, however, in defence of the 'insider' position argue that it is not as problematic as 'insiders' know exactly what to look out for during the research (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). More recent discourses on the subject are pointing to the fact that in many instances there are no clear lines between these two positions and it is possible for researchers may find themselves shuffling between the two rather than being strictly an 'insider' or an 'outsider' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Naples, 1996).

As indicated earlier, I personally knew about six of the research participants. Some of these had on various occasions discussed aspects of their experiences in their relationships with me. There was, therefore, some level of familiarity with their stories. In that regard, I considered myself an 'insider'. However, the familiarity with the stories of such participants had to be properly handled.

I, therefore, assumed the position of an 'outsider' who was venturing into the personal lives of the participants and was going to hear their stories for the first time, as was the case with the other participants who were not previously known to the researcher. I adopted this posture in order not to take any information given for granted and not to be quick to interpret the data on the basis of my prior knowledge of their experiences. Ultimately, the aim was to enhance objectivity. That notwithstanding, at certain points, I went back to the position of an 'insider' when I had to probe further on certain matters based on what I already knew about the participant.

3.10 Reflexive Assessment of Research Process

I became interested in researching on consensual unions because of my personal interactions with some friends and neighbours who are in such unions. Occasionally, some of them had spoken to me about challenges they faced in their relationships because marriage rites had not been performed. I, therefore, considered exploring the phenomenon in a scientific and systematic manner. The first challenge I needed to deal with was with the definition of a 'consensual union'. Marriage in African and, especially, Ghanaian societies is characterised by some degree of indefiniteness given the fact that traditional marriages in particular are more of processes than an event; processes which can last over long periods of time. Again, the advent of Christianity and modernization have resulted in the addition of church weddings to the traditional marriages. These factors make it quite complex to define what constitutes marriage. Even more problematic is defining the permutations to marriage such as a consensual union. Amid these limitations, I had to clearly define what I mean by consensual union in order to determine the target population and to address the research questions and objectives.

Another arduous challenge which I was confronted with at the early stages of the study was how to identify prospective research participants. Given the fact that persons in consensual unions are not an obvious section of the Ghanaian society, in that, one cannot easily tell whether a person is in a consensual union or not, the challenge was in finding them. A ring is a commonly known symbol of marriage. However, it is not always the case that married people were rings. The absence of a ring could, therefore, not be used to determine that an individual was not married. Although, as mentioned earlier, I personally knew a few of such people, more participants were needed in order to provide a richer and more diverse set of data. A lot of asking around and investigations had to go into identifying the participants. This took a considerable amount of time.

After identifying potential research participants, another challenge was getting their consent to participate in the study. Intimate relationships are a sensitive issue to discuss and many people consider it as their private affair and unwilling to discuss such matters particularly with a 'stranger'. Secondly, in the Ghanaian society, being in a consensual union, especially for women sometimes comes with some degree of stigma. These factors made some potential participants shy away from participating even after the purpose of the study had been thoroughly explained to them and anonymity and confidentiality assured. There were others who had earlier expressed interest and willingness to take part in the study but later withdrew. The search for other people then had to start all over again. Two potential participants were lost this way. For those who opted to participate in the study, I needed to be cautious in my choice of words and in my demeanour during interviews in order not to cause offence.

A third challenge encountered in conducting the study was the researcher having to deal with the emotional and psychological stresses that came with hearing participants' stories. Maintaining the position as a researcher and not interfering in the lives of some of the participants being studied was often emotionally draining for me. For instance, in the case of an abusive relationship, the researcher thought a piece of advice to the abused about handling abusive relationships would have been of benefit, but it was not in my place to do so. Even when some participants themselves asked my opinion on how to deal with their partners, I had to maintain a neutral ground as a researcher.

One major limitation of the study was the issue of language. Interviews were conducted in only Twi and English because those are, they only languages the researcher can speak and write. Some research participants whose mother tongue was not Twi, however, mentioned the fact that they could have expressed themselves better if they were speaking their own language. It became obvious then that this linguistic challenge also in a way limited the quality of data collected.

Another limitation lies in the fact that, for a study which was aimed at understanding consensual unions as a form of family formation in Ghana, it may have been useful to extend the data collection to some extended family members of research participants based on the information the latter gave. This could have added to the data and provided a deeper understanding of how the phenomenon plays out. Time and resource constraints, however, could not allow for the researcher to pursue this. This is, therefore, well considered for future research.

The challenges and limitations of the study, notwithstanding, I have gained insights into ways of negotiating around particularly unforeseen hitches during the research process. This has added to my repertoire of experience in social research.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the theoretical foundation for the methodological approach of this study. It emphasised the practical steps of the research process which made it systematic and scientific, while explaining the challenges encountered and limitations. The ways in which the challenges were handled are also reported. The chapter has also provided a description of the socio-demographic background of the research participants who were sampled for the study. The ensuing chapters focus on the findings that the study produced.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE INCIDENCE OF CONSENSUAL UNIONS: A MATRIX OF INSTRUMENTAL AND EXPRESSIVE FACTORS

4.1 Introduction

Although consensual unions are becoming more commonplace especially in urban spaces in Ghana, marriage is still held in high esteem. In most cases, people wish for the ideal situation, which is, to get married in the proper fashion. The lyrics of a highlife song by Ghanaian musician Obrafour (featuring Bisa K'dei) titled *Pempenaa,* gives credence to this argument. The song says:

♫*Pempenaa mpenaa, mma yɛnntwe mpena Abena*♫
Maabena, mepɛ sɛ me ne wo tena
Nana, Nana mma yɛnntwe mpena Abena
Maabenaa, mepɛ sɛ me ne wo tena

Ei, wosɛ awareɛ nti fa me kɔ fie kohu w'abusua
Menyɛ wo ho adeɛ, menhyɛ wo sika kɔkɔɔ pɛtea
Yɛdɔ yɛn ho a, yɛnnye akyinnyeɛ eee, m'akoma fam wo ho oo Nyame ama
Abena ee, ma me nhyɛ wo kawa, m'akoma fam wo ho oo obi dɔba ee
Abena, Abena ee, you are the one, there is nobody but you
I'm waiting for the day they'll be rolling the carpet for me and you

Ɔhemaa ne ho yɛfɛ. N'ahobrɛase na eku me kɛkɛ
Bisa, wonim sɛ naano yi a na me see no pɛ?
Mesee no sɛ ɔmma menhyɛ n'akoma mu ahenkyɛ
Hwɛ, w'apene so pɛpɛɛpɛ.
Nti mahyɛ no bɔ sɛ ɔbɛte me nka, ɛnkyɛ
Mempɛ mpenatwe, ɛnyɛ animuonyam hyɛ.
Afei nso mempɛ sɛ mede ne dɔ no bɛto ntɛ
Anigyeɛ bi abɛhyɛ me mu, ɔno nti.
Mehu no a, na me haw mpo me werɛ afi
Me nni akyire nsuti.
Brand new car with a trial number deɛ,
Mesi no pi, mɛ license ansa na matwi
Ɔkwakuo sɛ deɛ ɛhyɛ n'afonom na ɛyɛ ne dea.
Ɔbofoɔ ne deɛ ne nam ho apaso
Memma wonfiri wofie mmɛda awɔshia.

Ɛba no saa a amammerɛ manni so
Mede kawa si so a, yɛkɔ sen-sign na me din da wo so a,
Menya ɔsofopɔn bi bɛhyira so a,
Ɛno ansa na mɛhunu sɛ wo dɔ no abɔ ntoa, away.

Maabenaa, dom me ɛ, menkɔhu wo ni ne wo se
Mensɔ wonsa nkɔ fie, Nana mempɛ mpenatwe.
Twere Kronkron no se no pi.
Hwɛ, manware wo a mennya obi, mennya, mennya obi.
Mennyaa wo mma obi, Abenaa mma yɛn twe mpena
Yɛnware nni agorɔ pempenaa ee
Abena, Abena, Maabena, Abena, Abena, Maabena, Abena,
Woda soronko wɔ mma mu, manya wo yi mennyae wo mu da.
Maka ntam sɛ, mede wo bɛkɔ me fie ee ee
Efiri akoma mu, ɔdɔ yɛ wu menni wo ho agorɔ da.
Aberɛ nyinaa mu no mɛma wo nidie ee ee

Pempenaa mpenaa
Mma yɛnntwe mpena Abena
Maabenaa, mepɛ sɛ me ne wo tena
Nana, Nana, mma yɛnntwe mpena Abena
Pempenaa Abena.

Ghanaian music is a potent medium that carries messages about the dynamics of social structure and social life. Traditional folk songs, highlife and contemporary hip life all give insights into the workings of Ghanaian society. This song, *Pempenaa*, talks about a premarital relationship and how the singer thinks the relationship should be conducted. In *Pempenaa*, a premarital sexual relationship is projected as against traditional Ghanaian, as well as Christian religious values and practices. The singers espouse the ideal of completing all traditional marriage procedures, registering the marriage and seeking the blessings of a Reverend Minister, most likely in church as the necessary elements for the start of marital life. In practice, however, these processes are not always completed before the start of marital life. Why this is the case is the main thrust of this chapter.

'Pempenaa' translates into English as follows:

Pempenaa mpenaa
Let us avoid concubinage, Abena
Maabena, I want to live with you.
Nana, let us avoid concubinage, Abena
Maabena, I want to live with you.

Because I want to marry you,
I demand that I approach your family customarily
And perform the traditional marriage rites
And put a gold ring on your finger
Since we love each other, We need not argue with each other.
My heart is intertwined with yours, my God-gifted one
Abena, let me engage you with a ring, my heart is intertwined with yours
Abena, Abena eee
You are the one, There's nobody but you
I'm waiting for the day they'll be rolling the carpet for me and you.

Ɔhemmaa, is a beautiful lass
I am infatuated with her humility
Bisa, do you know that it is just recently that I asked her hand in marriage?
And pleaded with her to permit me to wear the crown of her heart?
Lo, she has so consented.
And I have promised her that she would hear from me sooner than later
I dislike concubinage, for it is not honourable
More so I don't want to joke with her love affairs
I am filled with great joy because of her
The mere sight of her assuages my troubles
I won't pursue it so as to stumble
Brand new car with a trial number,
I'll make a decisive decision to get it licensed before riding in it.
The monkey says, it is the food already in your mouth that is yours
The hunter whose game is on the barn is the one acknowledged as a real hunter
I won't admit you in my house as a concubine
That is a contravention of our custom
When I engage you with a ring, and we sign the marriage certificate,
And my name becomes appendage to yours,
And a renowned pastor celebrates our marriage,
Then I would realise that your love has become a reality, away.

Maabena, be gracious to me
Lead me to see your mother and father
Let me hold your hands and go home
Nana, I don't intend to live in concubinage
The Holy Bible does not approve of it
Lo, besides you I can't get anyone to marry.
I will never, never get a substitute.
I will not leave you for somebody else to take over.
Abena, let us avoid concubinage.
Let's sing the pempenaa song as a couple:
Abena, Abena, Maabena, Abena, Abena, Maabena.
You are unique amongst women,
Once I have gotten hold of you I will never let you off
I have vowed,
That I will embrace you in my house, from the depths of my heart.
My darling, I will never be kidding
I will always accord you honour and dignity.

Pempenaa mpenaa,
Let us avoid concubinage, Abenaa
Maabena, I want to live with you.
Nana, Nana, let us avoid concubinage
Maabena, I want to live you
Pempenaa mpenaa.

In this chapter, the various circumstances that resulted in the research participants' decision to enter consensual unions are discussed. Two major variables came out as highly dominant in influencing the dynamics of the circumstances to be explained. These are gender and socio-economic status of the research participants. The analysis of data showed that in almost all cases, the unions start as premarital sexual relationships that do not in many respects mirror marriage. Many of the rights and duties between married couples and especially living together do not characterise the relationships at their beginning. It is often as years go by that, they begin to assume a more enduring, 'stabilised marriage like' status, which in this study is defined as consensual unions. In view of this, the Chapter, which addresses the first objective of this study, is organised

in three broad sections. The first section examines those specific circumstances that contributed to the start of the unions whilst the second focuses on the conceptualisation of the unions by the partners involved. The third section looks at the different types of terminologies that are used by persons in consensual unions in referring to each other.

Analysis in this chapter is done drawing on Collins' (2004) Theory of Situations. The theory is used in explaining how the decision of research participants to enter consensual unions was influenced by some specific situations in which they found themselves. In describing the circumstances that led to participants' entry in consensual unions, the ways in which those circumstances create a situation of unequal power relations and how that also affects the types of attitude and responses (emotional energies) the partners exhibit, are also highlighted in the chapter.

4.2 Opting for a Consensual Union

Six factors, captured as 'livelihood strategy', 'escape route', 'for the sake of intimate relations', 'under a spell', 'demonstration of maturity and masculinity' and 'rehearsing for marriage' shape the decision to choose a consensual union and thus, form the focus of examination in this section. These factors can be categorised into two, namely, expressive, and instrumental factors. Whilst expressive factors are about intangible issues such as identity, emotions and the spiritual, instrumental factors refer to practical and observable matters (Baron, Byrne & Branscombe, 2006). Given this categorisation, therefore, the quest for intimate relations, the influence of a spell and the demonstration of male maturity and masculinity can be termed as the expressive factors. On the other hand, the survival strategy, escapism, and the rehearsal for marriage are the instrumental factors. These circumstances that are discussed below constitute the situations under which the

unions were formed. The first four factors were exclusive to female participants, the fifth to male participants and the sixth was common to both male and female participants. According to Collins' Theory of Situations, such circumstances constitute the basis for understanding the interactive processes that ensue in relationships.

4.2.1 A Livelihood Strategy

> When I first came to Accra, things were very difficult for me. I was selling pure water with some other girls at Dome and we were sleeping in a kiosk there…. So when I met this man and he said he was interested in me, I thought it was a good idea and I agreed to his proposal because he was working and had even rented a place where he lived. (*Maabena – Interview, October 2016*).

Maabena's account, is very representative of the stories shared by six other female participants (Nana Akua, Owusuaa, Agyeiwaa, Dede, Naana and Awuradwoa). The quest for livelihood improvement was a key reason that women would consent to starting a premarital relationship. These women sought to take advantage of the union to improve their standards of living. No male participant gave this reason. However, it is not the mere fact of their being women that put them in such a position but a multiplicity of other factors which work together with their gender. Women whose narratives were like Maabena's had some common features. They were mostly migrants, one of whom (Maabena) was a first-generation migrant, had low levels of education, and were not gainfully employed. The highest level of education attained by a member of this cohort was Junior High School and at the time of entering their relationships they were engaged in economic activities such as stone cracking, street hawking and doing people's laundry. These women often in their attempt to find better economic opportunities had migrated from their various hometowns and villages to Accra. Migration to Accra for many of them was necessitated by the search for

economic prospects, especially where there seemed to be no assistance from their families or other external sources.

Although rural-urban migration does not always deliver economic opportunities, it is often sought after as a remedy for poverty for many young people in African countries, including Ghana (Awumbila & Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2008). In Ghana, the differences between rural and urban centres in terms of amenities and even job opportunities are obvious, making places like Accra quite attractive to young people in search of jobs. In their work which explored the linkages amongst gender, poverty, and migration, Awumbila and Ardayfio-Schandorf (2008), pointed out that the traditional nature of migration in Ghana, which was amongst other things, male-dominated is increasingly becoming feminised. This trend, they argue, has come about because of "changing economic conditions, population expansion, urbanisation and improved mobility" (p. 174). Women, therefore, may leave their rural homes to urban spaces as independent persons to pursue their own economic agendas and not to join husbands or family members as used to be the case some decades past (Adepoju, 2004).

Having moved to Accra, Maabena narrates how life turned out to be. She describes it as 'very difficult'. This 'difficulty' she expressed was in terms of finding a job which was going to earn her enough for her upkeep. Being a migrant who had no family members with whom she could lodge, accommodation was also a challenge. Whilst very high levels of education may not always guarantee that one would be gainfully employed, it is all the more difficult for the person who has a low level of education and little or no employable skills to get employed in the formal sector in particular. Employment avenues for unskilled persons in formal organisations would usually be

low-paying jobs. “Young women lack the organisational and support networks that enable older married women to survive in the urban environment and may also lack the support of their own families” (Ankomah, 1996, p. 40). Ankomah’s assertion seemed to resonate in the experiences shared by Maabena and other female participants who identified with her. According to them, the reality of the economic conditions of urban living was the main drive for entering a consensual relationship. In the case of Dede, she was not a migrant. She had grown up with her parents in Accra. According to her, however, she considered entering a consensual union because of the economic hardships her family faced. The relationship was, therefore, to serve as a relief from the economic challenges, a line of action encouraged by her mother. Dede’s account bears semblance with what Duncan (2010) found in some cocoa growing areas in Ghana when she studied the relationship between conjugal unions and cocoa productions. The study found that, although it is not explicitly encouraged, consensual unions for some families are indeed a way of reducing poverty.

A significant body of literature discusses sexual relations in general and premarital sexual relationships in both developed and developing societies, sub-Saharan Africa included. This available literature on premarital sexual unions amongst young people in the modern African context suggests such unions could be transactional, exploitative, or just for free (Kuate-Defor, 2004). A range of factors which might be responsible for the practice which is viewed as widespread amongst contemporary youth have also been identified. Smith (2000) found that for young men and women in south-eastern Nigeria, premarital sexual relationships are a marker of individuality, independence from tradition and even shows a person’s level of exposure to the

wider world. Sexual experience, according to Smith (2000) has, therefore, become for the Nigerian youth, an indicator of maturity, enlightenment, and modernity.

In Ghana, Ankomah (1996), has indicated that contemporary premarital relationships could be understood as a form of transaction whereby sexual services are exchanged for material gains. Transaction, in this sense does not strictly imply a contractual agreement between the two parties involved. The expression of interest to enter an intimate relationship almost automatically carries with it the embedded implications of an exchange relationship. Neither the provision of sexual services nor that of material gains is unidirectional in terms of which gender provides it. The phenomenon of 'sugar mummies' and 'sugar daddies' for example prove this assertion. Whilst in some cases women are the providers of financial and material gains, the reverse also holds true in other situations (Dinan, 1983; Kuate-Defo, 2004). However, a number of studies (Akuffo 1987; Bleek 1976; Dinan 1983; Orubuloye, Caldwell, & Caldwell 1994b) on premarital sexual unions have concluded that there are gender differences in the nature, motives and objectives of such unions and in most cases, women are influenced by the economic factor in which case they provide sexual services in exchange for economic benefits. Such women intend for their partners to provide at least their basic needs. In Ankomah's study which sampled about 400 young women from Cape Coast in premarital sexual unions aged from 18 to 25 years, for example, he found that the expectations of the women included money for daily upkeep, rent as well as money for hairdressing, shoes and dresses. From this perspective, other studies (Dinan, 1983; Karanja, 1994) have also argued that it is the economic motivation that fuels the phenomenon of sugar daddies, also sometimes referred to as 'sponsors' who are older wealthy men with the resources to provide

for their girls (Meekers & Calvès, 1997). This perhaps explains why no male participant mentioned the financial factor as a motivation for entering a sexual relationship.

When female research participants cited financial constraints as the reason for their decision to start relationships, they were asked whether they had considered going in for the sugar daddies. Awuradwoa had this to say in response:

> Eeii, as for those men [sugar daddies], no. Most of the time they have wives which means that they will not marry you. I hear some of them even use girls for money rituals. And you know that sleeping with somebody's husband too is a sin. If you do that, in future when you get married another woman might do the same thing to you. Me, I think the *dabi dabi ɛbɛyɛ yie* is better than the *aben wɔ ha ooo* (laughs) *(Interview, October 2016).*

Dabi dabi ɛbɛyɛ yie and *aben wɔ ha* are both Akan phrases from two popular Ghanaian high life songs by Amakye Dede and Daddy Lumba respectively. *Dabi dabi ɛbɛyɛ yie* roughly translates as 'things will be well in the future', whilst *aben wɔ ha* would translate 'it's already cooked here'. The phrase as used by Amakye Dede in his song was to convey the message that life may not start off as all rosy but once the future remains unknown, it is important to strive on and work hard which will result in things improving in the future. *Aben wɔ ha*, on the other hand, refers to the situation where a person, usually a woman, goes into a relationship where the man is already established and well to do. What Awuradwoa was trying to say then was that she preferred struggling through life with a young man who was not necessarily rich so things would get better for them in the future than going in for the sugar daddy who as the name sugar implies had already worked for his money and wealth making it more likely to have a sweet experience with him.

Whilst the conclusion by Meekers and Calvès (1997) earlier stated holds true, Awuradwoa's quote gives the indication that although sugar daddies may be more financially sound, they often are not

ideal for marriage since they often are already married men. For this reason, a woman who also thinks of marriage as one of the benefits to derive in the long term from a premarital sexual union may not go in for a sugar daddy. For a younger unmarried man, there is the possibility of marriage in the long run whereas the option of marrying a sugar daddy is almost an impossibility. Since the chance of becoming a second wife is both not viable and desirable, the only possibility was the option of them becoming perpetual 'outside wives' (Obbo, 1987) which many of them were not prepared to be. "An outside wife is a woman with whom a man, usually married, has regular sexual relations and children, and though is not publicly shown by the man as his wife, is financially maintained by him. Outside wives, therefore, have limited social and legal recognition because no marriage rites are performed on them" (Karanja, 1987, p. 252-253). The prospects of marriage were, therefore, found to be significant in the choice of partners of the women. From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that there was some level of calculated benefits by the women before they entered their unions. These benefits are the livelihood support and potential marriage. However, with reference to information they provided, it is also evident that their rational decisions were influenced by the situation of harsh economic conditions. Opting for a consensual union can, thus, be described as one of the results of economic hardship. In this instance, the saying by Collins (2004) that "every day will have its dog" is given credence. This means that every situation will create its resultant actions.

Awuradwoa's description as 'sinful' the act of a woman having a sexual relationship with a married sugar daddy is quite an interesting dimension. Most participants professed that they were Christians. Christianity is one of the world's religions which takes a stand against premarital and extra-marital sexual relationships, which are often referred to as fornication and adultery,

respectively. In *Pempenaa*, for example, Obrafuor mentions that the Holy Bible is emphatic on the wrongfulness of premarital sexual relationships. The fact that one of these two practices, extra marital sexual relations, was considered as sinful and not necessarily the other, premarital sexual relations, was therefore quite interesting. When asked whether there was any difference between a sexual relationship with a married man and that with an unmarried man in terms of being 'sinful', responses from the female participants suggested that the former was a 'greater sin' than the latter. They were often quick to add the marriage prospects in both scenarios and how that influenced their choice of unmarried men who were not necessarily well to do. Their point was that the possibility of marriage with unmarried young men in the future made sexual relationships with them less sinful since sex is an integral part of marriage anyway.

While the young women suggested that they chose not to look for sugar daddies because it was more sinful, scholars such as Nielsen and Svarer (2009) offer a different explanation. Their line of explaining the choice of the partners of these women is the question of their pool of eligible men. Kuate-Defo (2004) has argued that because the sugar daddy and sugar mama practice can be described as an urban African phenomenon where young women and men use it as a livelihood strategy, it is common to find sugar daddies with all classes of women. In Ghana, however, such men often fall within the category of those referred to as 'big men' usually of relatively high socio-economic standing. Given their social statuses and backgrounds they may also want to enter homogamous unions. Nielsen and Svarer (2009) explain homogamy as marrying close in status. Sugar daddies in Ghana may, therefore, prefer women with some appreciable level of education and class with whom they can go places. Going by this logic, sugar daddies become more available to some category of women and supports what has been posited by other scholars (Ardayfio-

Schandorf, 2007; Karanja, 1994) that the sugar daddy relationships tend to be with female university students and young female professionals. The chances of the junior high school leaver selling 'pure water' around the Dome market meeting that 'big man' is, therefore, very significantly reduced. It may thus very well be the case that Maabena and the six other participants were not actively avoiding sugar daddies per se, but simply had not encountered them. This goes to reinforce the argument that although these female participants are seen to have taken the decision to settle for unmarried men, the situation of their available marriage market also had a role to play in their choices. An understanding of their decisions is, therefore, better appreciated when the focus is moved from these women to their situations, as Collins (2004) argues.

Upon settling on the kind of men they wanted as partners in consensual unions, these women participants mentioned that on their part they also provide certain services apart from sexual relations like cooking, washing, and cleaning. These activities, according to them are done as a form of appreciation for the support they receive from their partners and as a way of enticing the men to be consistent in their provision for them. In many instances, the lovers would not be living together at the beginning of the relationship. Over time, however, most women gradually relocate and join their partners in their places of residence where practicable. The decision to move in with men was not only pursued where women had accommodation challenges. They also did so as a way of securing their position in the lives of their partners. There was the general perception that men have the tendency to keep multiple partners in which case he would have to share his resources amongst the women. Moving in with one's partner was therefore a way of ensuring a stable place in the relationship and possibly marriage in the future.

With women striving for survival and negotiating for possible marriage in the future, their relationships also produced another situation of power rituals (Collins, 2004). Their expectation of their partners to serve as livelihood support systems put the men in a dominant position in the union. This is because the women became dependent on the men for their maintenance. Additionally, since marriage was more or less a latent function of the union, these women were also hoping for a time when the men would give the 'order' for them to marry.

