Article

Journal of Black Studies
2021, Vol. 52(4) 379–402

DOI: 10.1177/0021934721992262
journals.sagepub.com/home/jbs
SAGE

Conceptualising Male Vulnerability in a Ghanaian Context: Implications for Adult Education and Counselling

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Abstract

Gender advocates have bemoaned the diatribe about women inequality at the neglect of males' vulnerability in abstract narratives. We propose that achievement of female empowerment will be complimented by empirically exploring men's vulnerability themes wrapped in "masculinity" with cultural differences. This study documented views on male vulnerability in the Ghanaian environment using mixed-method design with 189 respondents conveniently. Chi square goodness-of-fit test, and thick descriptions were applied to the open-ended questionnaire items. Indeed, 74% of the participants agreed that Ghanaian males were vulnerable with 26% expressing contrary views. With nine overarching themes generated, gender was not a significant factor in categorising male vulnerability (Σ^2 (8) = 10.836, $p > .05$). We concluded that both sexes appear to have shared views on Ghanaian males' vulnerability issues and recommended for gender advocates

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to expand the equality discourse to cover males' vulnerability. Implications for adult education and guidance and counselling practices are indicated.

Keywords
male vulnerability, gender equality, adult education, counselling

Introduction

The general discourse on gender equity appears to be centered on vulnerability of females. Marginalization and discrimination of all forms against females, be it physical, social, economic, political, or cultural have been the subject of global human rights discourse. The move towards addressing the phenomenon has been backed by international historical landmark movements such as the *Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), *the Nairobi Conference* 1985 and the *Beijing Platform for Action* 1995 (Baldez, 2011; Porter, 2003; Zinsser, 2002). These landmarks have sought to protect the rights of women and girls and to make them more visible in various spheres of life. Even though gender equity acknowledges the ways in which both males and females are disadvantaged, the idea of male vulnerability seems to be quiet or far-fetched. On the other hand, men have been positioned as "the enemy," occupying patriarchal and hegemonic structures. Society and its process of socialization have constructed men as the problem, and perceived them as aggressive and violent; and women as passive and vulnerable (Buthelezi, 2007).

These, amongst several others, appear to have influenced the gender discourse on males, and have, thus, limited the discourse on vulnerability of males. While males mostly find it difficult to express their emotional vulnerabilities and seek help where, and when, necessary, females have been oriented to perceive themselves as culturally laidback and more vulnerable, and, therefore, are justified to solicit support when discriminated against or treated unfairly—a critical reflection and research could reveal otherwise. The paper posits that males and females are both empowered and vulnerable in different ways. There is, therefore, the need to have a balanced perspective of the strengths and weaknesses of males, and support them, accordingly. As highlighted in the literature, gender researchers now appear to be paying attention to vulnerability studies among males with the African cases being non-existent. This paper, therefore, seeks to understand the ways in which males are vulnerable, from the perspective of the Ghanaian adult, and explore ways of using adult education and counselling to support their continuous education and psychological needs. Secondly, the paper will propose that the gendering

of vulnerability could be an important narrative in shaping the lives of indigenous African men.

Vulnerable is an adjective which has been applied in different fields. Some have applied it to the analysis of social environment, economic, ecological system, and resilience thinking (Nathan, 2017, p. 37). Standard definitions of vulnerability often capture the resilience approach. In the same vein, Cops and Pleysier (2011, p. 59) refer to vulnerability as "the perception of exposure to danger or harm, a loss of control over the situation and a perceived inadequate capacity to resist the direct and indirect consequences of victimization." Deconstructing the concept of vulnerability, Murphy (2012, p. 65) identifies ethical ambiguity and harm as the buzz words, underlying its definitions, but he was quick to acknowledge that vulnerability does not necessarily have to be associated with violence or absence of it. On finding a suitable label, Gibson (2011) attacks the extremists' view on exposure to aggression, danger, and violence as simplistic and might limit the possibility to expand debates around vulnerability. In the opinion of Gibson, gender advocates should extend the themes on vulnerability to document fundamental human conditions that account for modern views on non-violence theory on gender. This is a view that is shared by Butler (1990). In consonance with Gibson and Butler's recommendation, the current study explored culturally specific concepts of vulnerability among males. The next segment of the paper, therefore, examines the gender literature on male vulnerability in relation to sexual offense, health, relationships, and economic issues. In all the definitions shared here, there is an element of one being in a disadvantaged situation as a result of something happening to the individual. We are inclined towards the resilience view of vulnerability as it provides a broader context to explore the male gender's desire to fit in various cultural labels, probably hampering their wellbeing.