4.2.2 An Escape Route

Ruth and Korkor shared two somewhat similar stories of how they ended up with their partners as a way of escaping sexual harassment from men with whom they lived within the same household. In Ruth's case, the man in question was the husband of her 'madam', the woman in whose shop she had been enrolled as an apprentice in dressmaking. The madam's husband was a friend of Ruth's parents back in their hometown. During one of his visits from Accra to the village, he found that after completing Junior High School, Ruth's parents could neither afford to see her through further education nor pay for her to learn a trade. He therefore offered to bring her to Accra to live with his family and learn dressmaking in his wife's shop. As part of the apprenticeship arrangement, Ruth was also required to work as a house help in her new home in lieu of paying an apprenticeship fee. According to Ruth, her parents and her were excited about this offer because it came as a relief from the family's financial burdens and was also an assurance of a better future for her. A few months into her stay with her new family in Accra, however, she realised she was going to have to be doing more than just learning dressmaking and helping with household chores. She narrates her side of the story as such:

> My madam travelled to Begoro to visit her mother and it was left with me, her husband and the two children in the house. That very night when she left, I was sleeping in my room

> when her husband came in and started fondling my breasts. I was very scared and was just begging him. The children were sleeping in the same room and I was afraid they would see us and tell my madam. Since that day anytime I was alone with him at home, he would try something like that, I knew he wanted to sleep with me…But that time too, I had met James who was living in the same compound with some relatives of mine and had said he wanted to be in a relationship with me. I had not given in to his proposal because I did not like him. But from the way things were going in my madam's house, I decided to move in with him because I knew if my madam ever caught her husband and I doing anything, I would be the one to be blamed and it would bring a whole lot of issues. I lied to them that I wanted to go and visit my relatives and I did not return to the house. *(Interview, January 2017)*

With Korkor, her maternal auntie had brought her from their hometown to assist her with her trading business because there was no possibility of her furthering her education after JHS. Her role in her auntie's business was to hawk food items. She, however, had to find a way to prevent her auntie's husband from sleeping with her. In her assessment of what she was faced with, the best way was to completely move out of the house and since she, like Ruth, could not afford accommodation and fully cater for her upkeep, her best option was to agree to the proposal of this young man she had met through the hawking business. She told me:

> My auntie's husband, anytime he saw me coming out of the bathroom and was going to dress up he would barge into the room to see me naked. I didn't like it at all and I knew he wanted to do something bad to me but I was afraid to tell my auntie because I didn't want to create any problems in the house since she was the one rather helping me by bringing me to her house…. So sometimes I go and sell and not come back home. I was spending those nights with John and I finally moved out. *(Interview, November 2016)*

According to Yeboah and Batse (2009), "sexual harassment includes women being touched against their will, forcing a woman to touch the private parts of a man against her will, threats on refusal to yield to sexual advances in school, demanding sex before the offer of job, and threats of job loss if sex is not granted" (p. 79). Parkes, Heslop, Januario, Oando and Sabaa (2016) also mention peeping as a form of harassment. What Ruth and Korkor both described in their narratives can,

therefore be termed as sexual harassment. Sexual harassment of women by men is a global issue and is sustained by silence because an attempt to expose it can be risky (Morley, 2011). It can be risky in the sense that exposing one's experience can also mean some negative consequences for the victim. In a study of how tradition and modernity influence how girls' talk about sexual relationships and violence in Kenya, Ghana and Mozambique, Parkes et al., (2016) found that victims of sexual harassment in Ghana were less likely to report their experiences to someone, a situation attributed to the strict norms and taboos around the topic of sex. These two participants indicated that one of the reasons they could not report what was happening to them was the fear of being blamed or being accused of lying, thus their silence. Whilst I was the first person Korkor claimed to have mentioned her harassment to, Ruth said she had told some few friends about it, but that was only some years after she had left the house.

It is in view of this culture of silence around the phenomenon and other forms of abuse in Ghana that it remains underreported, especially when it happens within the domestic setting. Studies in Ghana have, however, shown that sexual harassment occurs in domestic settings, in academic institutions (Britwum & Anokye, 2006; Coker-Appiah & Cusack, 1999; Morley, 2011; Norman, Aikins & Binka, 2013), within the police and military (Norman, Aikins & Binka, 2010) and even with faith based organisations (Norman et al., 2013). In these studies, women of varying socio-demographic backgrounds – age, marital status, profession, and educational attainment- have been found to be victims of acts of sexual harassment.

Some lines of argument suggest that the portrayal of women as sex objects is a major factor that contributes to the fact that targets and indeed victims of sexual harassment are mostly women.

Others point to patriarchy which prescribes submission of women to men at all fronts. Yet another explanation which Adomako Ampofo (1993), describes as problematic, is the argument that male sexuality cannot be controlled and becomes even more uncontrollable when women dress in a provocative manner. Parkes et al., (2016) have also asserted that financial dependence is a major factor which makes women susceptible to sexual exploitation by men. Their reason seemed to be the case of these two women who were being maintained by the harassers and their wives. For both Ruth and Korkor, they were not ready to start premarital sexual relationships at the time they did. The circumstances in their homes became the driving force to do so. For them sexual relationship with an 'outsider' was better than that with a benefactor like the men they had mentioned in their narratives. Thus, the decision to opt for consensual unions. Research remains quite low on this somewhat sensitive subject of sexual harassment, particularly regarding people's lived experiences and their coping mechanisms. This study adds to existing works and more specifically points to an escape route which some victims of sexual harassment may resort to in the face of this culture of silence.

Like female participants who opted for consensual unions primarily as a livelihood strategy, there is a clear connection between their situations and their consequent actions. The issue of sexual harassment and the circumstances surrounding it as has been explained were an instrumental drive of their opting for a consensual union. The situations of Ruth and Korkor also placed them in a position of unequal power relations. This was because leaving their respective homes to join their partners meant that they were dependent on them for their safety and maintenance. According to Collins (2004), such situations of unequal power relations produce makes the dependent party the 'weaker' one in the interactive process.

4.2.3 For the Sake of Intimate Relations

In two instances, women stated categorically that they had no plans of getting married. Emma, an auditor, told me:

> I am 45 years now. I am not a virgin, I already have two children so why should I stay single? But as for marriage, no. I just want to be with someone. The way my first marriage went, sister, it was not easy oo. I do not want any problems again…sometimes he talks about marriage but me I just ignore it. After all, I have been married before. If I did not have children, maybe I would have considered it, but I have my children so what again? *(Interview, May 2017).*

Emma's story illustrates how a multiplicity of issues can influence a person's decision. She also proves women's agency. She had taken the decision not to get married. Describing her first marriage as a traumatic experience, her middle-class status and having had children were the major reasons she was disinterested in getting married once again. Both marriage and the birth of children remain crucial criteria for womanhood. Having achieved these at an earlier point in her life, marriage was not critical to her. Again, her socio-economic status also meant that she did not have to be dependent on a husband for maintenance. The divorcee with children is not considered in the same way as the never married woman with children as the latter might even be labelled as 'born one' (Duncan, 2010). Emma was, therefore, not concerned about having to carry any such label.

Sheila, a policewoman who had also been married once disclosed that she was not thinking about marriage. Her previous marriage had ended because of issues of childlessness and though she had had a child with her current partner, she did not consider the birth of the child as sufficient reason to get married. In her opinion, "all the men are not correct". It seems ironical that although for her all the men are not 'correct', she still chose to be in a relationship with one of them. Although marriage is desirable within the Ghanaian socio-cultural context, children may sometimes be

prioritised over marriage. Obviously for both Emma and Sheila, they were in the unions for the sake of having intimate relations.

Studies done in the West have shown that cohabiting or consensual unions is often considered as the best option by people who lose their spouses through death or divorce (Gierveld, 2004). According to Stets (1993), in many instances, there is a link between an individual's past intimate relationship and the type of relationship they would choose in the future. An unpleasant marital experience could, therefore, influence a person's decision to avoid a future marriage. In such a case, a consensual union which has features like low commitment, instability and fluidity might be the better option to remarriage.

Although both Emma and Sheila are seen to be demonstrating agency by choosing not to remarry, their agentic resolutions can be explained from the perspective of their past marital experiences. Choosing a consensual union over remarriage for the purpose of intimate relations is indeed a rational choice. However, the situation responsible for the decisions provides a better understanding of their decisions.

4.2.4 The Influence of a Love Charm

The story of one female participant, Aku, reveal an expressive factor which got here into a consensual union. Unlike previous cases discussed earlier, her situation did not allow for a personal decision to enter a relationship. That notwithstanding, she presents yet another circumstance that can lead to the formation of a consensual union. She had this to say:

> …. He used '*for girls'* on me. It was just recently that one of his relatives revealed it to me and since then I have come to my senses. What he did was that, he put the medicine in a

> drink for me one day when I was going for our day in school. Since that day, I started sleeping with him…When I got pregnant, I finally came to live with him. I was not listening to anybody's advice. I did not even want to see my own mother. Now I am just 26 and I have three children, sometimes I just stay in my room and cry. *(Interview, March 2017).*

Aku's story depicts the place of the supernatural in intimate relationships. From her account, she believed she was under the influence of a spell for which reason she consented to the relationship. One might argue that, for this particular case the union would not be described as consensual. I re-emphasise here that consensual union for the study is defined in terms of the completion or otherwise of traditional marriage rites and not necessarily in terms of whether or not the couple involved were fully conscious of and agreed to the relationship. This case, therefore, illustrates one of the ways in which consensual unions come to be.

'For girls', is a love potion available by medicine men for the purposes of getting young women sexually attracted to men who for many reasons are unable to propose love to them and also in the case where these girls and young women are known to be 'hard to get'. These potions are sold openly on the market as evident in figure 4.1. The picture shows an array of substances being displayed on a table by a traditional medicine seller at the Madina zongo junction in Accra. An advertising board placed in front of the table captures the name of the seller as well as the various functions that the medicines perform. Amongst these is '*for girls'*. To have been under the influence of the *'for girls'* love charm meant that Aku was totally under the control of her partner who became the dominant figure in the relationship. This dominant position, therefore, implied that he was also a strong 'order-giver' who could dictate the course of the relationship. Aku, on the other hand, could only receive and act on the orders of her partner, making their relationship another example of unequal power relations.

Figure 4.1 An Advertisement for The '*For Girls'* Love Potion

Source: Myjoyonline, 2016

The fact that magic, charms and spells used to facilitate love relationships exist and are actively employed has been well acknowledged by many scholars as an age-old practice in both European and African societies (Gausset, 2001). Borsje (2010), uses the term love magic and defines it as verbal and material instruments by which erotic and affectionate feelings are believed to be aroused or destroyed in a supernatural way. In the African context, such manipulations could be categorised under the concept of 'juju' which is an umbrella term for magic (Appiah-Sekyere, 2013). The practice has been found to come in different forms, and include blood drinking, wearing of amulets and applying magical potions and some particular herbs on parts of the body like the face to attract the opposite sex. Much of the work on the use of love magic in relationships have suggested that women, both married and otherwise, are often the ones who resort to the use of these in their quest to win the love of men (Agyekum, 2002; Cassar, 2012; Tremearne, 2013). In the case of married

women, it comes in as a way of ensuring women's security and control in marriages, especially in situations where women are doubtful of the fidelity of their husbands.

The growing body of work on the sexual economy of Africa, point to the fact that transactional sex, but not necessarily prostitution, is a major means by which young unmarried women make money and maintain some standard of living (Amo-Adjei, Kumi-Kyereme, & Anamaale Tuoyire, 2014; Cole, 2004; Cornwall, 2002; Haram, 2004; Hunter, 2002; Maganja, Maman, Groves, & Mbwambo, 2007; Newell, 2009). This was the argument of a Ghanaian woman, Moesha Buduong, when she granted Christine Amanpour of the CNN, an interview about Love and Sex in Ghana. Moesha, using her personal experience, suggested in that interview that the decision of a young Ghanaian woman to be the mistress of a rich married man is often a financial decision which is often driven by difficult economic situations which is particularly unfavourable for women. According to her, for a young woman in Ghana, it is difficult to secure a job even after completing university, making it almost impossible to afford house rent and live a comfortable life. The solution for many such women, therefore, has been sexual relationships with older well to do men (Abdulai, 2018). It is within this context that it has also been found that such young women who often desire to live luxurious lives but are not in the position to afford it would resort to charms and spells to attract men and consequently extract money and other material things from them. Writing on the case of Mozambique for example, Groes-Green (2013), explains that there are traditional healers who are skilled in preparing herbs and other potions for women to use in seducing men and being able 'to put the men in a bottle', that is, literally bringing them under the control of the women. He explains that the potency of these charms is such that men are also encouraged to fortify themselves against their effects.

On the other hand, there are only a few studies on how men also use love charms in African societies. Mommersteeg (1988), writing on the fabrication of Islamic love-amulets in West Africa has, however, revealed that in Islamic practice,

> When a man sets his heart on a woman and wants to marry her, or sometimes just wants to make love to her, and the woman, despite all his advances, keeps rejecting him, he may call upon a marabout (Muslim religious specialist) for an amulet which will enable him possess that particular woman. Once the man owns such an amulet certainly the woman will open up her heart to him, no longer able to refuse his wishes. She will be completely enchanted not so much by the man's own charms but by the power of his amulet (p. 52).

Aku's case in this study, therefore, goes to show that love charms are not only practiced by women but by men alike. This goes to confirm speculations among sections of Ghanaians that the use of for girls as a love charm is gaining popularity among the Ghanaian youth. Some media sources like *myjoyonline* have reported how young men are more likely to go through this avenue mainly for the purpose of sleeping with the girl and later going about to brag about it. Aku's situation, on the other hand, suggests that it may not only be for the sexual pleasure that a man would employ supernatural means to win a woman over, but indeed also for the purpose of possible marriage.

Proving the truth or validity of spiritual matters is by no means the preoccupation of a scientific discipline like Sociology. However, the sociologist is also interested in the ways in which the spiritual matters in which people believe play out in their lives. From Aku's story of her experience with '*for girls'*, the immediate conclusion is that once she was under the love charm, there was no way out. The question this raises, however, is how and why her family did not intervene to move her out of her partner's house. According to Aku, her mother made a few attempts at getting her to return home, but she was adamant because of the influence of the charm. Upon her resistance, her mother had allowed her to continue living with her partner. Describing her mother's socio-

economic position as a single mother engaged in petty trading, it was obvious that Aku's mother was going through some struggles in her efforts to cater for herself and her four children. She explained:

> My mother has been with two different men. I and the one after me have a different father and the other two also have theirs. Both of them [the men] were not good. The one with whom she had my little brother did not even take responsibility for the pregnancy when she told him she was pregnant, so my mother has gone through a lot. Do you think if she had money to provide us with all we need I would have gone to ask someone to buy me malt to take to our day for him to also go and put '*for girls'* medicine in it? No. *(Interview, March 2017).*

In her study of conjugal forms in some cocoa growing areas in Ghana, Duncan (2010) found that, parents of girls who move out to cohabit with their lovers sometimes tend to overlook their daughters' actions since they consider the relocation of their wards as financial relief for them. Given Aku's family circumstances, she moving out could have been an advantage in disguise to her mother. If she had been the daughter of some middle- or upper-class couple who had the financial wherewithal or some reputation to protect, her story might probably have taken a different turn regardless of the supposed potency of '*for girls'*. Therefore, although Aku's case of finding herself in a consensual union she was not ready for can be directly linked to the influence of *'for girls'*, it can also be argued that her state of affairs was further maintained by her mother's financial constraints which made it difficult for her to adequately provide for her family. As a result, these two situations explained the incidence of her relationship.

4.2.5 A Demonstration of Male Maturity and Masculinity

For some men, being in a sexual relationship was for them a mark of adulthood and maturity. Yaw puts it simply when he said, "Oh I just felt that as a young man if I also have a girlfriend, yeah, it's

normal. I was old enough and a lot of young guys my age had girlfriends. I wasn't thinking about any marriage." (*Interview, June 2017*). The question then was what they thought they stood to benefit from such relationships. Responses pointed to the sexual gratification to be derived from the union. Beyond sexual satisfaction, however, gender socialisation and expectations are a possible explanation, such that, girls often tend to think of marriage at the onset of intimate relationships whilst boys may not necessarily think along such lines. For some male participants, however, there was more to gain than just sexual gratification. Appiah puts it this way:

> Instead of sleeping with different girls, it is good to have one serious one whom you'll take care of *small small.* If you stick to one your friends even see you as bold. That is what shows that you are a man, rather than changing them and always hiding and telling lies and things like that. *(Interview, January 2017).*

The above excerpts from some male participants suggest that premarital sexual relationship with one partner is a way through which men reinforce their sense of masculinity. Masculinity, according to Lindsay and Meischer (2003, p. 4) refers to the "cluster of norms, values and behavioral patterns expressing explicit and implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others". Masculinity would therefore find expression in a society's gender roles. Different societies have various socially constructed ideas about who a man should be and as such masculinity becomes a relational term which changes over time and space (Adjei, 2016). In African societies, the concept of the 'big man' is said to be the most enduring definition of masculinity. This 'big man' is the man who has amassed wealth and is able to provide for his family and have other people who depend on him (Meischer & Lindsay, 2003). But as Adjei (2016) has pointed out, masculinity changes over time and space and in many cases multiple masculinities exist. The concept of the 'big man' would therefore not be the only measure of masculinity. Mesicher, (2005), for instance has identified three routes to masculinity in the early 20th century

Ghana. These are getting married, becoming an elder (senior masculinity) and being a 'big man'. Acheampong (1996) has also said that for Akan societies, entering marriage is what marks masculinity for men. Both Meischer (2005) and Acheampong (1996) observed that all stages of masculinity as they found in Ghana are characterised by men acting as providers of food, clothing and other basic needs for their wives, children, and other lineage members. This criterion for masculinity has largely remained unchanged over the years. Even in contemporary times, the successful men are those who can provide for their wives and children even when their wives earn more than they do (Adinkrah, 2012; Nukunya, 2003).

In addition, in Africa, Ghana included, masculinity in the true sense is associated not only with economic and social success but also with fertility and sexual potency or prowess which means even having multiple sexual partners at a time (Adomako Ampofo & Atobrah, 2016; Meekers & Calvès, 1997; Morrell et al. 2012; Ratele, 2011). These discussions of masculinity point to the fact that masculinity for the Ghanaian man depends a lot on men's relationships with women whether as wives or sexual partners. In a society where historically, the status of men has been higher than women (Adomako Ampofo, 2004; Apusigah, 2008; Manuh, 1988), heterosexual relationships have a lot to offer men in terms of enforcing their sense of masculinity. As young unmarried men, the traditional normative as being providers for women and the need to demonstrate sexual prowess is re-echoed in this study. It is important to mention here that these notions of masculinity cut across ethnicity and socio-economic group. In addition to Appiah, a military officer who earned a relatively good salary, there were poorer male participants who also talked about the fact that they had migrated to Accra from their hometowns in search of employment avenues and possible improved standards of living. For many of them their economic conditions were not too different

from their female counterparts like Maabena. However, that did not prevent them from starting relationships and also thinking of themselves as providers. For instance, Kwabena, a housekeeper who acknowledged that it was difficult making ends meet was of the view that economic difficulties should not prevent a man from having a woman in his life. To him, "the poorer man who is able to convince a woman to start a relationship with him is the real man because out of his poverty he will be taking care of a woman. As for a rich person, everybody knows he has the money so he can do anything." Ankomah (1996, p. 43), reports of a 19-year-old secondary school student who had this to say about being able to provide for his girlfriend: "I want my girl to appear in the streets smashingly dressed to raise standards. In this case whenever she accompanies you to a place your friends will really admire you. In fact, they will sometimes cheer you up. 'Your girl, she is wild!'". For a secondary school student who most likely is dependent on his parents or guardians to make such a remark goes to show how provision for women is deemed crucial by men even for the men who may be grappling with poverty.

Awumbila (2006) has argued that poverty is gendered and how individuals experience poverty is also determined by the structure of their society and their position in that society. In other words, societal expectations of men and women in terms of their gender roles would impact the ways in which they use livelihood resources available to them. In the Ghanaian context where men are traditionally regarded as the providers and protectors for women especially, women and men's access to and use of resources differ. With reference to this study therefore, socio-economic status did not seem to be a barrier to men thinking of themselves as providers for their partners although they were not their wives, and urban dwelling had not changed these ideas. Women, on the other

hand, also tended to be of the view that, it was indeed the responsibility of men to provide for them which is why these relationships could be seen as a livelihood strategy on the part of the women.

In his book *Making Men in Ghana*, Meischer (2005) sought to examine the changing constructions of masculinity and femininity in Ghana since the nineteenth century. He cites the activities of the Basel missionaries as attempting to introduce new forms of masculinity which included sexual restraint and monogamous marriages (Meischer, 2005). These introductions both challenged and, in some cases, reinforced the traditional ideas of masculinity. The idea that men should be the providers for their wives or their sexual partners, remains upheld. This is even so when in practical terms women are known to sometimes be co-providers and even major providers in the household (Adomako Ampofo, 2007). With respect to this sample, however, the men although not necessarily well-off in absolute terms, were well-off relative to their female partners and therefore assumed the role of provider as a sign of masculinity. Such male participants for whom their relationships were an avenue to show masculinity, it was not just about masculinity but also the power that comes with it. Assuming the role of providers for their partners which is largely a societal expectation required for the definition of manhood, further underscored their position as the ones who wield more power in their relationship.

4.2.6 Rehearsing for Marriage

The idea of courtship which basically refers to a romantic relationship before marriage has come to be adapted by many young people in African societies like Ghana (Nukunya, 2003). What goes into this preparation for marriage, however, differs from couple to couple and from society to society. According to Attané (2007), many educated young urban dwellers tend to rehearse marriage before actually getting married. One of the aims of doing this for some people is to test

their levels of compatibility so as to avoid any surprises later in their married life. Attané's (2007) observation proved to be the case for one couple in this study that is Amoako and Maame. According to Amoako, when they decided to get married about three years ago, they also felt it was important for them to adequately prepare towards the marriage. He cited the example of testing their levels of self-control as one of the key reasons being in a consensual union was critical for them. He explained it this way:

> You know because of my work I travel a lot, so I am not always around. So, it's important for us to see if when we are not together, we both can abstain from sex. So, for the past three or so months we decided that we will not engage in sex. She was even the one who suggested it and I also thought it was a good idea and we have been able to do it. *(Inteview, February 2017).*

Several studies over the world have shown an association between infidelity and marital instability (Previti & Amato, 2004; Blow & Hartnett, 2005). Being aware of this reality, what Amoako was suggesting was that the issue needed to be explored to reduce or totally avoid its occurrence in the future.

Apart from the matter of self-control. Amoako and Maame also indicated that with marriage as the ultimate aim of their relationship, they also thought about saving towards their marriage ceremonies, that is, both the traditional marriage ceremony and the church wedding. It was for this reason that Maame had to be cooking for Amoako as way of saving money. "He does not know how to cook, so if he has to be buying food from outside all the time, he will be spending a lot of money. So, it is better for me to be cooking because that is cheaper and can save money", Maame explained *(Interview, February 2017)*. Amoako went on to point out that his relationship with Maame has basically been about "thrashing out issues" so they could enjoy their marriage in the future. For instance, he talked about stopping Maame from attending weddings almost every

weekend because according to him, if she enters marriage with such an attitude it was going to create problems for them since they would need time for each other. As compared to some other couples, their union had lasted a relatively short period (three years), they had no children together and their respective families were aware of and had agreed to the fact that they intended to get married. According to this couple, they had so far had a smooth-running relationship devoid of the issues of family pressures and intimate partner abuse.

Five of the female participants in the study could be categorised as middle-class women (Akosua, Emma, Sheila, Maame, Yaayaa). For three of these women (Akosua, Maame, Yaayaa) their relationships were not to serve the purpose of a livelihood strategy. They rather saw them as a sort of requirement for marriage. As Akosua, a nurse, put it, "Once you are thinking of getting married someday, you would by all means get into a relationship. It's not always that you'll marry the person but at least, you'll learn some lessons for the future". Akosua's idea of learning lessons from a pre-marital union which could be useful for one's marriage in the future ties in quite well to another theme expressed by some participants as constituting the basis for their decision to opt for a consensual union. This was the point about rehearsing for marriage.

A careful look at the circumstances that lead to the formation of consensual unions shows a clear distinction between the experiences of men and that of women. The situations show some level of unequal power relations between the men and women. Right from the fact that men function for women as livelihood support, a safe haven for escape and women being under the control of a love charm, men appear to be the ones who control the relationship, whilst the women assume the position of the 'weaker' ones. Furthermore, beyond the immediate factors that influenced the

women to opt for consensual unions, it was also apparent that many of the women had marriage in mind at the start of the relationships. This was, however, not always the thinking of most of the men. This situation, according to Collins (2004), marks the basis for a relationship of power play; a situation whereby one party's position in the relationship appears to be more influential than the other. The situation of couples who mutually opted to be in a consensual union as a way of rehearsing for their marriage, however, provides a different scenario in which the power dynamics are not of an unequal nature.

In all the circumstances that lead to consensual unions which have been discussed above, there is a clear indication of rational choice on the part of the participants. Whether serving as a livelihood strategy, an escape route or a show of maturity or manhood, the data so far revealed no cases of coercion into these unions. In many instances, participants were not ignorant of some possible negative implications of the decision to enter premarital sexual unions. Nonetheless, given their circumstances and the options available to them, being in such unions was the way to go. There was, however, one exception to the rationality embedded in the choices made. This was evident in Aku's story. Drawing on Collins (2004) Theory of Situations, however, there is a step further to go in understanding individual's choices, which is to move beyond the individual to the situations which influenced their decisions. These situations give an enhanced meaning to the actions. In this section, therefore, a discussion of the various factors leading to the formation of consensual unions has been done with the emphasis on not just the individuals but the impelling situations.

4.3 Consensual Unions: A Means to an End or an End in Itself?

> Marriage is looked upon as a sacred duty which every normal person must perform. Failure to do so means in effect, stopping the flow of life through the individual and hence the

> diminishing of mankind upon the earth… Therefore, anybody who, under normal condition, refuses to get married is committing a major offence in the eyes of the society and people will be against him. In all African societies, everything possible is done to prepare people for marriage and to make them think in terms of marriage (Mbiti 1975, p. 98).

In preceding sections, an attempt was made to explore the various key circumstances that led to the start of premarital unions amongst the research participants. Over time, these relationships had grown from simply being sexual unions to becoming more stabilised and enduring to the extent of mirroring marriage. In this section the focus is on examining the factors which participants reported to be accounting for why the unions had not been converted to marriages. The data collected for the purpose of exploring this research question revealed a gendered attitude to it. The section, therefore, analyses this gendered conceptualisation of consensual unions.

4.3.1 Consensual Unions as a Precursor to Marriage

As pointed out in the previous section, the specific factors leading to the formation of the unions notwithstanding, most women seemed to have marriage in mind when entering the unions and therefore, once they were in, it was their desire to see the unions converted to marriage. The responses from research participants showed that women tended to think of the unions as a precursor to marriage. Out of the seventeen female participants, twelve of them were of this view. Women, therefore, saw marriage as a necessary end which meant that for them their consensual unions served as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. This was particularly the case for women who had had children or had been in previous consensual unions. Women for whom 'knocking' rites had been performed were all the more hopeful of marriage since to them the marriage process had already officially begun, and the 'knocking' was also a sign that their partners were committed to marrying them. 'Knocking', is considered the first official step of the marriage,

particularly amongst the Akan ethnic group (Okyere-Manu, 2015). Since in Akan tradition, it is the responsibility of a man to marry a wife for his adult son (Allman, 1997), a suitor's father often in the company of another elderly person from his family would perform the 'knocking' rites. This they do by presenting schnapps and sometimes money to the prospective bride's father and family. The gesture is to officially ask for the woman's hand in marriage from her father. It is after this that the main marriage ceremony would take place later. Other ethnic groups have different practices that mark the official start of the marriage process, as was reported by Charles and Doris who are Frafra. Among the Frafra, marriage starts with 'clapping' which indeed marks the consummation of the marriage. This, however, takes place only when the woman's family has agreed to the marriage, thus in most cases, the woman would have eloped with the man, 'kidnapped' by the man's family and friends or taken to the man's family by her family members. So, it is only after the 'clapping' has been conducted that the bridewealth is paid (Apusigah, 2004).

Although scholars like Mbiti (1975), Gyekye (2003) and Anarfi (2006) suggest that marriage in African societies is considered important for both men and women, other scholars have also argued that getting married and being able to bear children within a marriage are what accord many African women significant levels of respect and social status (Calvès & Meekers, 1999; Hungwe, 2006). For many Ghanaian societies, like what Brydon (1987, p. 254) describes among the people of Avatime in the Volta Region of Ghana, "marriage was traditionally the inevitable consequence of a series of rituals, mandatory for each woman after she reached puberty". Additionally, in defining women's adult lives, motherhood tends to be a prominent social and cultural indicator (Cooper, Harries, Myer, Orner & Bracken, 2007) and this is often preferred to happen within marriage. As these scholars suggest, for the most part, the women in this study felt that, society

expects them to not just get married at a point in time, but also do so in the socially sanctioned way. This idea is represented in the experience of Dede. She describes her first partner with whom she had two children as a notorious womaniser and the second as an irresponsible man who did not provide for the family. Although she confessed that her current partner was physically and sexually abusive, she was bent on staying on with the hope of properly getting married this time round. She says, "You see, as a woman, marriage is your glory. Once you reach a particular age, like your thirties, everybody expects to hear that you are getting married. People respect you when they see you wearing a ring. I also want to wear a ring" *(Interview, October 2016)*. A ring, functions as a status symbol for married people for which reason women like Dede emphasise it as an important part of marriage. Obrafour seems to know this, for which reason in *Pempenaa,* he promises his lover Abena, a gold ring for the marriage ceremony when he said "*menhyɛ wo sika kɔkɔɔ pɛtea".*

Apart from the societal approval and recognition that Dede expected marriage to provide, she also saw marriage as the solution to the abuse she reported to be experiencing almost on a weekly basis. "When we get married and family members get involved, the beatings will stop because he will know that if he beats me I can go and report him to his family or my family and he will be called," she says. Domestic adjudication of marital issues is not an uncommon practice in Ghana. This is primarily because marriage entails an alliance between families and whilst in marriage a woman may have more obligations to her husband, she may also have some form of protection in terms of family intervention in such matters as domestic abuse. These women may have migrated from their respective hometowns and away from the social scrutiny of their families, nonetheless, they still live with the consciousness of supposed societal expectations of them to get married.

Aside the general view that the Ghanaian society expects adult women to get married, the other thing that appeared to be the reason for the hope for marriage was the child factor. For most women who had a child or more, they thought of the children as the reason the consensual union had to lead to marriage. Some studies have suggested that women would use pregnancy and the birth of a child to 'trap' a man into marrying them (Calvès & Meekers, 1999; Takyi, 2003). The child then becomes the reason marriage must happen. Although none of the research participants in this study reported this was the case with them, they emphasised the difficulty in finding a husband when one has children especially from a previous unmarried union. An unmarried woman with a child is sometimes referred to as 'born one' in Ghana (Duncan, 2010). For a society that has historically emphasised the chastity of particularly women, a 'born one' woman would usually not be the first choice for a man seeking a wife. In *Pempenaa*, Obrafour describes Abena as 'a brand-new car with a trial number' for which he hopes to acquire 'a license before he drives in it'. He uses these expressions to hail Abena as a virgin for whom he wishes to perform marriage rites before engaging in any sexual relations with her. This goes to reiterate the emphasis society places on women's chastity. 'Born one' women are often thought of as not morally upright and even if a man should choose them, the couple are likely to face opposition from the man's family. In order to escape this 'born one' tag and all the implications that come along with it, women participants with children tend to think of marriage as a necessary end to their union. In other contexts, like what Calvès and Meekers (1999) found in the case of the Bamiléké of Cameroon, having had a child would have been the more reason a consensual union would be converted to marriage since pre-marital cohabitation was to serve the purpose of women showing signs of fertility.

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that, for most of the women, the ultimate aim of their relationship was for it to end in marriage, as from what they indicated, they stood to benefit in the long run if they got properly married. Their desire to marry, was, however, not entirely their personal stance. As pointed out by Kivisto (2011) in his comments on Collins (2004) Theory of Situations, social situations are determined amongst other factors by cultural trends. For these women, therefore, they were in a cultural situation in which they were expected to marry rather than be in a consensual union. However, there was very little they could do on their part to make this happen in the sense that in almost all societies in Ghana, it is men who are expected to perform traditional marriage rites for women and no the other way around. Even if a woman fully financed the expenses of a marriage ceremony, it is still considered as the man marrying the woman. For these women, therefore, they could only look forward to their partners giving 'the order' for them to get married. This further shows an interactive situation characterised by power relations. As Collins (2004), has indicated, where a situation is characterised by power dynamics, there is often the 'order-giver' who seems to dictate the direction in which the relationship should go and there is the 'order-taker' who often waits on the former to give the directives. Having to wait on their partners for them to initiate the marriage process, therefore, implied that the women remained the 'order-takers' and for that reason, the weaker partners.

Within the gendered differences in how couples thought of their unions was the socio-economic status twist. For women of relatively high socio-economic standing, their reasons for defining consensual unions as a precursor to marriage were somewhat different. Women with high levels of education and of high socio-economic standing have been said to sometimes prefer consensual unions as an alternative to marriage. This preference is in order to avoid the direct control of

husbands embedded in customary marriages (Bledsoe, 1980; Karanja, 1987; Obbo, 1987; Takyi & Broughton, 2006). Contrary to this claim, this study revealed that the very fact of their educational attainment and socio-economic status is the reason such women think their consensual union must end in marriage. These women referred to the economic investment that had been made in terms of their educational and career pursuits as the reason they deserved to be married. To them, a man cannot take them for 'free', their socio-economic status meant that they were of high value. Akosua, a nurse, expresses this notion when she said:

> We are planning to get married. I am not one of those ladies who should be taken for free by a man. I am educated and working so a man must also spend money before he can have me. My parents will even be very disappointed if after all that they have spent on me they don't get anything back *(Interview, January, 207).*

Conceptualising consensual unions as a precursor to marriage was, therefore, not restricted to only female participants of lower socio-economic standing nor those who were expecting marriage to address some specific challenges in their union. Some middle-class women who thought of proper marriage as a form of status symbol also thought of their relationships as a prelude to marriage. There were two instances where men also thought of it as a precursor. Such responses, however, tended to come from men of high socio-economic background. Quantity surveyor, Amoako, is a case in point. According to him, there was the need to adequately prepare for marriage. Of particular importance in terms of preparation, he believes, is to work on compatibility and being in a consensual union would serve that purpose. His position is shared by Charles, a building contractor.

4.3.2 Consensual Unions as an Alternative to Marriage

Whilst female participants mostly thought of their unions as a lead-up to marriage, men, on the other hand, gave a range of reasons why they considered the consensual unions they were in as an

alternative to marriage, in that, they had no plans of formalising the union. Interestingly, two of these men (Charles and Alex) had begun the traditional marriage rites for their partners; they had gone through the 'clapping' and 'knocking' stage. The literature on consensual unions in Africa suggest the commercialisation of marriage payments coupled with young men's poor economic status as the leading factors responsible for consensual unions in cities. In this study, however, the inability of men to afford customary marriage payments did not come up at all as a reason for participants being in this union type. The most often stated reason why men saw their union as an end in itself was what they would describe as the unacceptable character of their partners. Whilst some described their partners as disrespectful, others mentioned laziness and heavy drinking as why their partners were not qualified for marriage. "I have done the knocking, but from the way things are going, I don't think I will go ahead with any marriage ceremony. She does not respect. Sometimes she even refuses me sex. Do you think that is good?", asks Alex *(Interview, November 2016).*

For these men, having had children with their partners was not a compelling factor for them to get married. To them, refusal to perform the marriage rites was the show of their disapproval of the partners' behaviours. Frustrated Yaw, a taxi driver, who has a child with his partner had this to say:

> She is very lazy. She doesn't want to do any work. She wants me to carry all the burden. Even when she uses her money to buy something for herself, she wants me to pay back the money. How can I marry a woman like that? I will rather use the money I would have used for the marriage to take care of our daughter *(Interview, June 2017).*

According to the men who had various complaints about their partners, they had on many occasions expressed their unhappiness with their partners' conduct. Men seemed to be concerned

about the long-term implications of getting and staying married to a particular woman. It was for this reason that they thought they needed to get a 'good deal' in terms of who they married. Their decision to refrain from marriage was for them a way of registering their displeasure about their partners' behaviours. What they often did not do was to make it known to the women that they had no plans of marriage because of their conduct. Whilst the men expected the women to read in between the lines themselves, the women appeared to fail to do so.

Not all men who reported the unsatisfactory conduct of their partners had come to a definite decision of living in a consensual union as an alternative to marriage. For instance, for Kwabena who cited excessive drinking as the reason he had refused to perform the marriage rites, his partner Naana was on a form of probation. "If she stops drinking, we can get married, but if she does not, I will not use my money to marry a woman who drinks. I have told her so now it all depends on her," he says *(Interview, January 2017).* In this case, the status of the union is uncertain. At different points in time, the man may think of it as either a precursor or an alternative to marriage.

For female participants Emma and Sheila, who had earlier indicated that they were with their partners for the sake of intimate relations, their relationships for them were an alternative to marriage. It is a fact that men are the ones who are expected to 'marry women'. However, in most cases, the consent of the woman is also essential for the marriage process to begin. This is where a woman can also exercise power in a premarital relationship. Unlike in most of the other circumstances of female participants, discussed earlier, for Emma and Sheila, they were the 'order-givers', whilst their partners were the 'order-takers'. Their respective partners were waiting on them to give the go ahead their relationships to be converted to marriage. This put them in the

dominant position in the relationship so far as a possible marriage was concerned. Emma and Sheila's dominant position was also evident in their attitudes (emotional energies) towards their relationships. They could afford to demonstrate a lack of enthusiasm which (Collins, 2004) describes as form of low emotional energy, because the future of their unions depended on them.

The literature on consensual unions in Africa suggest a unitary household conception of consensual unions either as a precursor or an alternative to marriage (Calvès & Meekers, 1999; Duncan, 2010; Moore & Govender, 2013; Posel & Rudwick, 2014a). Evidence from this study shows that this is not always the case that both partners in the union conceptualise it the same way. Whilst in some cases both partners in the union share the same view on the status of the union, in many others there are significant gendered differences. This finding bears semblance to the work of American sociologist Jessie Bernard who in her book *The Future of Marriage* (1982) argues that in every marriage, there are in reality, two marriages; the husband's marriage and the wife's marriage, which she termed 'his' marriage and 'her' marriage. According to Bernard (1982), the existence of 'two marriages' within a single arises from the gendered expectations and experiences of husbands and wives. As a result, when asked to evaluate their marriage, spouses would often produce significantly different assessments of their marriage. From this study, Bernard's (1982) argument for married couples is extended to persons in consensual unions where there is also a gendered conceptualisation of the union either as a precursor or an alternative to marriage.

The individual realities of the research participants were constructed from their interactive processes and interpretations of them. The Theory of the Social Construction of Reality by Berger and Luckmann (1966) posit that through people's interactions with one another a stock of

knowledge is produced, and social reality is also created. This social reality, according to them, is therefore a shared reality. This is contrary to the finding of this study which shows divergent and not shared realities of partners in their relationships. These differences become explicable by revisiting the situations which influenced individual participants' decisions to enter the unions and what their decisions implied for them in terms of their positions in the power dynamics. This is what the Theory of Situations posits. Clearly, just as the situations differ, the construction of realities also differs.

4.4 Terminologies in Consensual Unions

The ways in which research participants conceptualised their unions, either as a precursor to marriage or an alternative to marriage, found expression in the kinds of terminologies they used in referring to their partners. The different kinds of terminologies were used to negotiate marriage and also to depict what the partners meant to each other.

A major way by which social relationships can be understood is the terminologies that are used in the conduct and the description of the relationship in question (Read, 2013). In Ghana, like most other societies, the kinship structure defines social relationship. Kinship, according to Radcliffe-Brown (1950, p. 3) "refers to a working system linking human beings together in an orderly arrangement of interactions, by which particular customs are seen as functioning parts of the social machinery." "This kind of arrangement which is derived from consanguinity, marriage and adoption" (Nukunya, 2003, p. 17), therefore, comes with its own set of terminologies. In the book African Systems of Kinship and Marriage, the writers identified terms in various African societies which explain how people relate to one another. Radcliffe-Brown (1950) categorises these terms

as either descriptive or classificatory. Whichever way, kinship terminologies define social relationships and the rights and responsibilities that come with individuals' statuses. Anthropological studies in Africa (Akwabi-Ameyaw, 1982; Ardener, 1954; Goody, 1970; Kirchhoff, 1932; Kronenfeld, 1980; Schapiro, 1966; Schwab, 1958; Signorini, 1978) have, therefore, focused on examining how such terms are used particularly in consanguineous and marital relationships in their strict sense. Amongst the Akan, for example, the terms *yere* and *kunu* are used to mean wife and husband respectively (Agyekum, 2003, 2012; Akwabi-Ameyaw; 1982; Appah, 2004).

Consensual unions could be described as an unconventional way of family formation in many African societies for which reason the unions raise questions about the 'identity' of the persons involved. For many a society there are no clearly defined designations for the actors involved in consensual unions given the fact that the very nature of the relationship is in itself complex and therefore presents a nuanced situation. Against this backdrop, the study sought to find out participants' conceptualisation of their partners which translates into the terms they use in referring to them. This subject of investigation saw the generation of a number of terminologies.

As was established in the previous chapter, most female respondents thought of their unions as a precursor to marriage and so for them it was appropriate to use terms used in marriage. They referred to their partners as their husbands. For such women, they were influenced by two factors; having had a child or more with their partner which often implied having been in the relationship for a considerable number of years, and the fact that they lived together in the same residential space with them. Almost every woman who had had children from the union referred to their

partner as their husband. Out of the thirteen women who had children with their partners, eleven of them spoke of the men as their husbands. In these cases, the relationships had lasted from three to twenty-three years, with a minimum of one and a maximum of seven children. Naana, for instance who had lived together with Kwabena with whom she had four children, for fourteen years, had this to say:

> I refer to him as my husband even though I know we are not yet married. But I cannot say he is my boyfriend too. I say he is my husband because I have had children with him, and we are living together. That is how many people also see it because if I do not tell someone that we are not married, the person might not know *(Interview, January 2017).*

Referring to their partners as their husbands also served as a face-saving strategy for those women who felt there was some level of societal stigma attached to their status as women in consensual union and at the same time suggested a sense of marriage to them.

For middle class female participants like Yaayaa, Akosua, Maame, Emma and Sheila their partners were simply their 'guy' or 'boyfriend'. Particularly for Emma and Sheila who had indicated earlier on that they had no plans of marrying their partners, the men were just their boyfriends. A major difference between these middle-class women and the others was that, except for Sheila who had a child with her partner, they neither had any children with their partners nor lived together with them. For Sheila, the fact that she could leave the relationship anytime she wanted meant that her partner could not assume the status of a husband in her life and the child factor made no difference. The story was quite different when it came to the men. A few of them said they spoke of their partners as their wives, whilst the others provided a variety of terminology. Kingsley was one of the male participants who said he spoke of his partner, Dede as his wife. Although he and Dede had no children together, according to him, "I know I have not performed any marriage rites but

in my heart I see her as my wife because she does everything for me like a wife and I also do what I'm supposed to do as a husband. That's why I call her my wife." *(Interview, October 2016).* From his explanation, the fact that they conducted themselves as husband and wife was the rationale behind his calling Dede his wife, and she in turn calling him her husband. Apparently, this couple were in agreement so far as the use of these terms was concerned. This was not the case for all couples though.

The majority of men, however, recognised the incompatibility of marriage titles with their unions. For instance, whilst Naana thought of Kwabena as her husband, when Kwabena was asked the same question, he answered, "Oh she is my *mpena*. She's not my wife because I have not performed any customary marriage rites, so as for me I see this whole thing as just *mpenaware*. That is the truth". *(Interview, January 2017).* For him, the birth of their four children and the fact of living under the same roof was not enough justification to use the term *yere* (wife) to refer to Naana.

The term *mpena* is an Akan concept which is used in the generic sense to mean 'lover' (Bochow, 2007; Van der Geest, 2001) or boyfriend and girlfriend (Anarfi, 1998; Ankomah, 1994; Fretheim & Amfo, 2008). In Ghanaian tradition, Kwabena's use of the term *mpena* to refer to Naana is in fact technically accurate. In the absence of the performance of customary marriage rites, neither childbirth nor living together qualifies a person to be a wife or husband. Without the payment of bridewealth a traditional marriage cannot be established and there can therefore be no wives or husbands. It is unions of this nature which Bleek (1974) also described as 'free marriage' that are described in the Akan parlance as *mpena aware* or *mpena awadee* (Duncan, 2010; Korang-Okrah,

2015; Mikell, 1997; Opanyin Agyekum, personal communication, 2015). In a similar vein, Alex also stated that because he has not completed the customary marriage process, he does not speak of Nana Akua as his wife. According to him, he sometimes refers to her as '*ɔbaa no a me ne no wɔ hɔ no'*, *(Interview, November, 2016)*, roughly translated as 'the woman with whom I am in a relationship'.

None of the middle-class men also spoke of their partners as their wives although they admitted that in many respects, they conduct themselves as married. Like their female counterparts, their partners were their 'girlfriends'. Osei explains his stance as such, "She is my girlfriend, she literally lives with me and we do a lot of things together. I give her money and all that, but I cannot call her my wife. There's even no guarantee that we will get married." *(Interview, April 2017).* Quantity surveyor Amoako, however, also introduced a very unique term when he told me, "When we meet my *boys boys*, I tell them she's my *asaase wura* [land lady] and my friends understand that. When I say that they know she is the serious girlfriend in my life. That term is not used for just anybody." *(Interview, February 2017).* Amoako's use of the term 'serious girlfriend' is similar to the term 'main girlfriends' which is used by young men in urban centres of sub-Saharan Africa (Meekers & Calvès, 1997). According to him, the term *asaase wura* implies that just as the owner of a piece of land can decide what to do with it, Maame his partner, is an important stakeholder in his life with whom he takes crucial decisions. Moreover, she had been introduced to his family as wife to be.

The different perspectives in what they consider to be the appropriate term in describing each other as depicted in the case of Naana and Kwabena for instance demonstrates the subjective

interpretations of individuals of their everyday experiences which in some cases produces multiple realities. The interesting thing about these terminologies was that their use could change depending on the circumstances under which a partner was being talked about. Awuradwoa for instance explained to me that when it comes to her family members, especially her mother, she cannot refer to her partner as her husband but does so when talking to others. She said:

> If I am talking to my mother and I refer to him as my husband, she will ask me 'when did he come to perform any marriage rites that you are calling him your husband?' So, in order not to make her angry, I will just say *Akua nom papa* [the father of Akua and her siblings]". *(Interview, October 2016).*

In this instance, teknonymy, which is parent-hood titles (Ameka & Breedveld, 2004) becomes the descriptive terminology in referring to a partner.

When it came to how they called each other, male participants reported that they just call their partners by their names as is the practice with many Ghanaian married men. Women, on the other hand, would do same but would prefix it with "bra". *Me wura*, in Akan means 'my lord', 'sir' or 'master' (Obeng, 1997). This term is used by many women to address their husbands not just by Akan women but also by women of other ethnic groups as translated in their respective languages. Fiaveh (2017) and Diabah (2015) found in their studies of strategies employed by urban Ghanaian women in initiating sexual intercourse and the representation of male sexual power in Ghanaian radio commercials respectively, that *me wura* is also used by women as a romanticising appellation for their husbands. No female participants indicated the use of this term. However, Awuradwoa who said she calls her partner by his name feels she could do better if she was a proper wife. "If he marries me, I will call him sweetheart", *(Interview, October 2016)*, she says and looks away shyly. In her case, she had refused to call her partner, 'sweetheart' which is name of endearment

(Afful, 2006), to register her displeasure about the status of the union. In her opinion, men deserve such 'names' when they show respect to their partners by performing marriage rites for them. Although she was enthusiastic about their union ending in marriage, she calling her husband by his first name was a point of low enthusiasm. Collins (2004) explains that emotional energy is a continuum for which reason a person can move up or down the levels. In other instances, an individual can demonstrate different forms of emotional energies under different circumstances and for different purposes.

This study reveals that the terms 'husband' and 'wife' as marriage kinship terminologies are also used outside of the context of marriage in the Ghanaian context. These terms may be used based on individuals' subjective understanding of them and not necessarily as they are traditionally known to mean. For this reason, defining marital status a socio-demographic feature of a person needs to be done in a rigorous manner to avoid indefiniteness.

4.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has primarily been to examine the circumstances that lead to the formation of consensual unions as an alternative form of family formation in Ghana. The literature on consensual unions in Africa has largely attributed the incidence of such unions to amongst other factors, constraints in marriage payment, urbanisation, and individualisation. Findings from this study, however, show that underneath these general causes there are more specific situations that result in such unions. For instance, it would not be enough to argue that consensual unions in urban spaces come about because traditional norms concerning marriage are easily sidestepped without the notice of extended family members. Whilst that is tenable, the more important issues would be

the very specifics of why these norms are sidestepped some of which have been revealed in this study such as the livelihood strategy, escape route, show of male maturity and masculinity, rehearsing for marriage and the effect of love magic. It was found that women were more likely to opt for consensual unions as a livelihood strategy. Such women were mostly migrants, with low levels of education as well as low income levels. They, therefore, thought of their partners as the support system for coping with the economic hardships they encountered in Accra. As a way of escaping acts of sexual harassment from men with whom they lived, other women had also ended up with their current partners. The men, on the other hand, entered into their unions as a sign of maturity and masculinity. In this case, the decision to enter consensual unions is largely intentional and conscious. However, these decisions are explicable with reference to the situations individuals find themselves in which in turn influence their actions (Collins, 2004).

The literature on marriage in Africa in general and Ghana in particular, has also suggested that ethnicity and lineage type for that matter, is a major determinant of attitudes towards marriage and by extension other forms of conjugal unions. In this study, gender rather than ethnicity appeared to be the most important determinant of varying conceptualisations and understandings of consensual unions. Whilst men were more likely to think of their unions as an alternative to marriage, women, on the other hand, tended to consider the unions as a precursor to marriage. It is for this reason, coupled with the fact that the participants lived with their partners as married people, that most of the female participants referred to their partners as their husbands even when the men saw them as just their lovers.

There was, therefore, a clear case of power dynamics in relation to the different conceptualisations of the unions. Whoever was being waited upon to give the 'order' for the marriage to take place, usually the men, seemed to be the dominant figure in the relationship. The conceptualisations of the unions influenced the levels of emotional energies that partners demonstrated. Whilst those who saw their unions as an end in itself, usually the men, were less enthusiastic about considering marriage, others, mostly women, for whom their unions were a precursor to marriage showed a sense of hope and enthusiasm about the possibility.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE INSIDE STORIES: IMPLICATIONS OF BEING IN A CONSENSUAL UNION

5.1 Introduction

The previous Chapter was a discussion of the circumstances that lead to the formation of consensual unions. The chapter further looked at the ways in which partners in these unions think of their unions and I established that consensual unions may be seen as either a precursor or an alternative to marriage depending on the partner in question, which is also reflected in the terminology they use to describe each other. Building on that, this Chapter focuses on the daily experiences of the partners, ranging from daily pressures from multiple avenues to intermittent issues such as the naming of children and the death of a partner. These experiences could also be understood in terms of whether or not partners in consensual unions think of marriage as the end goal of their relationship.

5.2 The Three-Fold Pressure Group Experience in Consensual Unions

In the attempt to investigate the implications of being in a consensual union, the data suggested that because such unions are perceived as an unconventional route to family formation, the lives of couples involved come under the scrutiny of some institutions in the society. As reported by research participants, these groups through various means persistently impressed upon the couples the need to convert their unions into marriage, thus their designation by the researcher as ‘pressure groups’. There are three major pressure groups who react in varying degrees to persons in consensual unions. In most cases, research participants experienced pressures from all three groups. Thus, I conceptualised this as the ‘three-fold pressure group experience in consensual unions’.