Another construct of importance to our study is adult education, which is perceived and utilized differently from country-to-country, depending on the adult learning needs of the country (Findsen & Formosa, 2016). Adult education is "a process involving planning by individuals or agencies by which adults alone, in groups, or in institutional setting improve themselves or their society" (Houle, 1972 in Merriam & Brockett, 2007, p. 8). "Adult education is a process whereby persons whose major social roles are characteristic of an adult status, and undertake systematic and sustained learning activities for the purpose of bringing about changes in knowledge, attitudes, values, or skills" (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 9 in Merriam & Brocket, 2007). Thus, activities that are intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about learning among those whose age, social roles, or self-perception define them as adults constitute the field of adult learning. Therefore, exploring diverse

learning approaches that help adult men circumvent vulnerability traps is relevant to our study.

In the same vein, counselling, as used in this study, refers to integrative approaches in the application of therapeutic models to address male vulnerability. Gender advocates should be content in ameliorating their agents' discomfort through interdisciplinary engagements with helping professionals. For instance, clinical psychologists could be partners in possible diagnosis of a client's mental health due to vulnerability. Indeed, psychological constructs of mental, physical, and emotional dysfunctions are deeply associated with vulnerability conceptualization (e.g., Cops & Pleysier, 2011). Demonstrating the partnership between adult education, clinical psychology, and gender studies, Brown (2004) demonstrates how vulnerable men were educated on parental roles, child abuse, and neglect preventions in the Caribbean region.

Vulnerability factors such as reference group comparison of poverty at the micro level where households are exposed to health risks, economic, and social shocks have been of interest to social scientists within the context of Relative Deprivation theory (Treanor, 2016). Financially vulnerable persons, comparing themselves to similar reference groups, can result in debilitating psychotic conditions of depression, and anger (Smith et al., 2012). Similarly, Green (2007) linked anxiety, stress, and emotional well-being with poverty—which men are equally susceptible to.

The question is, do men seek counselling for their vulnerabilities? Mental health literature suggests that men of color are reticent in seeking counselling services. Various explanations have been offered for men's decline for therapy even in the face of vulnerability. Indeed, social roles have been mentioned by O'Neil et al. (1995). Levant and Pollack (1995) in their work, entitled "*A New Psychology for Men*," have argued that socially constructed myth of masculinity has been a contributing factor in male vulnerability. According to Clowes (2013), gaining more insight into men's vulnerability would mean fewer men would die of stress-related diseases before they get to old age. Apart from reducing numbers in prison, where males mostly outnumber females, discussion on men's vulnerability would mean positive spin-offs in terms of men's relationships with the family and friends, thereby building stronger support networks for times of hardship and stress." Drawing on major psychotherapy models such as psychodynamic, humanistic, and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT; Trull & Prinstein, 2013, p. 153), adult education practitioners can merge with adult educators to transform learning and address male vulnerability issues. Practically, the influence of the subconscious mind, defensive mechanisms such as transference, projection, fixation, sexual drives, and aggression (Knowles et al., 2015, p. 34) can be relevant concepts in explaining men's

vulnerability. Apart from only highlighting men's vulnerability, the current study sought to encourage gender discourse that recognizes help, available to vulnerable men in promoting gender equality.

What Makes Males Vulnerable?

It becomes increasingly difficult to understand how the "seemingly advantaged male" is also a figure of vulnerability against the backdrop of women's vulnerability being attributed mostly to gender inequalities. Men, nonetheless, could be vulnerable in a myriad of ways including sexual, health, relationship, and economic. According to Vogel and Heath (2016), societal beliefs of what is perceived as manhood and masculinity, create the defining roles and expectations of males. It is argued, then, that males are socialized to project strength, independence, self-sufficiency, authority, fortitude, and to usually not express their emotions or show signs of vulnerability to avoid being perceived as weak (Mankowski & Maton, 2010). Horowitz (1997, p. 75) remarked whilst describing men's vulnerabilities:

> *When the lives men lead are examined closely, it becomes obvious that by trying to follow the roles prescribed for us by our socialization, we suffer serious physical, psychological and emotional harm. As a result, we live very pressured lives and on average die younger than women, we spend much of our lives feeling like and because we cannot express those feelings, we often numb them out with alcohol and drugs. . ..*

Horowitz's (1997) views further imply that subconscious suppression of problems amongst men appears to be the norm, which is detrimental to their emotional balance, psycho-social, personal wellbeing, and their health.