5.2.1 "When your parents speak, they have spoken": Pressures from the Family

The role of the family, both nuclear and extended, is very crucial in the lives of individuals in Ghanaian society when it comes to marriage. The importance of the family is reflected in the roles members play in the marriage process from the choice of marital partners through the marriage ceremony to the dissolution of marriage. In Akan tradition, for instance, it is the responsibility of a father to marry a wife for his adult son (Allman, 1996). Family members continue to remain key in the lives of the married couple as they may even be involved in the adjudication of marital disputes. It is therefore almost an impossibility for a person to side-line his or her family on issues pertaining to their relationship or marriage. In this study, participants' family members constituted a strong pressure group. The 'pressure' was mainly for the participants in question to get married. Female respondents reported receiving significantly more pressure than their male counterparts. This was often the case where the men were perceived as being unwilling to convert the unions into marriage. Korkor narrated:

> There is not a single day that when I talk to my mother she will not ask when the man is coming to perform the marriage rites. She has come to our house on several occasions to threaten him that should anything happen to me, he will see what the family members will do to him…. sometimes my mother talks to me as if it is my fault that he hasn't performed the rites. *(Interview, November 2016).*

In Korkor's account, she revealed that after having her second child with her partner, he was asked by her mother as a way of registering her displeasure and also in consonance with their tradition, to pay what is called *kwasiabuo* money to her family. *Kwasiabuo,* an Akan word implies *taking somebody for a fool.* Sexual relations outside the context of marriage is usually frowned upon. *Kwasiabuo*, therefore, is a penalty paid by a man who has a child with a woman without performing the necessary customary rites, as compensation to both she and her family (Mwinituo & Mill, 2006). Even though the practice is very typical of the Akan, it has also got parallels amongst other

groups like the Krobo, the ethnic group to which Korkor belongs. The traditional rule for most Ghanaian societies is that a man has the right to enjoy the sexual and reproductive services of a woman only when he has traditionally married her (Nukunya, 2003). A man is, therefore, assumed to have taken a woman for granted and not given her and her family the necessary respect, if she delivers these services in the absence of bride wealth payment. In Korkor's case, as is the practice in many other instances, to satisfy the *kwasiabuo* penalty, her partner, John paid and amount of money and also gave the family a bottle of schnapps. The charge did not only serve as compensation but also made it possible for the family to acknowledge John as the biological father of the children.

Paradoxically, although some women also enjoy marital rights such as provisions for shelter and maintenance from men who are not their husbands, it is not the practice for such women to be also charged with taking the men for fools. This goes to show that in the case of consensual unions, the woman is seen as the victim and, therefore, the need to compensate her. A victim, in that, for a society which has historically emphasised the chastity of women and the value of marriage for women especially, childbearing outside marriage is often not considered ideal. Interestingly, among the Akan, children born to woman in or out of wedlock ultimately belong to their mother's lineage. However, in the case where the man fails to marry her, her value in the marriage market may reduce as she might not be the first choice for men looking for prospective wives. This argument is consistent with the earlier finding about most female participants tending to think of marriage as a necessary end to their consensual unions since going by the *kwasiabuo* logic, they are being treated as fools by their partners.

Yaw also talked about being constantly asked by his parents and elder brothers when he was going to ask them to accompany him to his partner's family to perform the marriage rites. He described this 'pressure' as a thorn in his flesh because he had no plans of marrying Owusuaa whom he had described as a lazy woman who did not want to work. According to him, his family is insisting that once he has had a child with the woman, he had to marry her. "Sister", he said, "it's a very big problem for me now, my parents do not want to hear anything about me leaving this woman, but I know how she is and I know I can't marry her. But when your parents speak, they have spoken." *(Interview, June 2017).*

Unlike participants like Korkor and Yaw whose family members wanted them to formalise their unions, Osei faced a different form of pressure. His mother did not approve of his relationship and was insisting that he ended it. Her argument, according to Osei, was that a woman who would be in a consensual union with a man before marriage was not virtuous and would, therefore, not make a good wife in future. He said:

> My mother passed by my house one morning and met her there. It was obvious she had slept over and from the look on my mother's face, I knew she was not happy with what she saw….so later when she complained about her, I was not surprised. Before then she only knew her as my friend. *(Interview, April 2017).*

Although for, he was satisfied with his partner's qualities, mentioning her temperament in particular, he was torn between honouring his mother and standing his ground. He, however, gave the indication that he was likely to follow his mother's wishes not because he agreed with her but because he revered her and valued her opinion and advice. So, like Yaw, discussed earlier, a parent had spoken. The literature on mate selection in Africa suggests that modernization is a key factor that has brought about autonomy (Meekers, 1992; Takyi, 2003). Urban dwellers and individuals with high levels of education are viewed as more autonomous in the selection of their marital

partners. Other scholars, like Nukunya (2003) have, however also indicated that although arranged marriages are declining with increased autonomy in mate selection, family or parental approval is still considered before a couple can get married. It is difficult to ignore one's parents' opinion about partners they intend to marry primarily because of the important roles parents play in the marriage ceremony itself. For example, it is often a father who gives his daughter away in marriage and so receives the traditional marriage payments. On the other hand, a man who wishes to marry would require his father to accompany him to ask for the woman's hand in marriage and ultimately perform the marriage rites. This is especially so among the Akan where a father is even supposed to provide the resources for his son's marriage payments (Allman, 1996).

Given these facts, a father's disapproval or his child's choice of a marriage partner can stall the possibility of the marriage altogether. Moreover, the relationship between parents and their children is not only considered as biological, but also spiritual. The full blessings of one's parents for an important step like marriage is, therefore, of extreme importance to many people who wish for a successful married life. This applies in many cases irrespective of the social status of the person in question. For a medical doctor like Osei the assumption is likely to be that he would enjoy a high degree of autonomy in choosing a marriage partner. However, the quote above and the experience with his mother support the argument that parental consent remains crucial in the choice of marriage partners.

Family pressure, as narrated by participants, did not only manifest in the utterances of family members, especially parents. Some participants also pointed to the ill treatment they and their children received whenever they visited family members in their hometowns. This kind of

treatment could be interpreted as their relatives' way of registering their displeasure about the status of their relationship. Naana narrated:

> When I go home [her hometown], I do not need anybody to tell me that I am annoying them. The one after me is a female and as for her, her husband has performed the marriage rites. When there is a funeral or something and I go there, I see a difference between how my mother treats her and her children, and how she treats me and my children. Even if you are a stranger there, you can tell the difference. You can see that she likes them… As for me, I know it is all because of the marriage issue. *(Interview, January 2017).*

Naana continued that she is sometimes reluctant to go to her hometown because of her experiences there which make her feel like an outsider amongst her own people. More women reported experiencing the pressures from their families as compared to men. Women seemed to be in much more contact with their families unlike their partners. For instance, they were more likely to attend family events like funerals back in their hometowns. Again, upon having babies they would either have family members visiting or they would go to some family members for assistance in taking care of the new-born.

5.2.2 "I know I'm living in sin": Pressures from the Church

Religion is one of the prevailing influences in the lives of many Africans and is a pivot around which the social structure revolves (Assimeng, 2010). Quoting Pobee, Omenyo (2006) talks about the Ghanaian as *homo religiousus* since both their ontology and epistemology are religious. Religion in many respects provides the framework for family life in Ghana and this extends to sexual socialization (Heaton & Darkwah, 2011). Sexual socialisation of individuals in society had traditionally been the responsibility of one's kin group. Over the years, however, other agents like the state and religious groups have also assumed this role, defining for people what is acceptable sexual behaviour and what is not. Several studies have, therefore, identified some connection

between religious affiliation and practices and behaviours towards sexual relationships (Addai, 2000; Takyi, 2003). In a study on how parents perceive the role of religious influence on adolescents' sexual behaviours in two Ghanaian communities, Osafo, Asampong, Langmagne and Ahiadeke (2014) found that religion is much more influential than the state in regulating sexual behavior. Their finding was consistent with what scholars like Anarfi and Owusu (2011) have observed that in Africa, religion is not only acknowledged as an essential part of people's lives but also crucial in the sexual socialisation of members of society. Anarfi and Owusu (2011), have further intimated that the three major religious groups in Ghana which are traditional, Islamic and Christian religions consider sexual relationships outside of the context of marriage as sin. The extent to which these religious views are upheld is, however, difficult to ascertain. According to Osafo et al., (2014, p. 964-965):

> Religion had both an inhibitive and facilitative role in regulating sexual behavior. The inhibitive role refers to the ways in which religious values deter people from indulging in sexual behaviours which are considered inappropriate. The facilitative role, on the other hand, refers to religious leaders acting as counsellors and assisting their members in making right choices pertaining to sexuality.

Although Osafo et al., (2104) focused on adolescents, these religious roles to a very large extent also extend to adult sexual behaviours as was proven to be the case in this study.

Women have been known to be more religious than men in most parts of the world (Trzebiatowska & Bruce, 2002) and in this study, female participants appeared to be more religious than their male counterparts. They often used religious references in their narratives. Although all research participants professed to be Christians, most of the men admitted they were not as regular and active in church as their partners. It was, therefore, not surprising that it was female participants who mostly reported the church as being one of the pressure groups pushing them towards

formalising their consensual unions. Naana could not mention the name of her church because she said it had a big English name which she could not pronounce. She only described it as 'one of these one-man churches' with an average Sunday service attendance of about fifty members, or about eighty on the days that 'everybody comes'. She had been a member of the church for a couple of years. Being a regular member, her pastor was interested in two major aspects of her life; that she stopped drinking and also getting her partner, Kwabena to perform her marriage rites. The fact that from time to time the pastor would ask if she and Kwabena were taking the necessary steps to formalise their union and even 'bring it before God' constituted some form of pressure on her. "When I go to church and we close and he [the pastor] calls me that he wants us to talk, I immediately know that he is going to talk about my 'husband' and me. Sometimes it even makes me feel ashamed", she said. *(Interview, January 2017).*

Since a premarital sexual union is described in Christianity as a sinful practice, Naana and others like her interpreted their being in consensual unions as not right before God, for which reason they would say, "I know I'm living in sin." This 'living in sin' also came with its consequences. Korkor narrated hers as such: "Because of my situation, I'm not able to do so many things in church. I cannot lead praises and worship; I cannot lead prayers, oh! So many things" *(Interview, November 2016).* The notion of 'so many things' as was revealed in the accounts of other female participants included not being able to participate in the Holy Communion and being disqualified from assuming church leadership positions. Meischer (2005) described a similar case of polygynous Kwahu men who converted to Christianity and became members of the Presbyterian Church. Their marital status prevented them from functioning as full members of the church.

The consequences of being in consensual unions also extended to the children. Naming rituals in Ghana, and many other parts of Africa, have traditionally been performed at home by an elderly lineage member. In the process of Christianising Africa, however, naming ceremonies have gradually been taken over by the church with pastors assuming the role of family heads. Many Ghanaian Christians, in the last two decades now have their children named in church by their pastors. Because children who are born in consensual unions are born out of wedlock, the naming ceremonies of the children of these female participants could not be held in church and even when it was held at home, the pastor would not be there to conduct the ceremony. These women blamed their inability to receive many of God's blessings on their marital status. In their opinion, the sinful nature of their relationships blocked the blessings from reaching them and in some cases even hindered their prayers from being heard by God. All of these consequences, both spiritual and physical, constituted a form of pressure on them to get the right thing done; get married.

Even though the men admitted they were not regular at church, that did not make them immune to the pressure of the church. Some male participants like John for instance reported being invited by the pastor of his wife's church for discussions on their relationship status. In the Ghanaian culture, it is a man who goes for a woman's hand in marriage and so performs the marriage rites. Where premarital unions have not been converted to marriage, it is common to find the women accusing the men of refusing to perform the marriage rites. The meetings between the pastors and their church members' partners were therefore held in an attempt to ascertain the reasons why the marriage rites had not been performed and consequently to encourage the men to marry the women. For John, it was this pastor who had accompanied him to Korkor's family members to pay the *kwasiabuo* penalty he had been asked to pay. He explained:

> Oh, her pastor has invited me a number of times to discuss the marriage issue. I just tell him that I am putting things together. You know that if someone is a pastor, you must show that person some respect. That is why I even asked him to accompany me to go and pay the *kwasiabuo* penalty. *(Interview, November 2017).*

For other participants who attended relatively bigger churches, the kind of church pressure as has been described in the preceding paragraphs was virtually absent. So far as Christianity is concerned, the rules concerning premarital sexual unions are supposed to be the same irrespective of denomination or church size. However, the level of implementation of these rules differed. Middle class participants were mostly members of the 'big' churches. As has been observed by Assimeng (2010, p. 25), "the trend in social differentiation and religious participation in West African countries like Ghana, shows that 'big men' usually attend the respectable cathedrals whilst the 'small men' participate in the small religious groups that are led by prophets and prophetesses."

In the words of Akosua, a nurse, "…. Oh, but that Presby-Methodist church, we are so many, and we even have two services every Sunday. Nobody cares about anybody. You can miss church for a long time, and nobody will even realise it" *(Interview, January 2017).* From Akosua's comment, the size of a church could affect the extent to which the lives of the individual members come under the scrutiny of the church leadership. That is not to suggest that churches with large numbers are unable to enforce their rules and sanctions. In some cases, whether the happenings in a person's life come to the attention of the leadership was also contingent on their level of involvement in church activities. More active members were subjected to greater scrutiny. Akosua, for instance, explained that her work as a nurse prevented her from regularly attending church service also being active in church. As a result, many people had no knowledge of her and her marital status.

Heaton and Darkwah (2011), however, argue that the differences in the organisational structures of orthodox and charismatic churches is such that in the former, the leading figures in the church do not often get to know about individual members' life issues. There are often structures at the lower levels that are expected to deal with people's issues even before they come to the attention of the top hierarchy.

5.2.3 "…and she called me an ashawo": Pressures from Friends and Neighbours

Nana Akua, giving an account of her life history, narrated how she had once gotten into a fight with a neighbour. The fight started because she disciplined one of the neighbour's children for being naughty and the child reported the incident to her mother. The child's mother confronted her and during the verbal exchanges she reportedly called Nana Akua an *ashawo*. *Ashawo* is a term of Nigerian origin, specifically Yoruba, which has been adopted in Ghana as a reference to sex workers and sometimes a woman who engages in sexual relations with men to whom she is not married (Izugbara, 2005). She continued:

> She called me that because she said I was sleeping with a man who had not married me. She knew I was not married because she does not see me wearing any ring, so as soon as she said that, I ended everything. Hmmm, that day… (She shakes her head). That time I was pregnant with my second child. *(Interview, November 2016).*

According to Nana Akua, as soon as her partner Alex got back home from work that evening, she narrated what had happened to him. Her main aim was to impress upon Alex the need to complete the customary marriage rites which he had started a few years ago by performing the 'knocking' rite. She expressed how she found this married neighbour's comments very disrespectful for which reason she wished she were also married.

Other female participants like Agyeiwaa revealed that they also experience some level of societal pressure. Unlike Nana Akua, theirs came in a subtler way which could be described as passive aggression and were evident in conversations with their married women friends. Agyiewaa expressed it this way:

> Whenever you have a problem in your relationship and you discuss it with your friend who is married, she will talk and talk and talk and all she will be saying is that your problems are because the man has not married you, as if as for married women they don't have any problems in their marriage. As for me, I call them the 'Mrs. women' (laughs) …. But it also makes you feel that maybe if you were married things would be better. *(Interview, October 2016).*

These female participants were often of the view in their circle of friends, the married ones whom Agyeiwaa labelled as the 'Mrs. women' tended to think of themselves more highly than their unmarried friends. Perhaps, similar to the implications of the traditional payment of *kwasiabuo*, these 'Mrs. women' considered their unmarried friends as fools; allowing men to engage in sexual relations with them and also have children with them without performing the necessary marriage rites. Indeed, many of the women in consensual unions already harboured such feelings. Reference to their marital status by their married friends, therefore, for them increased the pressure they felt to also get married. Emma and Sheila, the two middle class participants who had indicated that their unions for them were an alternative to marriage also experienced this form of pressure. Their class position did not prevent some of their friends, both married and otherwise, from persistently advising them against their decision to maintain the consensual unions as an alternative to marriage. For both of them, however, their minds had already been made up about the status of the unions they had established.

The level of pressure from a particular group was also contingent on the extent of a person's association of the agent of pressure in question. In most cases, however, research participants reported experiencing pressures from all three pressure groups, albeit in varying degrees, for which reason I conceptualise this knowledge which has been revealed as the 'three-fold pressure group experience of consensual unions'. This is to suggest that persons in consensual unions are often most likely to face reactions from all of these three quarters in relation to the future of their unions.

5.3 "…he beats me until he sees blood": Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

Aside the 'three-fold pressure group experience', another phenomenon which was reported by mostly female participants was intimate partner violence. Intimate partner violence is explained as any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours (Olayanju, Naguib, Nguyen, Bali & Vung, 2013). In Ghana, victims do not often discuss or report this phenomenon. This is particularly so when the victims are men since in a culture where masculinity is defined among other things, in terms of male dominance, discussing such experiences of a man could expose him to ridicule. Therefore, although both men and women in intimate relationships may experience some forms of violence, no male participant reported such an experience in their union. Five female participants (Dede, Maabena, Awuradwoa, Lucy and Naana), however, admitted that they experience different kinds of intimate partner abuse; physical, sexual and psychological.

A large body of work points to the fact that non-marital intimate relationships like cohabiting or consensual unions, in comparison with marriage are generally of poorer relationship quality as

they tend to be more violent than marriage (Brown & Booth, 1996; Carbone-Lopez, Wiersma, Cleveland, Herrera & Fischer, 2010; DeMaris, 2001; Kenney & McLanahan, 2006; Rennison & Macmillan, 2012). In their study which focused on why cohabiting relationships are more violent than marriages in the United States, Kenney and McLanahan (2006) found that the trend was basically due to the lack of social and institutional support systems for persons in such unions. A similar case can be made in the Ghanaian context where there is very little social and legal recognition of such unions making the individuals involved, especially the women, more vulnerable than their married counterparts.

Despite her swollen jaw and a cut under her left eye, Dede had been very outspoken and engaging all through the interview session until I asked a question about intimate partner violence. Her mood changed and with her head bowed she said:

> Hmmm, Maa Rose, [referring to the researcher] as for beating if I say he does not beat me I will be lying. I am speaking the truth before God. When he gets hold of me and starts beating me, he beats me until he sees blood. He is very quick tempered, that is the problem…sometimes too he forces me to sleep with him…. It is all because he has taken me for free. He has not gone to ask my hand in marriage from any family member that is why he is able to do all that. *(Interview, October 2016).*

Dede's facial expressions and the tone of her voice as she spoke showed a deep sense of emotion attached to what was being narrated. It was obvious that it was an experience about which she was not happy. Apparently, the swollen jaw and the cut under her eye had been the result of beatings she had received from Kingsley, her partner. The reasons that often lead to the abuse range from refusing to have sex, not cooking, or drinking alcohol. Maabena, in her account of abuse pointed to a broken blue plastic chair in front of their house. According to her, her partner Kudjo beat her up with the chair and for days she was unable to walk without limping. She described that as the

worst form of abuse she had experienced from her partner although there had been other instances of physical abuse against her. She explained that the abuse was a recent development and had all started because it came to her notice that Kudjo was cheating on her with another woman. When she confronted him on the matter, he physically assaulted her and since then at the least provocation she is physically abused. Maabena's shares some similarities with Lucy, another research participant.

Lucy who also indicated that questioning her partner Johnson about his infidelity led him to physically abuse her. Earlier in the interview, I noticed Lucy had a bloodshot eye. Out of concern I asked her what had happened. she initially told me she had hit her eye against a door at home. However, as she got comfortable during the interview and started opening up to me, she admitted the bloodshot eye was the result of being beaten by Johnson. Naana also reported receiving beating with a belt from her partner, Kwabena on several occasions. According to her, she has been warned on several occasions by him not to drink alcohol. Whenever she defied this order, he would beat her. Awuradwoa, however, reported psychological abuse. She claimed not to have ever been physically or sexually abused but said that she had to deal with insults almost daily, a situation which often left her disheartened. She said, "There's no sign of respect in the way he talks to me. He would shout at me and talk to me anyhow as if I am a little girl. It is not nice at all" *(Interview, October 2016).*

Intimate partner violence which is a form of domestic abuse is prevalent in Ghana and it raises both social and health concerns (Adinkrah, 2014; Adjei, 2016; Asiedu, 2016; Coker-Appiah & Cusack, 1999; Issahaku, 2015). It has been observed that in IPV, often men are the perpetrators

while women are the victims in most societies, including Ghana. Yeboah and Batse (2009) reported that of every three women in Ghana, one experiences a form of IPV from their partner. More recently, Issahaku (2017) posits that seven of every ten women in the Northern region of Ghana are abused by their husbands. Scholars offer multiple explanations for this occurrence. Bowman (2003) offers three possible explanations for this tendency in the African context. These are the rights-based, feminist and cultural perspectives. The rights-based theory talks about how the fundamental human rights of women are not adequately provided for in many African constitutions, while the feminist perspective emphasises the patriarchal nature of African societies and the cultural standpoint focuses on the traditional norms and practices that contribute to the incidence of intimate partner violence.

According to Gyekye (1996), women in traditional Ghanaian society are viewed as precious gifts and are to be emotionally and economically dependent on their husbands who in turn are also expected to be fully responsible for their wives' welfare. Other scholars from the feminist perspective have argued that this cultural arrangement of men as providers and protectors for women puts men and boys in the dominant position in society, a position which is central to the definition of masculinity in Ghana (Adomako Ampofo & Prah, 2009; Mann & Takyi, 2009; Takyi & Mann, 2006). "Violence is, therefore, used by some men when they experience the masculine identity disappointment, that is, a feeling of dissatisfaction in men from unrealised cultural notions and expectations of masculinity" (Adjei, 2015b, p. 425). According to Jewkes, (2002, p. 1615) "men construct women as legitimate vehicles for the reconfirmation of male powerfulness through beatings." One of the causes of this is when the women who are to be dependent on their husbands reverse the gender roles by becoming the breadwinners of the family thus challenging the authority

of men (Silberschmidt, 2001). With the cases of intimate partner violence in this study, the women in question, like unemployed Dede, were largely economically dependent on their partners and had therefore not challenged the positon of their partners in terms of their ability to provide for them. What was clear was that their economic dependence on their partners made them even more vulnerable to all kinds of treatments from the men. Women's economic positions in intimate relationships, therefore, do not trigger abuse only when they are better placed than their partners but also when they are almost totally dependent on their partners.

On the other hand, scholars like Amoakohene (2004) and Nukunya (2003) have argued that Ghanaian men generally tend to think that they have the right to discipline their wives. In a study by Adomako Ampofo and Dodoo (2001) in which they sought the views of adolescents on intimate partner abuse, their male respondents expressed the view that the payment of bride wealth entitles a man to physically penalise a woman. According to these young adolescent boys, they would not beat their girlfriends since they had not paid any bride wealth but would be able to beat them after they have been married. Their standpoint stemmed from the notion that bride wealth payment implies ownership of a woman by the man. Contrary to this idea, non-payment of bride wealth was not a restraining factor for the two male participants (Kingsley and Kwabena) who confirmed that they beat their partners sometimes. Both of them were of the view that it was their responsibility as men to bring their women, whether wives or girlfriends, to order through discipline when they went wrong. Dede's partner Kingsley, put it this way:

> As a man, if you are with a woman, it is your responsibility to check her. A woman must listen to the man. I have asked her to stop drinking but she does not listen. So, if I come back from work to find her drunk and she has not prepared my food, what will I do? I am the one who goes out to work and bring money home. *(Interview, October 2016).*

Kingsley's statement reveals how both the patriarchal nature of the Ghanaian family and his position as the one who 'brings money home' convinces him that he has the right to discipline his partner. According to Adinkrah (2014), this tendency of Ghanaian men to think of themselves as disciplinarians of their intimate partners can also be attributed to the concept of 'gerontogamy' whereby men are older than their partners. Using Dede and Kinsley as examples, Kingsley aged 45 is 7 years older than Dede, who is 38 years. For a society which has traditionally been stratified by age and gender, an older man is all the more likely to think of himself as the authority figure and thus justified to mete out punishment to his younger female partner.

Whilst men who admitted being perpetrators of IPV used their position as being the men and breadwinners, to justify their actions, the women victims interpreted such violence as a consequence of the relationship status. Unlike her other colleagues, Lucy was not necessarily economically dependent on Johnson. In her account, she explained that both she and Johnson contributed to the building of the 'two bedrooms self-contained' house in which they lived. Together, they had also constructed three 'single room self-contained' apartments which they had rented out. But according to her, Johnson thought he could beat her because she was not his wife and thus, she had no right to complain about his infidelity. Maabena, also reported similar comments from Kudjo whom she said asked if she could report him to any of his family members since she knew very few of them. Adomako and Prah (2009) have posited that in the situation where couples live away from their respective family and kin, partners' abuse is aggravated since the likelihood of family intervention is waned. This assertion is confirmed in this study as the research participants were mostly migrants and had very few of their family members in Accra. And like Dede said, from her viewpoint she was being abused because she had been taken for

'free', meaning that she had not been properly married. She said, "Even if I find one of his family members and tell him about what he's doing to me, they will tell me they don't know me because their son has not married me" *(Interview, October 2016).*

Other forms of intimate partnerships, like consensual unions, have received little attention in the literature on partnerships. As such, many studies on IPV in Ghana focuses on married couples, especially, 'wife beating' (Adjei, 2015; Adjei, 2016; Asiedu, 2016; Issahaku, 2017; Mann & Takyi, 2009; Ofei-Aboagye, 1994). Indeed, Takyi and Mann (2006) describe wife beating as the most common form of IPV in Ghana. This study, however, gives support to the fact that intimate partner violence is also common in consensual unions.

Apart from dealing with pressure groups and issues of intimate partner violence, most of the research participants indicated that frequent quarrels were characteristic of their relationships. The question of when customary marriage rites would be performed appeared to be the root of all the troubles between them. The women often brought up the subject. Both male and female participants reported poor relationship quality. However, the accounts of the female participants showed that they were more troubled by the state of their unions than the men. Mostly being the victims of intimate partner violence and the targets of the 'pressure groups', it is quite understandable that women would be more concerned about the quality of their unions. All of these contributed significantly to female participants hoping for their unions to ultimately end in marriage, a point which was established in the previous chapter. Emma and Sheila, on the other hand, said they were happy with their unions because they did not feel trapped in the unions like they did when they were married. As Emma put it, "Now I'm free [stresses the 'free']. Anytime I

want to get out of this relationship, I can do it and nobody can do anything to me, and because he is thinking about marriage he is behaving well, so it is good" *(Interview, May 2017).* In this situation, Emma could be described as in control of the union and making it work in her interest.

It is obvious from the narratives above that, women more than men tend to bear the brunt of the negative implications of being in a consensual union. Given the fact that in the consensual union, men were often the dominant figures, the power of the women lay in their decision to have insisted on their partners fulfilling the customary marriage requirements for marriage. Their failure to ensure that had largely resulted in them suffering more of the implications. Although as the dominant figures, the decision to convert the unions to marriage basically depended on the men, they did not bear much of the implications discussed above, compared to their partners. This disparity could be explained largely in relation to the social-cultural landscape of the Ghanaian society and how men and women are viewed differently in terms of their status as married people.

5.4 The Intervention of the Extended Family

In the preceding section, I discussed some of the experiences of persons in consensual unions. From the discussions, it is obvious that women tend to bear the brunt of sanctions of their union. This further worsened their positions as the 'weaker' ones in the power dynamics of their relationships as they wait on their partners to give the 'order' for marriage. This explained why they wished their relationships would be converted to marriages. However, in some other instances, based on the intervention of extended kin, other forms of implications are created, especially for the men. In this section the focus is on how the principles of matriliny and patriliny created implications for persons in consensual unions. The two major lineage systems in Ghana,

matrilineage and patrilineage, have their unique principles which guide and also sanction the violation of their marriage processes. These principles find expression in issues of child naming, the death of a partner and inheritance (Nukunya, 2003)**.** To need to, therefore, satisfy traditional marriage requirements is expressed in many forms including music.

In his song titled "You can't touch me", for example, the late Ghanaian highlife musician Daasebre Gyamena uses the phrase "you can't touch" is used metaphorically to mean "you cannot have sex with me." What Daasebre points out in this song is that traditionally approved marriage procedures must be followed to establish a sexual relationship between a man and a woman. According to this song, in the absence of the performance of customary marriage rites *ɔbaa no* (the lady) would decide to sanction her suitor by not making herself available for a non-marital sexual union. For the singer, this should be the ideal situation. In reality, this ideal is not always the case as it is with consensual unions that are a form of non-marital sexual unions. In the case of consensual unions whereby the "touching" happens and more critically children are born before the man "goes home" to perform the marriage rites, there is often the intervention of extended family members to mete out sanctions to the male partners involved. These sanctions come in different forms and are also informed by the type of lineage system to which the partners belong and the principles upon which they operate. The intervention of women's extended family to mete out sanctions was one way in which the women could also exercise some power and control in the union. The words of "You can't touch me" are:

♫*Kɔ fie na kɔyɛ me ho adeɛ, Darling, nte saa de a you can't touch me*♫
Kɔ fie na kɔyɛ me ho adeɛ Sweetie, nte saa de a you can't touch me
Na asɛm yi emu yɛ duru sen me o, nso asɛm nokorɛ yɛnto sɛbe o.
Me de wo bɛko akɔ kyerɛ agya, wanamontuo yɛ me fɛ.
Kɔ fie na kɔyɛ me ho adeɛ, Darling, nte saa dea you can't touch me.
Ɔbaa no, Ɔbaa no, nte saa de a you can't touch me, ɔbaa no.

M'ayɛ nframa, saa na woasi wo bo, firi sɛ Pentene asaase nna hɔ kwa
Wote meda ase a, woama wo kora so, w'adwen ne sɛ me yɛ akoa bi
Ɔdeneho na ne dehyeɛ ne me nti ɛyɛ wo sɛ meyɛ fo a, ɛyɛ agorɔ
Ɔdɔ, ka ntam di nsi sɛ anka menyɛ obi a wopɛ me anaa mate
Mate abrɛ nti ɛha wo o, wopɛ me a kɔhu m'abusuafoɔ
Barima yɛ mrɛ wɔ oko anim de a ɛnneɛ na K wosɛe mmerɛ
Kɔ fie na kɔyɛ me ho adeɛ darling, nte saa de a you can't touch me, ɔbaa no.
Meka ntam me sewaa Dankyi sɛ amammerɛ kwan so na mede wo bɛfa
Nana Aboagye akasa, Dacosta se ɔkɔ n'akyi sɛn ni
Amammerɛ yɛntoto no ase, yɛamfa anhyɛ hɔ a ɛfiri tɔ
Wonim mmaa pɛ a, wonsen w'ase nti nkontafoɔ bɛgye won nkontagyeɛ
Mɛkyɛ ɛna ntama pa, mɛma agya nsa pa
Adepa na ɛtɔn ne ho o, wɔfa Jones me su wo o
Kɔ fie na kɔyɛ me ho adeɛ darling, nte saa de a you can't touch me
Ɔbaa no, ɔbaa no nte saa de a you can't touch me, ɔbaano.

Obi de kasɛɛ adi me pɛn nti no ama maka ntam adi nse sɛ
Wode mpempem ba menhwɛ hɔ, gye mate sɛ abusuafoɔ ate aseɛ
Ɛfiri sɛ nwaawaho nti na kwankyɛn borɔdeɛ si hɔ a anyɛ yie no
Mahunu, mepɛ, maka, mafa, ne nyinaa kɔsi me hwɛe o
Abena Tabora ne Captain dɔ nti ama m'ani abere repɛ me deɛ
K Boakye nso ate aseɛ, wankwati amammerɛ nya ne so ne ne deɛ
Kɔ fie na kɔyɛ me ho adeɛ darling, nte saa de a you can't touch me
Ɔbaa no, ɔbaa no nte saa de a you can't touch me, ɔbaa no.

Translated into English, the song says:

Go to my family and pay the bridewealth, Darling
Otherwise, you can't touch me.
Go to my family and pay the bridewealth, Sweetie
Otherwise, you can't touch me.
This issue is weightier than I can bear
But truth does not need any euphemism.
I will go and introduce you to my father
I am impressed with your graceful movements
Go to my family and pay the bridewealth, Darling
Otherwise, you can't touch me,
That lady, that lady, otherwise you can't touch me
That lady.

I have become as free as air
Likewise, you are determined.
For the lands of Pentene village are not lying idle
Don't rush to opportunities unduly
Do you think I am a nonentity?
I am a royal of His majesty
So you must be kidding to think I'm a riff-raff
My love, you have to take a vow,
That you would still love me if I were a nobody
I have heard this a million times, so hold your breath
If you love me, go and see my family.
As a man, if you would show cowardice at the war front
Then K, you are wasting time.
Go to my family and pay the bridewealth, Darling,
Otherwise you can't touch me, that lady.

I swear by my aunt Dankyi,
That you have to observe tradition.
Nana Aboagye has spoken
Dacosta says he dare not break tradition
We do not defy tradition.
If we neglect what is required,
Everything will fall apart.
You can't surpass your in-law in wooing women
So your brothers-in-law will demand in-law fee
I will offer your mother an expensive cloth
I will offer your father an expensive liquor
Worthy wares advertise themselves
Uncle Jones, I pity you.
Go to my family and pay the bridewealth, Darling
Otherwise you can't touch me. That lady, that lady
Otherwise you can't touch me, that lady.

Somebody has once deceived me
So I have firmly resolved that even if you approach me with thousands,
I will not be enticed. Unless my family approves of everything
Because it is due to incessant interference,
That stunted the growth of the wayside plantain.
I have seen it, I love it, I have said that, I have taken it,
They all boil down to 'I looked at it'.

The love affair between Abena Tabora and Captain,
Has strengthened my resolve to look for my own lover
K Boakye also understands this,
So he did not defy tradition and got the one he deserved
So go to my family and pay the bridewealth, Darling
Otherwise you can't touch me, that lady, that lady
Otherwise you can't touch me, that lady.

Out of the fourteen couples sampled for this study, ten were Akan and the remaining four were Frafra and Krobo. The three single women who participated were Akan, Ewe and Ga. In his description of the composition of lineage types in Ghana, Nukunya, (2003, p. 25-26) writes:

> Though the patrilineal system of kinship is by far the most common form of organisation in Africa, the same cannot be said of Ghana. The Akan as is well known, practice the matrilineal system and of the remaining societies there are many which resemble bilateral or cognatic descent rather than patrilineal. These include most, if not all, the centralized states of the north, namely the Gonja, Dagomba, Mamprusi and Wala. This leaves us with only the acephalous societies of the north such as Tallensi, Kokomba and the Lowiili, among others and the societies of the South-East namely, the Ewe, the Ga, the Adangme and the Krobo as the only thoroughgoing patrilineal societies.

From Nukunya's categorisation, the ethnic backgrounds of the study participants can be clearly seen as either matrilineal or patrilineal.

5.4.1 Controversies over Naming Rights

One of the principal characteristics of the matrilineal system of social organisation is the fact that relatedness through females is considered as more culturally significant than that through males for which reason men transmit wealth and political rights to their sisters' sons (Holden, Sear & Mace, 2003). One's maternal uncle is, therefore, an important figure in the matrilineal structure as according to Nukunya (2003), he is not only a point of reference when it comes to inheritance but also performs parental roles which are normally reserved for fathers in patrilineal societies. This

arrangement offers a possible explanation for why men of matrilineal background have low paternity confidence (Holden et al, 2003). These notwithstanding, a crucial role that men of matrilineal societies maintain is the naming of their children.

In his study on kinship and marriage among the Asante, Fortes (1950) found that the naming of a child serves a number of purposes for both the father and the mother. According to him, although children do not belong to the lineage of their fathers, many men seek to have children because it gives them the opportunity to be able to pass on the names of their forebears. Paternity is, therefore, acknowledged when a man accepts responsibility for a woman's pregnancy and consequently provides maintenance for her over the period of the pregnancy, presents gifts upon the delivery of the child and most importantly names the child. This was not reserved for only married men but also unmarried men whose lovers got pregnant. What was considered shameful for the unmarried girl and her maternal kin was not the fact that she got pregnant, but the fact that her lover failed to acknowledge paternity of the child. This disgrace also extended to the man in question. Although the child is considered fully legitimate in their mother's lineage, they would also carry the stigma of not being acknowledged by their father (Fortes, 1950). Though Forte's study focused on the Asante, what was observed bears semblance with what pertains amongst other Akan groups, such as, Akyem, Akuapem, Bono, Kwawu, Assin-Twifo, Wasa, Fante-Agona, Nzema and Ahanta (Nukunya, 2003).

In this study, the dynamics around child naming appeared to be different from what Fortes (1950) had observed several decades ago. Out of the ten Akan couples, seven of them had children. For some male study participants, the failure to perform customary marriage rites for their partners had

caused the extended family of their partners to intervene and sanction them by way of denying them the right to name the children born into the union. There are two cases in point. In the case of Naana and Kwabena, all their four children had been given names by Naana's mother. She named the children after members of their extended family. According to Naana:

> When I was pregnant with our first child and I told my mother, she told me if the man doesn't come to perform the marriage rites, she won't allow him to name the child because I am not his wife. Truly, when I gave birth, she came to Accra and told him that the child will be named after her mother and that if he comes to perform the marriage rites then he can change the name…. but as I speak to you now, all the four children were named by my mother after our family members. It is as if the man does not care. *(Interview, January 2017).*

Speaking to Kwabena on this issue, he confirmed the information Naana had given. In his view, being denied the opportunity to name his children had "reduced his glory" as a man. "In a way, her mother is justified to do that, but I can also say because of that I will not take care of the kids, or you do not agree with me? So, it is all a problem" he said, *(Interview, January 2017).* Obviously, Kwabena was not happy with this form of sanction but had not resisted it. He had been denied the opportunity of passing on the names of his forebears. Naana, on the other hand, did not think of this as a disgrace to her or the children but as a way of demonstrating autonomy over the children. Whilst some years back, such an unmarried girl would have been concerned about her lover naming the children and not necessarily about him marrying her. In the present study, however, this right is taken away from the man as punishment for not marrying his lover, even though he had accepted responsibility for the children.

In "You can't touch me" Daasebre argues that 'the lands of Penten village are not lying down idle' such that anyone can cultivate them to yield foodstuffs for them. In a similar vein, a woman is not

just available to bear children for any man who is not ready to perform marriage rites. When that happens the man in question would have 'rushed unduly to opportunities and taken the woman for a nonentity' as Daasebre puts it. In the event where this has already happened, therefore, denying men, naming rites was a way of getting reprisal.

The story was different for Awuradwoa and Paa Kwesi. Awuradwoa narrated:

> Our children have two sets of names. Their father gave each of the three of them a name. He named them after members of his family. But my parents have also named all of them again. When he names, they also name. So, my family members know the children by different names and his family members also know them by different names. Hmmm, it is funny eh? (Laughs). *(Interview, October 2016).*

This apparently curious scenario had also been occasioned by the non-performance of customary marriage rites. For this reason, Awuradwoa's parents felt Paa Kwesi had no right to name the children. Paa Kwesi, on the other hand, who was aware that his children had another set of names had this to say, "I accepted responsibility for the pregnancies and I am the one struggling to take care of them so why could not I name them?" *(Interview, October 2016).*

In Ghana, like most other parts of the world, the naming of a new-born is a ceremony to which a lot of importance is attached. Writing about the Akan group, Agyekum (2006) emphasised the fact that it is at a naming ceremony that a child's name is officially announced to the public. The exercise also has a spiritual component whereby blessings are invoked upon the newborn and moral lessons, particularly truth, are introduced to him or her. Ideally therefore, a naming ceremony is held for a child once in their lifetime. Fayorsey and Fayorsey (1992), however, have observed that over the last two decades in urban Ga communities, what has come to be called outdooring ceremonies for babies could be held twice or thrice for the same baby. Fayorsey and

Fayorsey (1992) concluded that the practice which was often organised by the child's mother was a way of raising funds and also to promote female autonomy in these communities. In this instance of 'double naming' of Awuradwoa and Paa Kwesi's children therefore, the researcher sought to find out how naming ceremonies were gone about for these children. In response to this inquiry, the couple indicated that there were no naming ceremonies organised for their children. The same was indeed the case for Naana and Kwabena. Although, a naming ceremony is one of the important occasions in the stages of a person's life cycle, it is also not unusual to have situations where no such ceremonies are held for new-borns. This may happen for a number of reasons. For persons in consensual unions, however, the uncertain nature of their union type and the issues it came along with were the main reasons naming ceremonies could not be organised for their children. Paa Kwesi explained, "Ah, but even the names of the children, we are fighting over it. Who can then go and say they are going to organise a naming ceremony?" *(Interview, October 2016).* According to him, he could have held something 'small' for the children if it were not for the tussle over who should name the children.

Unlike matrilineal societies, in many patrilineal societies, marriage has traditionally been an important prerequisite for the naming of children by their fathers. But again, like many other traditional norms, there are flexibilities and compromises. Such is the importance of the relationship between marriage and claiming of children that in many patrilineal groups once a man pays the bridewealth of a woman, he has rights over every child born by the woman, whether or not he is the biological father of that child. This is because bride wealth payment confers on a man the rights in *genetricem,* that is, the reproductive services of his wife (Nukunya, 2003). This can

be said of societies like the Lozi of Northern Rhodesia, present-day Zambia and Zulu of Natal, South Africa (Gluckman, 1987).

In her PhD thesis which focused on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the Manya Krobo area of the Eastern region of Ghana, Langmagne (2016: 206-207) explored issues of paternal rights in this patrilineal society. She describes the dynamics there as such:

> Since Krobos are patrilineal, the biological father usually names the child and the *la muɔmi* custom is performed as a seal on the name. The seal *la*, which is a string and *kɔli* (bead) are tied around the wrist of the child by an old woman; usually the first born of the family of origin – *we mi Dede* (Nyumuah, 1998:22). … By the Krobo custom, when a man has a child with a woman without performing the traditional marriage rites, the children belong to the family of the woman. Such children are known as *yo bi* (the woman's child). In this respect, the woman's family names the child/children and performs the *la muɔmi* rite, which connotes a "seal of ownership" of the child (Nyumuah, 1998). For a father to have paternal rights over his child/children born out of wedlock, he has to perform the *la pomi* custom – the "cutting of the seal of maternal ownership" (p. 45). This allows the father to give the child his family name (rename). The *la pomi* custom is performed in the woman's family house in the presence of both families of the child. To perform the *la pomi* rite, the father of the child is required to provide a castrated sheep (*to saa)* and a bottle of schnapps…. In so doing, the man has legitimacy over the children as a father and these children can also inherit his properties (Nyumuah, 1998: 46).

This practice amongst the Krobo happens to be quite similar to Frafra traditions. Among the Frafra, 'clapping' confers paternity to a man. Without it, children belong to the woman. During a divorce, the 'clapping' fowl must be returned and accepted before it can be finalized. Depending on the number of children, bridewealth would be returned or not. If there are no children, the man's family take back all their payment (Agana, 2012).

Of the two Krobo couples in this study, Korkor and John were the ones who had children. Their experiences so far as claiming of paternity rights and the naming of their five children were,

however, not in any way like what Langmagne (2016) found to be the traditional requirements among the Krobo. In their case, John had been allowed to name all five children after members of his family. Korkor's father, now deceased, but who was alive at the time she had her first child, did not claim the child. Upon the birth of the subsequent four, her family members had not punished John in terms of preventing him from naming the children. He, therefore, did not have to perform the *la pomi* rites except to pay a penalty. According to Korkor, this penalty, which was in the form of a bottle of schnapps and an amount of money, was not meant to give him the right to name their children but just to serve as compensation for her and her family for making her pregnant without having married her. In her opinion, her family has been lenient with John because they had hoped that he would perform the marriage rites. It has been twenty-three years and what John has had to deal with is the constant reminders of the fact that Korkor's family have the right to change the names of the children at any point in time. He agreed with Korkor on the point that the latter's family has been lenient with him as he said, "oh I can say the family has dealt with me well because this is not the usual practice", *(Interview, November 2017).* This couple, like many of the other participants, hardly visited their hometown after migrating to Accra. John for instance mentioned that he had not gone back home in seven years.

Migration from one's hometown into a different socio-cultural space does not in any way dilute a person's ethnicity or insulate them from the application of the principles of their lineage structure. That notwithstanding, being removed from among kinsmen and their scrutiny of one's personal life, influences the extent to which principles of the lineage structure can be applied. Urbanisation and migration have, therefore, been said to be key factors that contribute to the incidence of consensual unions (Oheneba-Sakyi, 2007).

The two other patrilineal couples in this study with children were both Frafra (Charles and Doris, James and Ruth). For both couples, they had performed a part of the marriage process which is the 'clapping'. According to them, because the men had initiated the marriage process, they had some level of recognition in the women's family. There had, therefore, been no attempts by the women's families to prevent the men from naming their children. Ruth talked about how upon the birth of their first child, James had organised a big naming ceremony for the child which was attended by members of both of their families. No naming ceremony was held for their second child but both children had been named by James who chose English names and added his surname to both of them. Charles had also done the same without organising a naming ceremony. The difference between these two couples and the ones already discussed is that, these men had performed the 'knocking rite'. Even though it did not guarantee that they would be marrying their partners, the women's families saw it as a symbol of respect for them and their daughter.

Denying men, the exclusive rights to name children they had with their partners was not simply an implication they had to bear, but also a way the women together with their extended family sought to challenge their power and dominance in the relationship. As Collins (2004) has argued, at certain points in a relationship characterised by unequal power relations, the 'order-taker' can be rebellious and take decisions that seek to lessen the power of the dominant figure. Despite taking such initiatives, however, it ultimately did not convince men to initiate the marriage process.

5.4.2 The Lineage and the Corpse

Thirty-eight-year-old unemployed Dede was the first participant to grant an interview for this study. About seven months after this interview, Dede died. She fell ill, was admitted at the hospital

for a few days, was discharged because of inability to pay for medications and laboratory tests, and she eventually died about two weeks after her discharge from the hospital. While this was a sad incident, it also presented an interesting case for further exploration particularly given the fact that she had died at a time when she lived with a man who had not performed customary marriage rites for her.

There is a popular Akan saying which goes "*abusua dɔ funu*", which translates as "the lineage loves the corpse" or "the matriclan loves a corpse" (Appiah, 2005). In his study of old people and funerals in the rural community of Kwahu-Tafo in the Eastern region of Ghana, van der Geest (1995) reported hearing this saying quite frequently in his interactions with his research participants. One of the reasons for this saying was that a person's ties with their lineage can never be broken even in death. As a result, lineage ties are considered more crucial than that of a conjugal union. Again, the lineage loves the corpse because funerals organised for dead people also become a money-making avenue. This comes in the form of funeral donations; monies and gifts presented to the bereaved by their friends and loved as a relief of the financial burden of organising funerals. This observation has been made by a number of other scholars (Arhin, 1994; de Witte, 2001, 2003; Roberts, 2011) some of whom have argued that sometimes it is not until a person is dead that one would find out that they indeed belonged to a lineage.

In the case of women who die whilst in consensual unions, their lineage members may also come in to mete out varying degrees of punishments to the men with whom the women lived. In many African societies, 'necrogamy', the act of marrying dead people, is one of the ways in which men are sanctioned for failing to perform marriage rites for women they assume as wives. In a report

in the *Daily Trust* on 20th May, 2011 by Shehu Abubakar titled "Where Boys Marry Corpses", the chief of Akwa Ibom in Nigeria is said to have explained:

> Such marriages are conducted between a boyfriend that sees a girl that he likes, invites the girl to his house and decides to live with her in the house without initiating the process of traditional marriage up to the time the girl died while living with him. After fulfilling all the traditional marriage rites, the boyfriend is then given the permission by her parents to go ahead and bury her.

The *Today* Newspaper of Ghana on 20th June, 2017 also had a BBC report with the heading "Man forced to pay bride price for dead wife". The writer reported of a young man who was made to pay the 'lobolo', which is the bride wealth for his girlfriend who got pregnant and died from complications of childbirth, in the southern province of Inhambone in Mozambique. In Ghana, though not very well documented, such incidents are known to occur, some of which sometimes come into the public domain. A man who had cohabited with a woman for seven years and had had two children with her, upon the death of the woman was required by Fante custom to provide 8 pieces of cloth, a dozen head scarves, a dozen handkerchiefs, a dozen pants, 2 rings, schnapps and GH₵ 200 as compensation to the woman's family before burial rites took place. Similarly, the story is told of one Ghanaian pastor who lived with a woman for six years and was made to perform all the customary marriage rites and fined GH₵1,500 by the family when the woman died. Both stories were reported by www.newsghana.com 18th September, 2012 and 4th May 2016, respectively. These accounts point to one critical implication of being in a consensual union, mostly for men since it is considered their responsibility to perform marriage rites for women they wish to take as wives.

Following up on the demise of Dede, I sought to find out the role her family will play after her death and what it would mean for Kingsley her partner. Perhaps, it was time for the narrative

concerning the power dynamics of their relationship to be changed. Upon, her death Dede's family were in the position to sanction Kingsley and provoke a different kind of emotional energy; from a lack of enthusiasm to a show of concern. This, they could do by asking him to perform the customary marriage rites for her as has happened in many other instances. This was, however, not to be the case. Having informed the few family members resident in Accra about her death, Kingsley confirmed that not even one of them expressed an interest in the death of their family member. None of them had visited her when she went on admission at the hospital, and none of them wanted to have anything to do with her corpse. In my presence, Kingsley singlehandedly carried Dede's corpse from the single room in which they lived into a taxi to be conveyed to the morgue. That was the end of Dede's story. In her case, the "lineage did not love the corpse." Judging from her background, there was also the possibility that an attempt to organise a funeral for her was going to be a financial burden on the extended family rather than an avenue for making money. Kingsley was also certainly not in the position to conduct the funeral. He, however, was not too surprised at the turn of events. Commenting on the family and showing some frustration he said:

> Oh, leave them! That is how they are *oo*. I do not understand. When their own mother died, the same thing happened. After taking her to the mortuary, nobody stepped foot there up till today. I am sure the mortuary man just threw her body away. They will do the same thing to Dede. Hmm, it is strange *oo*. There is something wrong with their family. As for me, I have done my part. Am I lying? I cannot go and bury her because she is not my family member. *(Interview, June 2017).*

"A family may be defined as a group of individuals related to one another by ties of consanguinity, marriage or adoption, the adult members of which are responsible for the upbringing of children" (Nukunya 2016, p. 61). From this definition of family, Kingsley was right to say that Dede was not his family member since he did not fall within any of the three family criteria. Consequently,

he was not responsible for burying his partner because that responsibility traditionally lies with her lineage members. Having prior knowledge that Dede had a somewhat weak family support system was probably one of the reasons Kingsley did not feel a sense of urgency to perform marriage rites for her. No family member had ever asked him about it and perhaps he could also foresee no punishments being meted out to him in the event of her death. He could not, therefore, be bothered about performing marriage rites. In this case, all the power of decision making concerning the status of the relationship was with him. And since, he was not particularly interested in marrying Dede, he demonstrated an emotional energy which Collins (2004) describes as bland normalcy. In other words, there was not much enthusiasm on his part to convert the relationship to marriage.

Traditions and customary practices are associated with high levels of fluidity and uncertainties. In many instances, the extent to which traditional laws will be implemented is contingent on a multiplicity of factors that may include the financial wherewithal or even the consensus to take one decision or the other. The narration shows a clear case of the lack of a family support system to carry out the demands of the lineage on such a matter. Among other ethnic groups like the Frafra, where both families have roles in case of the death of a female relative, a male partner should perform the marriage rites in order to play his role in the funeral rites, otherwise the body will be taken over by the woman's family (Atinga, 2006).