According to Hooks (2004), Horowitz's observations seemed to suggest that men face a lot more vulnerabilities, and, yet are imprisoned by a patriarchal system that demands that men remain emotional cripples, a system that could challenge and weaken their mental health; compared with men, females seem to express their emotions and solicit help in a social context. Playing the *emotional dump* can be detrimental to men's mental health as demonstrated by Ratele (2006) with South African men being more likely to die from man-made causes than women. Ratele's views are shared by Danson (2008) who noted that men were six times more likely to be victims of homicide than women; and there are four male victims of non-natural deaths for every female victim. In another vein, data gathered from weekly sources showed that men were sometimes entangled in their struggle and desperation as providers for their children and wives, against a context in which they did not

want third parties, neighbours or even their families to know how burdened they felt (Clowes, 2013). This confirms Murphy's (2012) perception of vulnerability associated with display of defensive mechanisms and sexual drives of psychoanalysis models.

It is often the case that women are the victims of sexual assault or offense. Societal norms reveal that females are the less domineering gender, and, thus, are more prone to being victims of sexual offense. Nonetheless, a critical look at the root cause of sex offenses shows that males are primarily vulnerable when it comes to sexual offense. The views of Shefer et al. (2007) illustrate that men have been construed more as "privileged oppressors" and perpetrators of sexual violence and less of the victims. Shefer et al. (2007) have hypothesized that child sexual victims are more likely to commit sexual violence as adults, with Marshall et al. (1990) reporting that between 30% and 60% of male, adult sex offenders were sexually-abused in childhood and their present sexual offenders' statuses are only results of childhood experiences payback. In a study of 150 males, between the ages of 20 and 60 years for sexual charges, Sabatino (1999) observed a sense of shame and personal inadequacy stemming from childhood abuse as a causal factor for their offenses. He agreed with Marshall et al.'s (1990) earlier revelation that in all probability, a large majority of male sex offenders were initial victims of sexual abuse.

Notwithstanding the fact that abuse is traumatic for both males and females, males go through double agony related to their vulnerability and seeming loss of control. Since men are normally not expected to express helplessness, such situations place them in disturbing realities and are detrimental to their masculinities. This is corroborated by Levant and Pollack's (1995) findings that "real men" believe they must be in control. These stereotypical assumptions and beliefs by men make it embarrassing for them when they become vulnerable, hence their inability to voice out and ask for help. According to a *World Health Report on Violence and Health* (2015) in developing countries, only 5% to 10% of men reported a history of childhood sexual abuse. This buttresses the point that males find it difficult to expose their vulnerability, and a denial of sex offenses by males once abused is a means of protecting themselves from shame and vulnerability. By shelving their childhood sexual violence experiences, and expressing them indirectly in their adult life through assaults, could put males in a very depressive and helpless state—a concept aptly explained by displacement by psychodynamic therapeutic model (Levant & Pollack, 1995). One can imagine the emotional torture that males go through as a result of their inability to express their intra-personal conflicts that they suffer over the years. Measures to create awareness among parents and the entire society through adult education

and provision of counselling support systems for victims will go a long way to prevent and relieve male victims of such agonies.

Health vulnerability has been widely studied in the gender and psychological literature. It has been argued that men find it difficult to challenge normative structures and beliefs surrounding their masculinities and health. Some researchers have recorded accounts of males, acting contrary to the expected norms of masculinity. Emslie et al. (2006) noted that some depressed men were able to negotiate and challenge their masculinity and fought health issues better using CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy). Earlier, Moyinhan (1998) attributed men's failure to seek treatment to the familiar "masculinities" refrain. According to Courtenay (2000), the control of emotions and denial of vulnerability in health experiences are significant aspects of hegemonic masculinity. As men may seem to "keep their heads above water during ill-health, they may be covering deeper sentiments of hurt, pain, and weariness, which could expose them to further complications.

In another study of African-Caribbean and White working-class fathers by Williams (2009), it emerged that due to fear of making their uncomfortable feelings known to others, men dealt with vulnerability, associated with their health, difficulties in personal relations and psychological stress through solitary ways of feeling, thinking, and acting. Ironically, the management and control of these feelings, driven by fear, were also considered as "strength" by males. If men were to talk about sadness or anxiety, they may have appeared as weak in the society, which they preferred to avoid (O'Brien et al., 2005). Warner and Brown (2011) describe such solitary behavior as risky to men's health. Combination of social orientations and stratification might increase health risks and emotional distress for men, hence men have higher rates of illness and mortality. We suggest that society's perception of masculinity and men's unwillingness to express ill-health could make everyone vulnerable (including dependents). Consequently, adult education and counselling interventions could help to re-orient males from the façade of machoism to their reality of being normal mortal beings, who are susceptible to illness, and, thus, can equally seek medical care with families and loved ones.