5.4.3 Issues of Inheritance

Another consequence of being in a consensual union is regarding property inheritance. In Ghana, the principles of matriliny and patriliny have traditionally been central in issues of inheritance and

succession in the societies where they apply. Whilst inheritance refers to the transmission of properties, succession means the transmission of office or position (Nukunya, 2003). Every lineage structure has arrangements that define inheritance and succession procedures with the aim of ensuring that properties largely remain within the lineage. In matrilineal societies, a man's property, both self-acquired and that which belongs to the lineage, is said to be inherited by his sister's children, particularly the sons, who are members of his lineage. Since the legitimacy of children in matrilineal societies is not contingent on whether his or her parents were married, children born in consensual unions by the principles of matriliny still have rights to their properties of their mothers' brothers'.

In reaction to Ollenu's (1966) point that as wives, women in matrilineal societies are like strangers in their husband's families partly because they have no rights to inheritance, Takyi (2001) has argued that even as wives the women continue to have access to their own lineage land and also the children of the conjugal unit, a situation which is believed to be a major contributory factor to marital instability among matrilineal groups. Women in these societies whether married or not often have access to lineage properties. Nukunya (2003) has observed that when it comes to issues of inheritance and succession among patrilineal groups, there are some variations in the details of the processes. For instance, whilst in some daughters are completely excluded from property sharing, in some others, they are included. However, the point of convergence is that children inherit the properties of their father. Here, children should be recognised as members of their father's lineage and this often means that the man has customarily married their mother, which gives him the right to claim paternity of them. Using the Krobo case, Hugo-Huber (1963) has said that since children of an unmarried woman are considered as children of their mother's father, the

unmarried woman could inherit property from her father to be given to her sons. In the traditional arrangements for inheritance in both matrilineal and patrilineal groups, there seems not to be a clearly defined place of women either as wives or as partners in consensual unions.

The Intestate Succession Law, PNDCL 111, passed in 1985 to address some of the shortcomings of the customary law sought to include wives in the inheritance of their husbands' estate. In Section 5 of this law, when a man dies intestate and is survived by a spouse and children, the provision is for three-sixteenth of the estate to go the surviving spouse whilst nine-sixteenth goes to the surviving child or children. Section 6 also states that where there are no children, the surviving spouse is to take one-half of the estate. The concept of 'spouse', has, however, over the years been contested. Spouse here is interpreted as a married partner. In this case, the position of partners in consensual unions remain undefined.

In an attempt to also address the shortcomings of the Law of Intestate Succession, in October 2009, the Property Rights of Spouses Bill was laid before the parliament of Ghana by the Leadership and Advocacy for Women in Africa (LAWA) group to be passed into law. This bill sought to make a case for couples in consensual unions, which the document captured as cohabitation. Cohabitation was defined as "a situation in which a man and a woman hold themselves out to the public as husband and wife" (p.9) even when they have either not begun or completed any marriage process. The argument advanced by the bill for cohabitees is that once they have been together for not less than five years, they shall be deemed as spouses and have the rights of spouses. This means that they have equal access to jointly acquired property in the course of their union. Upon dissolution of the union, therefore, the properties must be shared as such.

This proposed provision for cohabitees in the Property Rights of Spouses Bill, 2009, has been criticised by sections of Ghanaians on the grounds that such a law will be an onslaught on the institution of marriage and rather promote cohabitation as an alternative form of family formation. The study, therefore, sought to find out the views of research participants on this bill. Interestingly, none of the thirty-one participants had any knowledge of this bill. However, when the details were explained to them, all thirty-one of them thought of it as a step in the right direction. The female participants seemed to be more enthusiastic about the bill. Ruth, for instance, excitedly said, "Is that so? I agree with it a 100%. The men have cheated the women for too long. It's very good" *(Interview, January 2017)*. That women appeared more welcoming of this provision for cohabitees is quite understandable given the fact that women have often been the victims of unfair treatment when it comes to property sharing in marriages and consensual unions.

Before this, however, Justice Ollenu in 1966 proposed what he termed the four essentials of customary marriage as a guideline for family tribunals to intervene in cases where the lineage was being 'unfair' to a partner in a cohabiting or consensual union in the event of death or the dissolution of the union. These four essentials as recorded by Offei (2014, p. 19) are:

1. The couple agree to live together as man and wife.
2. Consent of the family of the man that he should have the woman to be his wife; that consent may be formal, that is, the family of the man going to the family of the woman formally to ask for her hand, or it may be informal, that is, by the family of the man recognizing the woman as the wife of the man and admitting her and her family to performance of customary rites for their family such as funeral rites.

3. Consent of the family of the woman that she should have the man for her husband; which consent too may be formal; that is, where the family of the woman accepts drinks offered by the family of the man, or it may be informal, that is, acknowledging the man as husband of the woman and admitting the man and his family to perform customary rites for their family such as funeral rites on occasion of bereavement in the woman's family.
4. Consummation by cohabitation.

Where these four essentials were present, the union was to be considered as a valid customary marriage when it came to property sharing.

In this study, three of the fourteen couples pointed out that they had jointly acquired property. Lucy and Johnson had three single room self-contained properties, David and Ruth also had a two-bedroom house and Korkor and John said their intended three-bedroom house was still under construction. All three property-owning couples indicated that they had not made wills to cover their properties. They all, however, emphasised that whatever properties they acquired whether jointly or as individuals should go to their children. Together with other couples who had no properties, they were of the view that increasingly a person's family is defined as their children. Ruth expressed her thoughts this way: "those days when we depended on family property are past *oo.* Now it is about what you leave for your children. As for me, I do not want property for anything, for myself. All my toil is for my children", *(Interview, January 2017).* Naana who shared similar thoughts with Ruth also added that, "these family properties and succession things, if you follow them, you can even meet your untimely death so nowadays everybody makes a will and gives whatever they have to their children", *(Interview, January 2017).*

The position of participants on inheritance suggested that once there were children born into the union, properties acquired had to be willed to them. The responses of the female participants also revealed that property given to their children was almost the same as given to them. Children, they opined, are often closer to their mothers and love them more than they do their fathers. Studying kinship and marriage among the Asante, Fortes (1950), observed that children, especially sons seemed to owe greater allegiance to their mothers than to their fathers obviously because of the practice of matriliny. He found for example that a man would consider building a house to accommodate his mother and seek to provide her needs first before turning attention to his father. In the event of their partner's death therefore, even if jointly acquired properties are given to the children of the union, their expectation is that they would eventually be the beneficiaries of those properties.

Nukunya (2003) has also discussed the relationship between sons and their fathers in patrilineal societies as best described with the concept of the opposition of adjacent generations. He explains that the role of fathers as disciplinarians of their children makes the latter more driven to their mothers who offer care and comfort. Again, citing the Tallensi as a typical case, Nukunya (2003) describes the father-son relationship among patrilineal groups as characterized by tension, taboo, formality and even avoidance, largely because a man's children, particularly the sons are not considered as adults and may not even be able to take up any leadership role in the family once their father is living. For both matrilineal and patrilineal societies, therefore, children appear to have reasons to be more attached to their mothers than to their fathers. These realities offer some explanation to why the females were more emphatic on the need to will properties to children.

From these opinions expressed by participants, they were not concerned with the role of matriliny or patriliny on the issue of inheritance. For them, once it is possible to make a will and decide who should inherit your properties, being in consensual unions did not put them in a disadvantaged position.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described some of the key experiences of the persons in consensual unions which is noticeably extremely limited in the literature on consensual unions in Africa. Some of the experiences like intimate partner violence and poor relationship quality as shared by research participants, are not exclusive to persons in consensual unions. However, participants' subjective interpretations of their experiences pointed to the fact that they attributed their experiences to the status of the union. The lived experiences of couples in consensual unions may therefore overlap with those of others in other forms of domestic partnerships. On the other hand, there are others which can be described as exclusive to them such as the three-fold pressure group experiences. These could also be explained based on whether the union was being considered by one partner as a lead up to marriage or whether it was an end in itself. Women turned out to be often the recipients of the pressures for which reason they hoped their unions would be converted into marriage. The major pressure groups which research participants had to deal with were the family, the church and society.

With respect to the intervention of extended family in the affairs of couples in consensual unions, men tended to be the target for sanction. One of such was men being denied the right to name their children. It was in such situations that women also got the opportunity to exercise some level of

power in the relationship. The extent to which the extended family could intervene, however, was case specific. Findings from the study proved that traditional norms and practices change over time and can also be characterised by significant levels of fluidity. Whether or not a particular cultural norm would be implemented to the letter is often contingent on a wide range of factors such as the availability of financial resources and the lack of or otherwise of a family support system.

CHAPTER SIX

MANAGING LIFE IN A CONSENSUAL UNION

6.1 Introduction

In the two previous chapters, the incidence and implications of consensual unions have been discussed. In both chapters, the underlying theme which explained the experiences of research participants was the different ways in which partners conceptualise their union; either as a precursor or an alternative to marriage. This meant that partners often had different realities, a situation which could be traced to the situations in which partners found themselves in their relationships. This theme manifests again in this chapter which looks at the various ways in which partners in consensual unions strategize to deal with the implications that come with their union, such as having to deal with different pressure groups. The differences in the strategies stemmed from the conceptualisations of the unions by participants. This chapter discusses those strategies and also examines the extent to which these strategies worked for those who resorted to them. The chapter is divided into two main sections. The first focuses on the accounts of the participants who think of their union as an end in itself and the second on those for whom the union was a means to an end. As Collins (2004) argues, the actions of individuals are best interpreted through the situation of their interactive processes. These strategies could, therefore, be appreciated through an analysis of an actor's position in the power interaction rituals and its resultant emotional energies.

In his song titled *Sete*, Ghanaian hip life singer Obrafour who refers to himself as Kwabena in the song, narrates how the woman to whom he had been engaged did not show up on the day of the marriage ceremony. He uses the phrase '*wayɛ me sete'* to mean that the woman by her action had

deceived him. The word *sete* is of Ga origin but has been absorbed into the vocabulary of other Ghanaian languages, for example the Akan language to mean deceit or being fooled into believing something was true. Whilst he, Kwabena, was thinking of marriage as the culmination of their relationship, this woman whose name he did not mention, apparently had no such intention, hence her refusal to show up for the wedding. Kwabena's sense of having been 'deceived' by his partner, resonates with the experiences of many of the participants in this study. These are those who had hopes of their relationship being converted into marriage but whose partners thought otherwise. For Kwabena, the best way of dealing with his predicament was to avoid marriage for the meantime. This he expressed as '*me ne awadeɛ ayɛ aka.*' He, however, adds that once he is still in his youthful years, he hopes to find another woman who is ready to spend her life with him. Though in despair, he chose to keep hope alive. The words of the song are as follows:

Yee, sugyani abranteɛ
me ne awadeɛ ayɛ aka, wayɛ me sete a momma me nkɔda ɛ
A! sugyani abranteɛ me ne awadeɛ ayɛ aka oo,
Wayɛ me sete a momma me nkɔda ɛ
Ɔbaa bi agyegye me e, wama m'atɔ kawa, yeduruu ayeforɔ a wamma
Wayɛ me sete a, momma me nkɔ da ɛ
Woanware me a, memmɔ tuo, woanware me a mensɛe o.
Yee, na ɔbabunu te sɛ me a, me ho nsuo gyina me ho yi deɛ
Ɛnyɛ dɛn a, menya ɔdɔfo bi a me ne no bɛbɔ bra yi
Kwabena e, mensɛ da o

Yɛse, sɛ memeneda bɛyɛ dɛ a, ɛyɛ a hwɛ wo fiada anwummerɛ
Meyɛɛ, mampam, mesisii m'aso, na meregye daama atu serɛ
Mepraa me bɔtɔmu kɔtɔɔ kawa,
Allah, yɛse adeɛ rebɛyɛ aboa nanka a, ɔnam a na ne to resa
Ɛnnora nyinaa mante ne nka, anyamhyhyeɛ, mantumi anna
Mesɔree anɔpa nɔnsia ne fa, metwaa ne fie, yɛse wada
Asew de apɔ bi too me tirim, ɔse ɛbɛsɛɛte, 'no disappointment'
Kwabena, me nso m'ano bucket, radio so, internet,
Merebɛyɛ ayeforɔ ɛdeɛn, deɛn, deɛn
Mato nsa afrɛ President.

Du mmienu bɔeɛ, prɛmu toeɛ, asɔre dan mu hɔ, na mmerɛ aso
Ɔsɔfo, bestman ne nkekeho, Joe, na obiara ayɛ krado
Yɛtwɛɛn yɛ, bɛyɛ dɔnhwere nnan, afei deɛ na ani ayɛ nyan
Metuu bɔfoɔ, ɔnkɔpɛ n'akyiri kwan, ɔbaeɛ a ɔde nsa pan
Yie, asɛm bɛn nie?
Osugyani mede bankye kɔbɔɔ ngo mu
Me coins kɔfiri tɔɔ po mu, na me nsa bɛka a gye bonsu anom
Ɛhɔ nso deɛ, adɛn me yɛ Yona.
Ɛne sɛ mawie yi
Oo mede m'akoma nyinaa maa no a, sɛ me ne no ara na ɛbɛkɔ wuo mu
Ɔdɔ agyegye me wɔ konkɔn so a, wabɛgya me wɔ nsubunu ani
Me nsusuyɛ nyinaa aka me tirim. Ɔdɔ ama me nsa asi fam
Kwabena, me ne awadeɛ e, me ne awadeɛ e, me ne awadeɛ nni hwee yɛ
Wayɛ me sete a, momma me nkɔ da ɛ.

In English, the lyrics of *Sete* are as follows:

Yee, a young bachelor
I don't want to have anything to do with marriage
If she had done 'sete' to me, allow me to go and sleep peacefully
Ah, a young bachelor
I don't want to have anything to do with marriage
If she has done 'sete' to me, allow me to go and sleep peacefully

A certain lady has deceived me, she has made me buy a ring,
But failed to turn up for the wedding.
If she has done 'sete' to me, allow me to go and sleep peacefully
If you refuse to marry me, I will not commit suicide
If you refuse to marry me, I will not be a failure in life
Lo, a young man like me, full of vigour and fashion,
I will at all cost meet a lover with whom I shall live
Kwabena, I will never be a failure in life.

It is said, an enjoyable Saturday, starts from Friday evening.
I turned deaf ears, like the alligator, I was diligently looking for money
I spent all I had to buy a ring.
Allah, it is said, if calamity is going to befall the puff adder,
It starts to shiver as it moves about.
I didn't hear from her yesterday, so due to panic, I could not sleep.
When I woke up at half past six in the morning, I called her house.
I was told she was still asleep.

In-law gave me an assurance, that she will be ready, no disappointment.
Kwabena, my 'slippery mouth',
I made announcements of the wedding on radio, the internet and what have you
I had invited the president.
It was twelve o'clock, the siren sounded
It was time to be at the chapel
The pastor, the best man and the rest; Joe, everybody was ready.
We waited for about four hours
At this point, I was restless.
I sent a messenger to go and fetch her, and he came back empty-handed.
Yei, what a disappointment!
A poor bachelor, I am in for the worst
My coins have dropped into the ocean,
And it is only in the mouth of a whale that I can retrieve them
But am I Jonah to do so?
Then I am finished.

Lo, I offered her my whole heart, that I will be with her till death.
My love has deceived me on the shores, and deserted me on the deep seas.
All my plans have been shattered.
My love has let me down.
Kwabena, I and marriage, I and marriage, I and marriage,
Have been put asunder.
If she has done 'sete' to me, allow me to go and sleep peacefully.

6.2 Management Strategies Where There Are No Plans of Marriage

This section presents the accounts of how research participants who did not have the intentions of marriage managed their relationships. The data revealed two groups of people; those who were planning to end the relationship altogether, and others who stayed in their relationships and live each day at a time.

6.2.1 The Exit Plans

> Looking at the situation now, I do not think we can get married, so I have thought of a way to end the relationship…. I am going to tell her that I have impregnated another lady and my family members, especially my mother, are insisting that I marry that lady, so we cannot

> continue. I'll later get the picture of a baby and put it up as my WhatsApp dp [display picture] and if she asks me, I'll tell her that that's the child…. I feel bad about it because I know she expects that this thing will end in marriage. We have even been watching those joy bridal fair programs together and although we have not really discussed marriage, I know that is what she wants. That is why I feel bad but.… (Shrugs his shoulders). *(Interview, April 2017).*

Osei, the medical doctor who had been in a consensual union with Yaayaa, revealed this during our interview. This was his exit plan. He was planning this exit because for him, the relationship was not a precursor to marriage, even though in the beginning he had thought of it as such. He had earlier indicated his mother's dissatisfaction with his relationship as the reason the union could not end in marriage. This disapproval was on the basis that, according to his mother, for his partner to be in a consensual union with a man before marriage meant she was not morally fit to be a good wife. Osei's exit plan was, therefore, in response to his family, specifically, his mother putting pressure on him. As the dominant figure in the relationship, his partner was waiting on him to decide on when they would get married. He was in the position to dictate the direction of the relationship and his decision was to call it quits. Ending the relationship altogether would be the clearest sign of a lack of enthusiasm (emotional energy) to convert the union to marriage.

A considerable body of work exists on the subject of the dissolution of intimate relationships, both married and unmarried (Clark & Labeff, 1986; Frazier & Cook, 1993; Hewitt, Haynes & Baxter, 2013; Kippen, Chapman, Yu & Lounkaew, 2013; Taylor, Brown, Chatters & Lincoln, 2012; Vaaler, Ellison & Powers, 2009). While much of the literature is based on literature collected in the West, parallels could be drawn to other societies. Clark and Labeff (1986) explored the strategies employed by students in a state university in ending their intimate relationships. This study which sampled twenty females and twelve males who had had an experience of relationship

dissolution, identified three main ways of terminating relationships namely, the direct, oblique and non-verbal tactics. Clark and Labeff (1986) posited that females often resorted to the direct way of ending a relationship. This meant telling their partners to their face that they wanted out of the relationship. The male students, on the other hand, were more likely to go the oblique way. This tactic was characterized using cover stories, which concealed the real reasons for the desire to end the relationship. This oblique approach could best describe the nature of Osei's exit plan in which he was concealing the actual reason for the break-up which was his mother's disapproval of his partner. His cover up story was, therefore, a fabricated story involving impregnating another woman. The use of a cover story thus amounted to deception which is known to be a frequent occurrence between intimate partners (Anderson, Ansfeild & DePaulo, 1999; Cole, 2001).

But how sure was Osei that this cover up strategy was going to work? He had this to say to this question:

> I know a lot of our women are not comfortable with the idea of step-children because the general perception is that the man will continue seeing the mother of the child even if he doesn't marry her…and the whole idea that I cheated on her can also put her off…there's also the possibility that she would say she's ready to accept the child into our marriage. That is why I have added the part that my family is insisting that I marry the one I have impregnated. She can also argue that why am I allowing my family to dictate to me. But you know in our part of the world, it is difficult to defy your parents. *(Interview, April 2017).*

The issue of infidelity in both premarital and marital unions being a cause of relationship dissolution has been explored in different studies producing varying results. According to Amato (2004) for example, infidelity is both a cause and a consequence of a deteriorating relationship. It has been generally observed, however, that although men are more likely to be involved in acts of infidelity, they are less tolerant when women act in such a manner. Women, on the other hand,

tend to be more accommodating of their partners' infidelity (Hall & Fincham, 2006). For many contemporary African societies, however, young women's definition of a love relationship also implies a monogamous union which makes them less likely to want to remain with men who fail to demonstrate evidence of exclusive commitment to them. For instance, in a study of Swahili Muslim women in Tanzania, Keefe (2016) found that even amongst a group where polygyny was largely practiced, women were increasingly fiercely resisting it and often preferred divorce to being in polygynous marriages. Keefe's research participants, like many other contemporary women, opined that love must be expressed in monogamy. Given this standpoint, Osei's plan was likely to succeed granted that Maame would think along the lines of the contemporary Ghanaian woman who would interpret infidelity as inconsistent with love. Again, although marriage in Africa is increasingly becoming characterized by self-choice (Keefe, 2016; Meekers, 1995; Mondain, LeGrand, & Sabourin, 2007; Takyi, 2003), the family or parental influence is still relevant, irrespective of a person's socio-economic status. Osei, was aware of this and had accurately incorporated that in his plan to exit the relationship. Judging from his own analysis of his exit plan and taking into consideration the practical realities in the Ghanaian society, Osei seemed to have thought through his strategy quite well and identified the likely loopholes which his partner could argue. He had, thus, convinced himself of the possibility of it succeeding.

Taxi driver Yaw also had an exit plan. Having conceptualised his union as an alternative to marriage, he had to deal with the family and church pressure on him to convert his union to marriage. This was how he planned to escape his family, church, and partner:

> I will run away, sister. That is the only option available to me now. I will run away because I know I can't marry her. A few years ago, I had the opportunity to join one of the supporters' unions to travel to Canada. I do not want to mention the name of that supporters' union. My plan was to go and not return. In that case nobody can come and

> force me to marry anybody. I even discussed with my sister that before I leave, I would bring our daughter to her to take care of her for me, because the lady I'm in the relationship with is not working so if I'm not around, she won't be able to take care of the child…unfortunately the Canada plan didn't work out and I'm still here. But I am still thinking of travelling somewhere so that I can avoid her. I am serious. *(Interview, June 2017).*

The third breaking off strategy revealed by Clark and Labeff (1986) is the non-verbal approach. As the name suggests, this approach involves behavioural changes as the main way of conveying their disinterest in the relationship. Yaw's exit plan of completely disappearing may be described as a somewhat 'extreme' form of this non-verbal tactic. According to him, once he was gone and refused to stay in touch with Owusuaa, she was going to come to terms with the fact that he wanted to avoid her. On the feasibility of this rather radical plan, Yaw said: "Right now, I'm not thinking about what will happen if I leave. I just want to go somewhere", *(Interview, June 2017)*. Unlike Osei, Yaw had not thoroughly thought through life after 'running away'. Given his circumstances at the time, however, he thought it was his best option. Like Osei, the power to have his relationship with Owusuaa turned into marriage lay with him hence his decision to run off, another expression of a lack of enthusiasm for marriage.

For obvious reasons, the partners of both Osei and Yaw were not privy to these plans being hatched by their men since those plans were aimed at getting rid of them. Both women, Yaayaa and Owusuaa, had expressed hopes of their unions ending in marriage which was definitely not what their male partners were thinking. They were, therefore, most likely to experience their own versions of deception, experiencing *sete*, as described by Obrafour in his song, if these exit plans were carried through.

Completely ending the union was also the way out for Aku. Aku had indicated earlier that she ended up in a relationship with her partner as the result of a love spell cast on her using *for girls*. Her kind of deception was, therefore, at the beginning of the union. Having now 'come to her senses', she had declared her intention to call it quits. She said:

> Now that I know the truth, I want to leave him. I have gone back to my mother to tell her everything that happened. But she also has to make some preparations before me, and my three children can go and live with her. I have told her I want to start selling fruits so she should try and get me some money to start with it. If everything goes well, I will just go away…. I asked him [her partner] if it was true that he used the *for girls* on me and he could not say it was true and he could not also say it was not true so me I knew it was true because now I can even see that I have come to my senses so I'll go…I have told him *plain plain* that I will not stay in this relationship, he could not say anything. *(Interview, March 2017).*

Though Aku was emphatic about her plan to call it quits, she said the relationship was not necessarily characterised by apprehension as she went about her normal duties as she did before confronting her partner about the genesis of their union. According to her, there was no need for any constant quarrels since she had already decided on leaving him. Once her mother was ready to receive her, she was going to leave with the children. As Collins (2004) pointed out in the Theory of Situations, an 'order-taker' could eventually rebel against the 'order-giver' at a point in the interactive process when he or she decides not to conform with the directives of the dominant figure. This could describe Aku who for ten years had conformed to her partner but had taken a different position upon 'coming to her senses'. This act of rebellion was, therefore, set to change the power dynamics of the relationship as she made plans to leave.

All three cases described above show the various ways in which exit plans were designed in consensual unions where, once a partner decided that converting the consensual union to marriage

was not an option, exiting the relationship was the better alternative. The factors which necessitated the exit plans can be traced back to the kinds of pressures such participants faced. For both Osei and Yaw, their exit plans were in response to their families and their unwillingness to defy them. For Aku, on the other hand, she felt she had simply not been treated fairly by her partner and exiting the relationship was not a decision she wanted to rethink.

6.2.2 The Use of the Indifferent Attitude

In the previous section, the discussions were of participants who indicated that they could not afford to remain in the relationships let alone manage life in it, thus having devised exit plans. For another category of participants, mostly male participants who thought of their unions as an alternative to marriage, the strategy was to stay unperturbed by whatever implications their union types brought their way. In any case, they received much less pressure from the pressure groups as compared to their female counterparts. In situations where women's extended family had stepped in to punish men, these men appeared to have just moved on with their lives. Such family interventions which were aimed at propelling the men to perform marriage rites, often tended to discourage them from taking any such initiative. For instance, for men like Kwabena and Paa Kwesi whose partners' families had denied them the opportunity to exercise the exclusive right of naming their children, they just accepted their fate and were living with it. For these two and other male participants, their relationships were just like any other intimate union, like a marriage which comes with its challenges. Whenever any problem came up, they dealt with it accordingly.

This position taken by such participants fits the description Dede, a female participant in this study used for her partner. She used the Akan expression '*kosi a nkosi, kɔ da a nkɔda'* which she sought

to simplify with the use of the term *Konongo kaya.* These two terminologies, which translate into English as 'between and betwixt', explain the situation where a person who is expected to take a particular action is unwilling to do so and yet is also reluctant to step aside and allow another person to do it. Relating this to their consensual unions leading to marriage, participants who thought their lives should just go on were neither prepared to perform the marriage rites nor willing to let go of the women in case another man was willing to marry them.

While the attitude of such male participants is akin to illustrating an apathetic emotional energy, the attitude could also be the result of their dominant position in their unions. Although some of them had received sanctions for their failure to perform the customary marriage rites, the fact that their partner still remained with them and hoped to receive the 'order' for them to get married continued to reinforce the men's positions as the order-givers. This found expression in their lack of initiative to convert the unions to marriage.

6.2.3 Playing It Safe with Deception

> I always use my experience from my first marriage as an excuse whenever he raises the subject of marriage. The thing is that, I do not want to get married again but I do not want to tell him that, so I always say he should give me time because I do not want to go through what happened in my first marriage again. Whenever I say that I realise that he mellows because I have told him everything and he himself even said that my ex-husband did not treat me well at all. *(Interview, May 2017).*

This quote was from once married Emma who had been emphatic about the fact that she had no plans of marrying her partner. As can be deduced from her quote, bad experiences from a previous marriage had informed her decision not to venture into marriage a second time. She could be described as not wanting to have anything to do with marriage similar to Kwabena in *Sete.* Unlike

Kwabena who hoped to marry later, Emma had no such intentions, a decision she was unwilling to disclose to her partner. The impression she had created for her partner was that she still needed time to make the decision to get married. Therefore, she was using a form of deception to maintain the relationship. Managing life in her relationship therefore meant playing it safe to cover up her lies. Studies have shown that deception in intimate relationships is quite common (Anderson et al., 1999; Cole, 2001; Peterson, 1996). Reasons for lying to intimate partners often serve a number of purposes for individuals who resort to it. Cole (2001) in a study which sought to find out why people lie to their romantic partners sampled 128 couples to fill in questionnaires on the subject. The study suggested three major reasons for lying; reciprocity, avoidance of punishment and a combination of many factors. Respondents who were categorised under the reciprocity factor indicated that they lied to their partners on the basis that they had the perception that their partners were also not being truthful with them. In the second category, respondents said that being truthful about particular matters was likely to cause their partners to react in a manner that would negatively impact the relationship, thus the decision to rather deceive them.

Emma's case resonates with the point about deception for the avoidance of punishment. In her case, she was afraid her partner will terminate the relationship once she told him her intentions. She did not want to be punished for her decision. According to her, in expectation of her agreeing to get married, her partner was putting up good behaviour and treating her well. Being truthful about her stance on the relationship was therefore likely to cost her this benefit, thus the deception. Playing it safe through deception was Sheila's strategy as well. Both women shared some similar demographics; middle class and once married. Like Emma, marriage was out of the question for Sheila though she had a child with her current partner. The experiences from a previous childless

marriage was what had informed her decision to remain unmarried, a position which was unknown to her partner. For both Emma and Sheila, they were the ones exercising power in their unions so far as the decision to get married was concerned. However, for similar reasons, they both had no plans of getting married. To continue controlling the relationships and as a cover-up for their lack of interest, therefore, they had resorted to 'lying' to their partners and keeping their actual intentions hidden from them.

6.3 Strategies for Negotiating Marriage

Just as participants who were disinterested in marriage devised their management strategies, others who were hopeful of marriage also had their own. The two categories of strategies differed quite significantly from each other. This section describes the strategies of those who looked forward to marriage and the results that these approaches produced in terms of their desired outcomes. As has been already established in preceding chapters, female participants were mostly the ones who thought of their unions as a precursor to marriage. In addition, women tended to bear the brunt of the negative implications that came with their union type. These factors explain their position as the 'weaker' ones in the relationship. For a number of them, however, there was reason to suspect that their partners were deliberately being lackadaisical in converting their unions to marriage. They, therefore, felt the need to find ways of instigating their partners to perform the customary marriage rites. The strategies they resorted to were, therefore, attempts to rebel against their partners whose orders seemed to be that their unions should remain at the consensual union stage. Through the actions of these women, they sought to also exercise some power in the power rituals.

6.3.1 Negotiating Marriage Via the Suspension of 'Wifely' Duties

The strategy most described by female participants (Nana Akua, Ruth, Lucy, Korkor, Awuradwoa) could be interpreted as the occasional suspension of the services they provided their partners as though they were wives. A key component of the working definition of a consensual union in this study is the fact that the partners involved 'conduct themselves as married.' For the most part, therefore, these women acted as wives in their unions. The roles of a married woman are largely similar in most parts of the world. These roles which have persisted over the years basically include domestic services such as cooking and cleaning and sexual services. These are what have been termed as the rights in *uxorem* of the husband. (Nukunya, 2003). Of these wifely roles, the women chose to intentionally withdraw their sexual services.

Refusing their partners sex was the number one form of registering their displeasure with the status of their union and an attempt to 'force' their partners to take steps to properly marry them. For these women, there was truly little they could do to end the pressure from the various pressure groups except to give in to the demand and get their partners to marry them. Nana Akua explained:

> What I also do sometimes is that, I tell him I will not allow him to sleep with me because I am not his wife…one night when I said I wasn't going to allow him to sleep with me, he wanted to force me. I slapped him and he left me alone (laughs). Ah, isn't it annoying? He wants to be enjoying something that he has not paid for. What even annoys me more is that as I told you earlier, he has done the knocking *oo.* So, I do not really know his problem now…I have told him that very soon, I will not allow him again until he goes to complete the marriage rites, and I can do that. *(Interview, November 2016).*

Nana Akua's strategy of the refusal of her partner sex was shared by other female participants like Ruth, Korkor, Lucy, Awuradwoa. According to these participants, sex in relationships is more crucial for men than it is for women. Ruth, for instance, illustrates this point this way:

> Have you realised that when a man's wife dies, at most after a year, he gets married again? It is not for any reason. It is all because they are not able to stay without sex for a long time. But when a woman's husband dies, sometimes the woman might be young, but she won't marry again. And she will be able to live without a man for the rest of her life, but men are not like that. *(Interview, January 2017).*

What Ruth is pointing to in this quote is a gendered difference in the sexualities of men and women whereby women seem to have repressed sexual desires as compared to men for which reason abstinence from sex is more tolerable for women than for men. Several studies, particularly by feminist scholars, have sought to explain how and why such a tendency exists. In postcolonial Africa, sexuality, they argue has been a tool for subordinating women to men through the ways in which women's bodies are portrayed, how they are socialised and the actual policing of their bodies (Lewis, 2005; McFadden, 2003; Pereira, 2003). Quoting Mariam, Pereira (2009, p. 19) argues that 'women's lived relations of heterosexuality have to be understood against the background of a general acceptance of men's rights to have sexual access to women'. Although women have their own sexual desires and wants, therefore, these are often suppressed through societal and religious norms, making women more of passive actors in sexual relations, and men the active ones. In his book, *Weapons of the Weak,* Scott (1985), argued that where there is a relationship between two parties characterised by unequal power relations and exploitation, the relatively powerless group, as a form of rebellion may resort to some strategies, which he terms 'weapons of the weak'. "Foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson and sabotage" are some of such weapons (Scott, 1985, p. 29). In the context of intimate relationships, denying a partner sex could function as a weapon by the 'weaker' partner as a form of resistance. In many cases, women think of this weapon as powerful enough to 'fight' men.

With this viewpoint about men, Nana Akua, Ruth and the others who shared such a view resorted to the approach of denying their partners sex, hoping it will trigger their desired results. At the time of interviewing, however, this strategy had not yielded the outcomes these female participants wanted. In fact, for some of the men this move was the more reason they had refused to perform the customary marriage rites. That was the case for Alex, Nana Akua's partner. He had indicated during his interview that the fact that Nana Akua sometimes denied him sex on the grounds that she was not his wife was a major reason which had discouraged him from proceeding from the 'knocking' stage to finalising the marriage process. He had, however, not made this known to Nana Akua. This shows a clear situation of the couple living in two different worlds within the single world of their consensual union.

In her bid to stop acting like the wife she was not, Awuradwoa carried out the strategy of the withdrawal of wifely duties in a different manner. From time to time, she moved out of the house in which she lived with her partner and the children. She did so with all three children and went to her mother's house which is in a nearby location. According to her, she once left the house for close to a month. This was how she explained the rationale behind her approach:

> I want him to know that he cannot always take me for a fool. I am living with you (referring to her partner), and I do everything that a woman is supposed to do at home. Sometimes I even contribute to the chop money because at times what he gives me will not be enough. Eh, I do all that and just go and perform the marriage rites you do not want to do it. That is why I sometimes leave the house with the children so that he will know that he must go and perform the rites. And my mother does not have any problem with me coming over to her house with the children. *(Interview, October 2016).*

Obviously, anytime she leaves the house with the children Awuradwoa did not have to perform any domestic or sexual duties for her partner. The message she wanted to send across was that if the man needed her to be acting as a wife to him, then he also had to do what was required of him

in order to have a wife. According to her, anytime she left the house, her partner would come begging for her to return with the promise that he was going to start preparations towards the marriage rites. This, she said had happened on about three occasions. Clearly, this strategy was not yielding any results.

In Awuradwoa's own assessment, the success of her strategy was being impeded by two main factors. The first was the financial implications of moving away from her partner with their three children. This meant that the responsibility of feeding the children and herself was almost entirely her burden since her mother was not in the financial position to fend for her and her children. As an Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) toll collector, her income was barely enough to take care of herself and children.

The other impeding factor was a more disturbing one to her. She explained:

> Anytime I move out of the house with the children, they start getting sick one after the other. The one who gets seriously sick most of the time is the middle one, Akua. She and her father were both born on the same day of the week, which is Wednesday, so they have the same *kra da* (day born). So anytime I take her away from her father she will get very sick. When she gets sick too I have to stay at home and take care of her which also means that my income will be affected because they pay us commissions on the tickets we are able to give out so if I don't go then it means I can't get my money, do you understand? …but as soon as she goes back to her father, she will start getting well. *(Interview, October 2016).*

What Awuradwoa is purporting in this narrative is that her daughter Akua gets sick when the spiritual connection between she and her father is interrupted. The spiritual bond between fathers and their children was explored by Fortes (1950) among the Ashanti. According to Fortes (1950), fathers are connected to their children first through their *kra* and *sunsum.* The *kra,* which is the

spirit, is the source of life and destiny whilst the *sunsum* is the personal soul and embodies the personality. These two intangible but crucial components of a man were believed to be transmitted to his offspring and necessary for their well-being in life. Indeed, Fortes (1950) found that it was a strong belief among the Ashanti that once a father's *sunsum* for instance is withdrawn from a child, that child would not be able to prosper. It is for this reason that fathers are given the right to name their children since the belief is that it is through the naming that the spiritual connection is established although the *kra* and *sunsum* would have been transmitted at conception. A father's spiritual relevance in the lives of his children is not only upheld by the Ashanti but by other groups. The belief is even reechoed in some Christian religious circles.

Awuradwoa's assertion that her children do not do well when they are taken away from their father who has named all three of them could, therefore, be explained from this perspective. Her observation that the child with the same *kra da* as her father gets more seriously sick, compared to the others suggests a stronger bond between that daughter and her father. Nothing could be done to avert this trend except for her to be in the same space as her father. This reality, coupled with the financial implications of leaving her partner, according to her, are what makes her yield to his pleas to return to him. Over the period of executing her 'moving out' strategy, therefore, no progress seemed to have been made in terms of the desired results.

6.3.2 Negotiating Marriage Via Diligence in 'Wifely' Duties

Whilst some female participants thought that refusing to perform the roles of wives would be the push factor to get their partners to marry them, others thought non-verbal persuasion was necessary to achieve their desired end. This non-verbal persuasion found expression in the performance of

wifely duties with diligence. Such were the cases of Owusaa, Dede and Maabena. For these women, projecting themselves as 'wife material' was the sure way of convincing the men to consider converting the unions to marriage. Unlike their other counterparts who sought to use rebellion as a way of getting power, this category of participants took a much sober position possibly out of fear that doing otherwise might completely get their partners disinterested in marrying. Fear, as emotional energy, according to Collins (2004) is often associated with the weaker party in the power rituals and this had the potential of making them cooperate with the dominant figure.

Particularly in the African context, diligence in the performance of wifely duties has been taught as the way women can endear themselves to their husbands. This is often emphasised during traditional marriage ceremonies. Similar teachings are advanced within the religious circles of Christianity and Islam. In his article titled 'What role must a wife play to avert marital crisis?', HajGold (2017) explained that in Islam, the Prophet Muhammad is said to have taught that wives who diligently perform their duties of cooking, cleaning, taking care of their husbands particularly in terms of sexual satisfaction would earn the pleasure of their husbands which will earn them entry into Paradise upon their death. He also referred to the book of Proverbs, chapter 31 in the Bible which is used by Christians and often interpreted as the responsibilities of the virtuous wife. The virtuous wife through the performance of her duties causes the heart of her husband to trust in her (verse 11) and also praise her (verse 28). Moreover, Colossians 3:18 also talks about wives being submissive to their husbands. For the three Christian female participants who chose to apply this principle in their unions, their aim was to convince their partners that they were worth marrying.

Owusuaa explained:

> You know the men, sometimes you must be patient with them. If you are always disturbing them with the marriage issue that alone can even put them off. So, it is all about patience. Then you make sure that you perform all your duties as a wife and even do more so that they will realize that if they should marry you, they have not thrown their money away. But if every day 'when are you going to do it? when are you going to do it?' then sister, they won't even mind you…he will do it, it's just a matter of time. *(Interview, June 2017)*

What was particularly interesting about Owusuaa's situation was that she happened to be the partner of Yaw who had earlier on indicated his plans to run off to another location just to avoid Owusuaa and the pressures that were coming from his family and church to marry her. This was yet another case of, partners with two different expectations and assessments of a single union. If Yaw ever succeeded with his escape plan, Owusuaa's fate was going to be similar to Kwabena's in the song *Sete*. Although in her case, she had not received an assurance from Yaw that he was going to marry her, he had also not been definite about not marrying her.

6.3.3 Managing Consensual Unions with a Laissez-Faire Attitude

Although this study has emphasised in the study that the majority of women wished for their unions to be converted into marriage, there was one category of women (Agyeiwaa, Naana, Doris) who had adopted what could best be described as a noninterventionist attitude towards their relationship. For them, they saw no need to act in any specific ways to persuade their partners to marry them. They were just living their lives but still with the hope of being married. For these women, being the 'weaker' party in their relationship was not enough reason to make them want to take steps to make their desire of having the unions converted to marriage come to pass. They chose to simply wait for the 'marriage order' to be given. The kind of emotional energy they exhibited fits what Collins (2004) describes as 'bland normalcy' or a 'lack of initiative'.

Agyeiwaa whose relationship had lasted 24 years and had produced seven children kept her hope of marriage alive but explained that she did not take any steps to ensure that it happened. She explained her position this way:

> …. oh, but what can I do? We already have seven children, seven *oo.* Is it now that I am going to be fighting with him about the marriage? I do not even want the children to see anything like that going on. He [referring to her partner] knows what he is supposed to do because he is not a child. So, I am just watching him. *(Interview, October 2016).*

The length of Agyeiwaa's relationship and the number of children appeared to be the restraining factor. Over the years, she had resorted to talking her partner into performing the marriage rites. When it seemed not to be yielding any results, she decided to relax. That was not to say, however, that she had given up on marriage.

Naana was also in a similar situation. Her family had intervened in the union to prevent her partner Kwabena from naming any of their four children. On a personal level, however, she was not actively trying to convince him to perform the marriage rites, though she very much wanted him to do so. Like Agyeiwaa, she maintained that Kwabena was fully aware of the customary marriage requirements. For her, the fact that the opportunity to name their children was dependent on whether or not he performed the rites should be the main motivating factor for him to perform the rites and not necessarily what she did as a person.

Whilst she waited for the marriage, however, she also felt the need to deal with the issue of physical abuse which was quite frequent in the relationship. She described her approach to dealing with it as '*you do me I do you*.' This was how it worked, according to her:

> You see I told you that sometimes he beats me. Sometimes with his hands and other times too with a belt. So, I also decided that if he has not married me and I don't have anybody

> to report him to, I also had to do something. So, some time ago, he beat me because he said I had gone to drink alcohol. I did not say anything. I went to hire some land guards I know to ambush him and beat him for me. As for land guards, you do not have to give them anything, even if you give them something small for *apketeshie* (local gin) they will do what you ask them to do for you. So, they also beat him very well and as I speak to you, he does not know that I was the one behind it. (Laughs)…. He thinks he is the only one who is strong. *(Interview, January 2017).*

Nana resorted to the '*you do me, I do you'* strategy, because the union was not marriage. According to her if they had been properly married, she would have adopted a different approach which is reporting him to his extended family members for their intervention.

6.4 Conclusion

I described, in this chapter, the various strategies that research participants used in dealing with the implications which came with their union type, as was discussed in the previous chapter. I established that participants' response to these implications depended on whether or not it was their desire that the unions were converted into marriage. There were two categories of participants who had no intentions of marriage. The first were those who wanted to end their relationships and to achieve this had devised various exit plans. The second category was those who wanted to remain in the unions despite disinterest in marriage. Many of such participants, mostly men, had a laissez-faire attitude towards the implications of being in a consensual union. Others, who were women, kept their relationships going by deceiving their partners into thinking that they were considering marriage. What came out quite clearly was the fact that in most cases, partners had two divergent expectations of the status of their union for which reason one of them was likely to suffer the effect of *sete* at the end of the day.

For those who saw marriage as the necessary end to their unions, they resorted to schemes which they believed could stimulate the start of the marriage process or to hasten its completion in the cases where the process had already begun. Such strategies were often developed by women and targeted at the men since it was mostly female participants who thought of their unions as a prelude to marriage. Their strategies, therefore, included withdrawal or intensification of wifely duties, both aimed at provoking some response from their partners. Others, however, took a more relaxed approach and still hoped for marriage to happen at some point in time. Emotional energies ranging from aggression to a lack of enthusiasm were demonstrated based on individuals' position in the power dynamics and how they expected their unions to ultimately end.

As I indicated in the previous chapter, women tended to bear the brunt of the implications of being in a consensual union, particularly from the pressure groups; their families, churches and society at large. All of these pressures were aimed at getting the women to convince their partners to formalize their unions. It was, therefore, no surprise when it came out that female participants were more likely to devise strategies to manage life in their unions. The literature on consensual unions, as has been indicated earlier, is silent on the lived experiences of persons in consensual unions. The findings in this chapter are largely new to the literature on consensual unions in Africa and therefore constitute a distinctive contribution to knowledge.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

Consensual unions as an alternative form of family formation have over the years become a widespread phenomenon in many parts of the world for which reason quite a number of studies have addressed the subject. In the African context, such scholarly works in which consensual unions, which is also referred to as cohabitation or informal unions have described the phenomenon as more common in urban spaces although present in rural settings too. The literature has, therefore, been focused on the causes of this practice and have identified urbanisation, commercialisation of marriage payments and increased autonomy in mate selection as the main causative factors. A clear gap in the literature is the details of how these unions play out after they have been formed.

To address this gap, this qualitative study focused on exploring the experiences of persons in consensual unions in the multi-ethnic space of Accra where a total of thirty-one research participants were purposively sampled. Based on this general aim of the study, the study set out to achieve three specific objectives which were, to find out the circumstances that lead to the formation of consensual unions; to examine the implications of being in such a union type and to find out the ways in which persons in consensual unions deal with the implications that come with their union type. The study drew on Randall Collins' (2004) Theory of Situations (Interactive Ritual Chains) as the theoretical framework within which analyses of data were done. This theory posits that individual's social situations determine their social action. Furthermore, patterns of human interactions can produce a relationship of power. This situation of power dynamics would

in turn, influence the types and levels of emotional energies that the parties in the interactive process will demonstrate.

Upon completion of the research, several significant findings have been discovered. In this chapter, these findings are summarised, the contribution to knowledge stated, a conclusion is drawn, and some recommendations are made.

7.2 Summary of Key Findings

In exploring the circumstances that lead to the formation of consensual unions as an alternative form of family formation in Ghana, it has been discovered that although in most cases, consensual unions are formed on the basis of rational and intentional choices of individuals, these choices are influenced by some specific social situations. This finding is explained through the Theory of Situations which argues that social action is understood from the perspective of social situations. Not only can these determining factors be categorised as either instrumental or expressive (Baron et al., 2006), there are often gendered differences in the push factors responsible for individuals' decisions to opt for such unions.

The study identified two major factors that influence the decisions of women of lower socio-economic status. The first was economic difficulties. Consensual unions for such female participants, therefore, serves as a livelihood strategy. All five of the female participants who reported this reason happened to be migrants, with levels of education not beyond the Senior High School level, engaged in menial economic activities and consequently with low income levels. With all of these factors resulting in low standards of living, such women thought of their partners

as livelihood support systems. Although their partners were themselves not necessarily engaged in lucrative jobs, the women were still expectant of a boost in their standards of living once they were in a relationship with them. This finding confirmed the argument by some scholars that the ways in which men and women expend their resources is largely influenced by the expected gender roles in a particular social environment. Where men are thought of as breadwinners for their families, therefore, irrespective of their income levels, they are expected to act as such once they attempt to start some form of family life (Adinkrah, 2012; Awumbila & Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2008; Nukunya, 2003).

The study has also found that women, may end up in a relationship not necessarily because they wanted to be with the men but as a way of escaping a situation they find unpleasant, such as sexual harassment from men they considered as family members. Women who were influenced by such a circumstance, considered opting for a consensual union as a better alternative to sexual relationships with men they rather saw as father figures. Participants in this category were also of lower socio-economic standing.

The major factors which influenced the female participants' decision to enter consensual unions, created a situation of unequal power relations between themselves and their partners as they were basically dependent on their partners for livelihood support and for safety. Partners of such participants tended to be in control of the relationship, making the relationship that of power rituals (Collins, 2004).

For middle class female participants, however, they were either in their unions as a way of rehearsing for marriage or just for the sake of intimate relations. Previous marital experiences were primarily the situations which made some of such women opt for consensual unions for the purpose of intimacy, whilst for the others, it was the need to adequately prepare for marriage.

For most men, on the other hand, the decision to start a relationship was primarily an indication of their maturity and their masculinity. Even in the face of changing definitions of masculinities, the Ghanaian society has historically emphasised phallic competence and responsibility as family men as key indicators of manhood (Atobrah & Adomako Ampofo, 2016; Morrell et al., 2012; Ratale, 2011). Men, across all classes in this study, therefore tended to reinforce their sense of manhood through heterosexual relationships like consensual unions.

Following from this gendered difference in the circumstances that lead to the formation of consensual unions, the study revealed that there was also a gendered conceptualisation and expectations of the relationships. It was found that women were more likely to think of their unions as precursor to marriage whilst men often saw them as an alternative to marriage. For women, the duration of the union, the presence of children which made them less attractive as potential wives to other men, and the desire to meet societal expectations of them to get married were the pressing factors that made them wish for their unions to be converted into marriage. Men, because they experience relatively low societal pressures to get married, did not see marriage as a pressing issue and were often dissatisfied with the character traits of their partners. There were, however, two cases of middle-class female divorcees who also thought of their current relationships as

alternatives to marriage and middle-class men who had intentions of marriage as an end to their unions.

The situation where there were contrasting expectations of the union regarding its conversion to marriage resulted in unequal power relations; an 'order-giver' and 'order-taker' relationship (Collins, 2004). The 'order-giver' in this case was the one who was expected initiate the marriage process, whilst the other was the 'order-taker' who waited upon the other to dictate the course of the relationship. The former became the centre of attention in the union with the latter being the 'weaker' partner. It was discovered in this study that female participants were often the 'weaker' ones in the interactive process because they were more likely to expect their unions to end in marriage when their partner were not.

The gendered conceptualisations of consensual unions, the study showed, found expression in the various terminologies that were used by partners in referring to each other. It was revealed that couples in consensual unions could refer to each other as husband and wife though not formally married. Whilst most women referred to their partners as their husbands, most of the men in turn used a variety of terms such as *mpena* (lover or concubine), when they spoke of their partners. This pointed to how nuanced the concepts 'husband' and 'wife' can be since they are sometimes used in reference to people who may not be married. That women referred to their partners as their husbands could also be attributed to the fact that they, they women were hoping to turn the men into real husbands, thus a kind of preparation or negotiating strategy for them. This did not only emphasise their position in the relationship as the 'weaker' partners but also demonstrated the kind

of emotional energies they displayed in their unions. Their emotional energies were often that of optimism and enthusiasm.

In exploring the implications that result from being in a consensual union, one key finding was that persons in such unions experience the three-fold pressure groups to convert their unions into marriage. These were the family, church, and society. Although the onus lies with men to perform customary marriage rites of women they wish to take as wives, it was revealed that women bore the brunt of these pressure groups. This is partly explained from the standpoint that pressures on women to get married is stronger as compared to men. Again, these pressure groups expected the women to be the 'order-givers' who would give their partners the go ahead to perform their marriage rites before giving in to start a family life with them. Failure to do this put them at the receiving end of the three-fold pressures.

Several studies, particularly from the West have described consensual unions as more violent than marriage (Brown & Booth, 2006; Carbone-Lopez et al., 2010; DeMaris, 2011; Kenney & McLanahan, 2006; Rennison & Macmillan, 2012). Such a tendency was confirmed in this study. Five female research participants reported varying degrees of physical, sexual and psychological from their partners. They interpreted their experiences as a result of their union type which lacked both social and legal recognition. The two male respondents who confirmed being perpetrators of domestic violence, however, saw it as part of their manly duties, giving credence to earlier works on domestic violence which argue that patriarchy remains a major impetus for domestic violence by men against women (Adjei, 2015b; Jewkes, 2002).

The study also revealed that, there are matrilineal and patrilineal principles that respond to the issues of consensual unions. Findings showed that, men more than women are likely to suffer the cultural implications of being in consensual unions. These include being made to pay a *kwasiabuo* (taking someone for a fool) penalty, not being allowed to name children and being asked to perform customary marriage rites for a partner in the event of their death. The study finding, however, suggested that the extent to which such sanctions are carried out against a man may depend on a range of factors. Key amongst them are the presence of a strong family support for the women whose cause her lineage members are to be fighting and the economic standing of the parties involved. The intervention of a woman's external family to mete out sanctions to men then alters the power dynamics of the relationship.

Knowledge levels of Ghana's legal provisions for persons in consensual unions in terms of property sharing was found to be extremely low. None of the thirty-one research participants was aware of the proposed Property Rights of Spouses Bill. Having been told about it, female participants, tended to show more excitement and enthusiasm about the bill as compared to their male counterparts, who were quite indifferent. Both men and women, however, were of the view that their jointly acquired properties were supposed to be transferred to the children they had in their unions. Only three of the couples in the study had some form of jointly acquired properties.

In finding out the ways in which persons in consensual unions manage the issues that come with their union type, it emerged that the strategies employed were largely determined by whether an individual considered the union a precursor or an alternative to marriage. For participants who had no intentions of converting their unions into marriage, mostly men, there were two lines of action.

The first was to completely exit the relationship and the second, to remain in the relationship and live with the implications. There were also others, women, who kept their disinterest in marriage from their partners and rather projected otherwise.

On the other hand, persons who saw the relationship as a precursor to marriage, mostly women, had different sets of strategies. The study revealed that suspension of wifely duties, particularly sexual services was the most resorted to strategy aimed at convincing their partners to marry them. Other women rather acted more diligently in the performance of their wifely duties to impress their partners, whilst another section adopted a laissez-faire attitude towards their unions.

It was shown that female participants generally demonstrated high levels of emotional energies like enthusiasm and hope in their unions, whereas male participants showed low levels of emotional energies such as a lack of initiative and bland normalcy. This was largely because, given the fact that the women waited on men to perform their marriage rites, the men became the dominant figures in the relationship. They could, therefore, afford to be unenthusiastic about converting the union to marriage making the women, who for social, cultural, and religious reasons tended were more desirous of marriage, the 'weaker' parties.

7.3 Contribution to Knowledge

Findings of this research as have been summarised in the previous section reveal some significant contributions to the existing literature on consensual unions in Africa. First, the literature on consensual unions suggest a unitary household conception of such relationships. From this study it has been shown that there could also be a gendered conceptualisation of consensual unions

whereby in a single union, the man and the woman would have divergent definitions and expectations of their relationship. This is an extension of the work Bernard (1982) who discussed a similar phenomenon pertaining to marriage and conceptualised it as the 'his' marriage and 'her' marriage. The similarity between the finding of this study and that of Bernard is that men and women are likely to have different realities in their intimate relationships, with the opposite sex, be it marriage or consensual unions. This knowledge has shown clearly that reality is not always shared in interactive processes.

Again, with the factors that contribute to the formation of consensual unions, what is already known are the broad factors such as urbanisation, the commercialisation of marriage payments, and autonomy in mate selection. This research has shown other factors such as the use of love charms, an escape route from unpleasant situations, a livelihood strategy and a demonstration of male maturity and masculinity as possible causes of the formation of consensual unions. These factors show some specific situations which influence the formation of consensual unions.

Furthermore, the literature on consensual unions in Africa is quite silent on the implications of such union type as experienced by the persons involved and for their children. This knowledge has been brought to the fore through this research. Through this study, the concept of the 'three-fold pressure group experience of consensual unions' has emerged. This has revealed the specific ways in which external pressures are mounted on persons in consensual unions to direct the course of the relationship in one direction or the other. Aside the experience with pressure groups, intimate partner violence, which is often conceptualised in the literature on domestic violence in Ghana as wife-beating, has been shown to also be characteristic of consensual unions too. It has been

revealed that beyond factors like patriarchy, the informal nature of consensual unions also contributes to the incidence of intimate partner violence.

Another significant contribution to knowledge by this study is the strategies that are employed in dealing with the implications of being in consensual unions. It has been demonstrated clearly that based on how partners in consensual unions conceptualise their relationships, they would accordingly devise strategies aimed at achieving the purpose for which they wish their relationships to serve. These are largely distinctive contributions to knowledge.

7.4 Conclusion

The study's findings and contribution to knowledge indicate that the research questions, objectives, and purpose that the study set out to address were achieved. The knowledge gap, which constituted the research problem, was that little is known about why people would violate the rules that define the establishment of marriage in a contemporary setting and the lived experiences of those who do so. As earlier anthropological studies have shown, notions of marriage and family in Ghana have been characterised by significant levels of fluidity and indefiniteness and indeed consensual unions had existed side-by-side marriage (Fortes, 1950; Vellenga, 1983; Grier, 1992; Kyei, 1992; Allman & Tashjian, 2000). The new knowledge of consensual unions that this study has produced confirms that such unions certainly are an alternative form of family formation amongst a section of Ghanaians. The study has shown that marriage largely remains a social institution that people desire. However, the realities of social situations may not always make marriage possible and as such, consensual unions become an alternative social reaction to individual's social situations.

In addition, these family studies in Africa have suggested that ethnicity, specifically, lineage structures is about the most influential determinant of people's attitudes towards marriage. This study on consensual unions, in contrast, points to gender being as influential as ethnicity in defining the difference in attitudes. Gender, however, does not operate in isolation as it manifests is influenced by the socio-cultural context. It is these essentials that also explain why men in consensual unions could often consider their unions as an end in themselves whilst their partners are likely to consider it as a means to an end; marriage. The conceptualisation of the unions further explains the nature of the lived experiences of the partners in the union.

Like other forms of intimate relationships, partners in consensual unions have their peculiar experiences that cut across personal, social, religious, and cultural lines. As such, although a consensual union in many respects mirrors marriage, it must be considered on its own terms in any attempt at analyse and understand it.

7.5 Recommendations

As stated at the beginning the aim of this qualitative study was not to generate generalisations about the experiences of people in consensual unions but to provide in-depth information about the experiences of the participants of the research. To a large extent, therefore, results from this research would be inadequate to make suggestions towards the making of policies to address the issue of consensual unions in Ghana. Recommendations, therefore, are mostly made for future research that will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of consensual unions in Ghana.

However, because this study showed that knowledge levels about the proposed Property Rights of Spouses Bill is quite low, it is recommended that there is a more public education and engagement about the Bill. This is necessary because regulating intimacies can be a difficult endeavour because of the complexities associated with issues of emotions, conjugal and family relationships.

Guided by the assertion in the literature that consensual unions are predominant in urban areas, this study was situated in the multi-ethnic space of Accra. Most of the findings that came up in the study could, therefore, be interpreted from the perspective of modernisation and urban living. Further research on the subject conducted in some rural areas to reveal more complex dynamics of the phenomenon in such settings, thus worth exploring. Rurality, is likely to show how proximity to extended family and being within a space where traditional rites are more upheld, would impact the experiences of persons in consensual unions.

Additionally, it is recommended that further studies focus on middle class persons in consensual unions for a more detailed account of their experiences. This current study showed that poverty is a major factor which influenced particularly women's decision to opt for a consensual union. It was also a likely reason why some men did not perform the marriage rites. It would, therefore, be interesting to explore the reasons why middle-class women who may not enter consensual unions as a livelihood strategy, and middle-class men who can afford marriage payments, would choose to be in such unions.

Finally, in this study research participants made a lot of reference to some external players like the family and religious groups in shaping their lives experiences. It is, therefore, also recommended

that in further studies on consensual unions, these external players like the family and religious groups be included for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

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APPENDIX I

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR THE HUMANITIES (ECH)
P. O. Box LG 74, Legon, Accra, Ghana

My Ref. No.....

10th October 2016

Ms. Rosemary Obeng-Hinneh
Department of Sociology
University of Ghana
Legon

Dear Ms. Obeng-Hinneh,

ECH 001/16-17: UNDERSTANDING CONSENSUAL UNIONS AS AN ALTERNATIVE FORM OF FAMILY FORMATION IN GHANA

This is to advise you that the above reference study has been presented to the Ethics Committee for the Humanities for a full board review and the following actions taken subject to the conditions and explanation provided below:

Expiry Date:	30/08/17
On Agenda for:	Initial Submission
Date of Submission:	16/06/16
ECH Action:	Approved
Reporting:	Bi-Annually

UG/ISSER/ECH VALID UNTIL 30 AUG 2017 APPROVED DOCUMENT

Please accept my congratulations.

Yours Sincerely,

Rev. Prof. J. O. Y. Mante
ECH Chair

CC: Rev Dr. M. P. K. Okyerefo, Department of Sociology, University of Ghana.

Tel: +233-303933866 Email: ech@ug.edu.gh | ech@isser.edu.gh

APPENDIX II

INTERVIEW GUIDE

RESEARCH TOPIC: *UNDERSTANDING CONSENSUAL UNIONS AS A FORM OF FAMILY FORMATION IN GHANA.*

FIRST SESSION

Section A

1. Can you please tell me about yourself? (*Socio-demographic characteristics: Age, ethnic group, religious denomination, educational attainment, occupation, number of children, residential arrangements etc.*)

Section B

2. Can you please tell me about your partner?

Section C

3. Can you please narrate to me your life history, from as far back as you can remember to now? (*Family background, place of birth, growing up, live experiences, previous relationships etc.*).

SECOND SESSION

Section D (*Further questioning on specific aspects of research participant's life history in relation to research questions and objectives*).

4. What exact circumstances led you into your relationship?
5. What are the customary marriage rites for your ethnic group?
6. How would you describe life in a consensual union?
   - Are there any cultural implications for being in a consensual union?

- How do the inheritance and succession structures of your ethnic group affect you (and your children) in this situation?
- What is the stance of your religious group on the status of your union?
- Are there any religious consequences?
- What other experiences do you encounter specifically because you are in such a union?

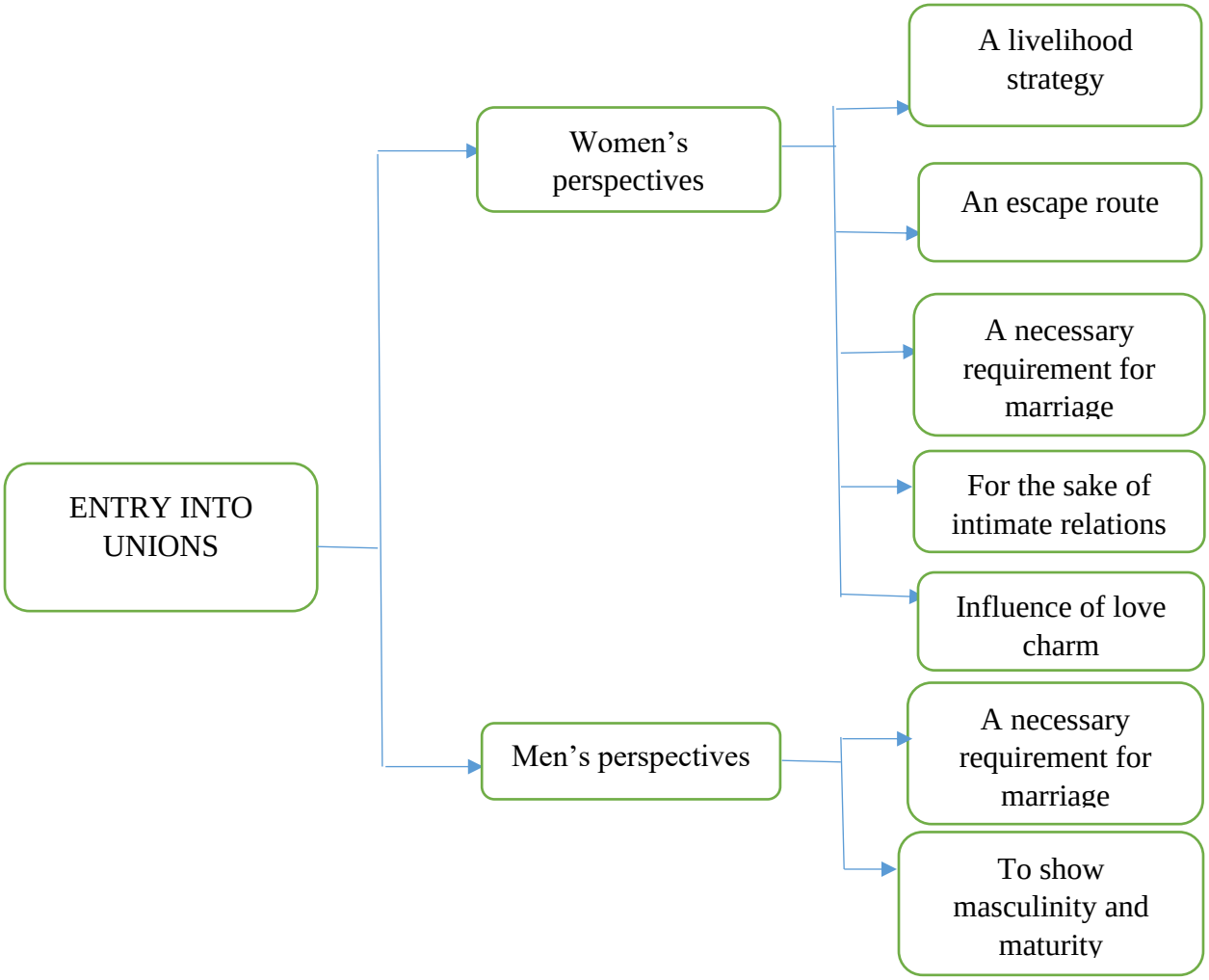
7. From your experience, are there any positive or negative sides of being in a consensual union?
8. How would you describe the quality of your relationship?
9. What do you see as the future of your union?
10. What are the reasons for the future you envisage for the union?
11. Are you aware of any legal provisions that address consensual unions?
12. What do you make of these provisions?

THIRD SESSION

Section E: *Recounting key information given back to research participant for confirmation and clarification.*

APPENDIX III

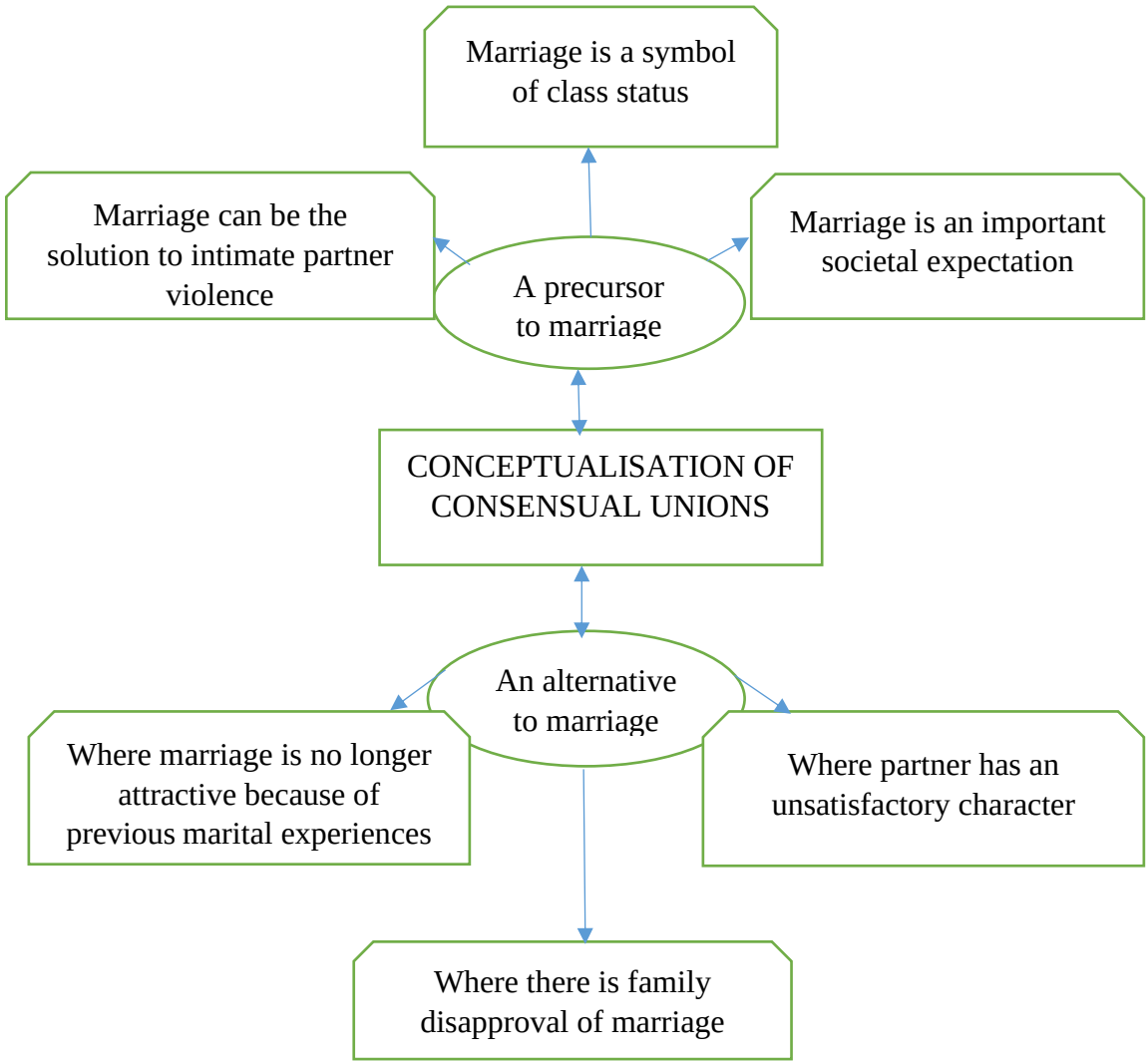
Thematic Network Analysis of Factors Which Influenced Entry into Unions



Source: Researcher's Thematic Network Analysis, 2017

APPENDIX IV

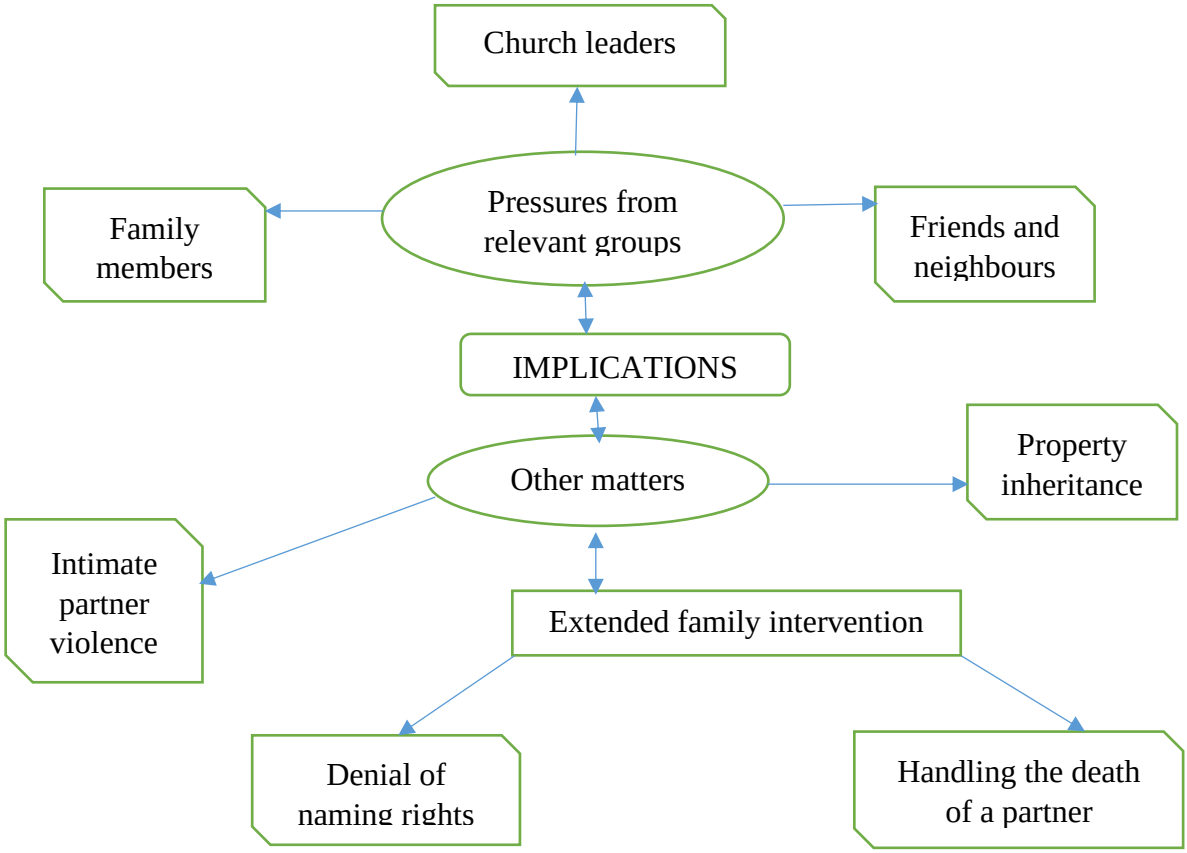
Thematic Network Analysis of the Conceptualisation of Consensual Unions



Source: Researcher's Thematic Network Analysis, 2017

APPENDIX V

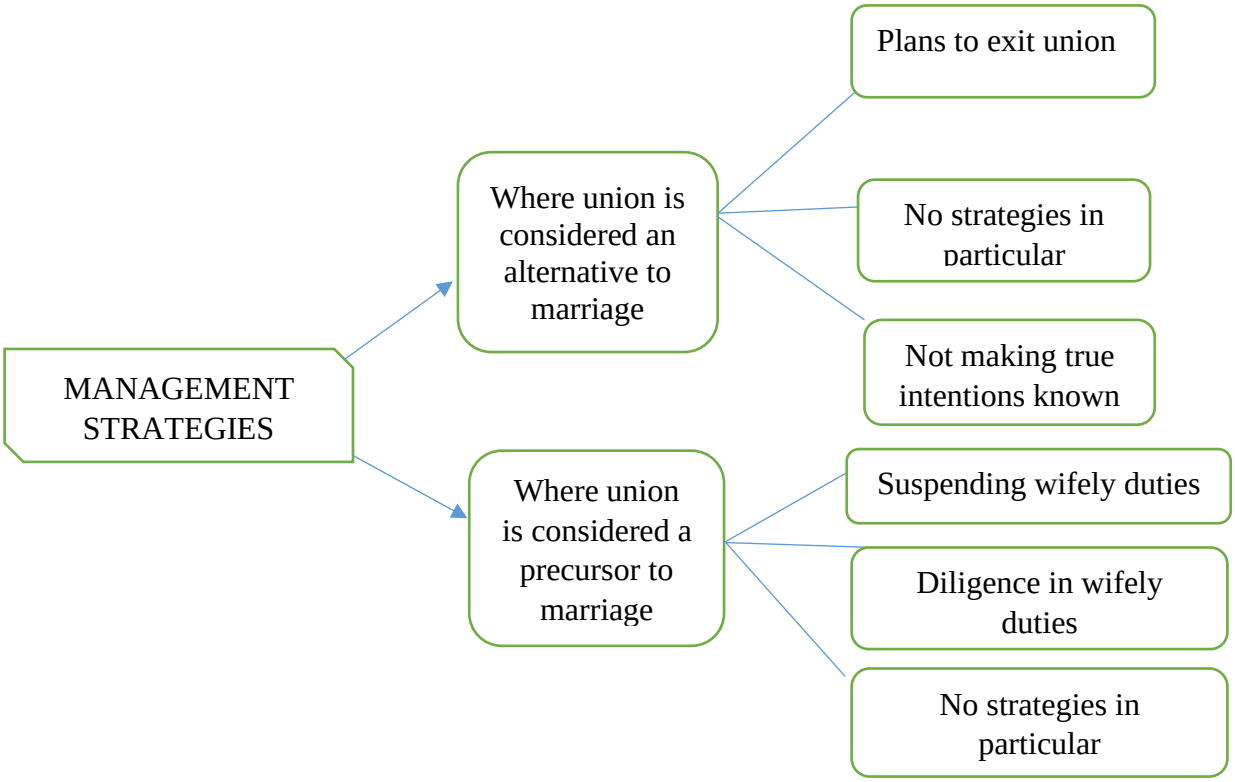
Thematic Network Analysis of the Implications of Being in a Consensual Union



Source: Researcher's Thematic Network Analysis, 2017

APPENDIX VI

Thematic Network Analysis of the Management Strategies for Persons in Consensual Unions



Source: Researcher's Thematic Network Analysis, 2017

APPENDIX VII

BRIEF PROFILE OF AKAN LANGUAGE EXPERT, MR. EDWARD APENTENG-SACKEY

Mr. Apenteng-Sackey is currently a part-time lecturer with the Department of Linguistics, University of Ghana, Legon. He holds an MA degree in Linguistics from the same university. Mr. Apenteng-Sackey specialises in the Akan language and has taught courses in it in several institutions including the Ghana Institute of Journalism and the University of Ghana. Some of these courses are; Use of a Ghanaian Language – Akan, History and Development of Akan, Written Literature in a Ghanaian Language – Akan, Oral Literature of a Ghanaian Language – Akan and Twi Proficiency for Beginners. Aside teaching, he has also done translations of various works from Akan to English and vice-versa. Key amongst these translation works are; National Reconciliation Commission of Ghana Final Report, 2006, Domestic Violence Act 2007, Air Pollution Report by the Noguchi Institute for Medical Research, 2008 and Bible Study Outline for the Presbyterian Women's Center, Abokobi, on Empowerment, Gender and Religion, 2015. His publications include *English-Akan-English Science Dictionary*, *Akan Terminology* and *Akuapem Kasasua Mfiase Nhoma* (Akuapem Language Study),

Other activities that Mr. Apenteng-Sackey engages in, in relation to his field of expertise are; Co-writer and team leader for Akuapem Twi writers for Unimax Macmillan Publishers, Chief Examiner for West African Examination Council (Basic Education Certificate Examination, Twi, and West African School Certificate Examination, Akan), editor for Twi Documents for Great Commision Movement (GCM), Ghana and proof-reader and editor for *Ahene Pa Nkasa* Series, Digibooks Limited, USA.