Traditional femininity appears to define women to behave passively, respond to men's sexual advances, have a constant need to be with a romantic partner, be sentimental, caring, emotionally committed to a relationship and have the capacity to attract the gaze of men (Korobov & Thorne, 2009). To attract women's attention in relationship, Tolman (2002) postulates that it rather places men in vulnerable position of dominance in relationships. However, males' sexual dominance narrative appears to have changed with rehabilitation cases such as anxiety and insecurity among men (Blake &

Brown, 2004). Thus, men find themselves in vulnerable dispositions when women resist their need for belonging (Tolman, 2002). Korobov (2011, p. 61) earlier reported;

> *When women resist* [emphasized] *feminity, their sexuality and the material reality of their bodies and desires constitute a potential threat to conventional masculinity. Men become increasingly vulnerable as restrictive feminity dissolves and women's embodiment of multiple femininities expands*.

As women conform less to the stereotypical cultural expectations of emphasized femininity and turn down sexual proposals from men, the confidence, control, power, and ego of men largely become affected. Men have to explore ways of managing sexual resistance that has played down their masculine identity (Hyde et al., 2008). Later, Korobov (2011) confirms that women's resistance to men's sexual gestures undermined their masculinity and made them vulnerable, leading to depression among men. Indeed, the literature on males' relationships vulnerability suggests that a man's expression of sexual power is dependent on the woman's response that might be associated with emotional stress. Admittedly, men have been the bread winners for many homes in the Ghanaian context, hence therapeutic sessions using cognitive structuring could help males' well-being, and prevent suicide.

Economic survival for many societies has implications for male vulnerability (Klasen et al., 2015), as narratives have largely centered on two broad areas: analysis of the differences between male and female-headed households, and the belief that households headed by women are more likely to suffer more burdens of poverty and vulnerability (Chant, 2010). According to a World Bank Group (2016) Report on economic vulnerability, men are better positioned, compared to women, on access to markets. Ostendorp's (2010) study coheres with the recent World Bank study on women's limited access to formal credit due to lack of collateral and other requirements. Though earlier researchers attributed difference in poverty levels to varied sources of incomes and the role of the welfare systems (Pearce, 1978), education and number of children per household (Anyanwu, 2010; Javed & Asif's, 2011), others have refuted gender dichotomization of economic variables in classifying household poverty (Klasen et al., 2015). While females could easily engage in petty trading for livelihood, society frowns upon men who seek menial jobs to make a living (Chant, 2003; Chopra, 2020), a likely marker of men's economic vulnerability. However, the authors submit that empirical data is required on men's sexual relationships, health, social, and economic vulnerability

from an African perspective as well. More significantly, the discourse on gender equity will be better placed within a balanced view of men and women's disposition in various spheres. The objective of this paper is, thus, to find out from respondents the ways in which males are considered vulnerable in the Ghanaian environment and to suggest ways in which males could be supported through adult education and counselling interventions within gender equality frameworks.

Methodology

This section of the paper discusses the approaches that were used in the study. These include the research design, samples and sampling techniques, instrumentation and its administration, and how the data was analyzed.

Research Design

The paper employed the Concurrent Mixed Method (CMM) designed to explore Ghanaian workers' and university students' perceptions on male vulnerability, using open-ended questionnaire items and dichotomous (Yes/No) items simultaneously in consonance with educational researchers' (Creswell, 2012; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) recommendation on mixed methods designed to collect both qualitative and quantitative data to provide better understanding of a research problem in a single study. The CMM design offered a suitable approach to investigate the vulnerability phenomenon amongst students and workers from diverse backgrounds (age, marital, and occupational), towards identifying culturally-specific constructs, defining Ghanaian male vulnerability.

Samples and Sampling Techniques

Our population of interest comprised staff and students who were conveniently selected from the main campuses of a Ghanaian public university and a private university. The intent of discovering possible themes underpinning male vulnerability for generating academic discourse motivated the researchers to use such a convenient sample for explorative reasons. Generalization was not the focus for the study due to the non-randomization employed. The average age of the participants was 27.8 years ($\pm$7.3); and 93% (n=174) university level education. Indeed, 189 participants with 45% (n=82) males and 55% (n=103) females; 57% (n=96) workers and 42% (n=71) students; 24% (n=45) married, and 76% (n=143) unmarried importantly defined our respondents in this study.

Instrumentation and Administration

A two-part questionnaire was designed for the data collection with Section A on respondents' demographics such as age, sex, marital status, and occupation. Section B contained closed-ended and open-ended items, measuring male vulnerability. Face validity of the items was ensured from gender expert's comments, received during the pilot study. One hundred and eighty-six open-ended statements were transcribed for an analysis. We distributed 210 open-ended questionnaires to a cross-sections of senior and junior staff, and students at the main campuses of the two universities with a return rate of 90% ($n = 189$), using three trained data collection volunteers. Ethical standards of confidentiality, anonymity, no harm, and deceptions were observed during the data collection, analysis, and reporting processes. It must be added that no financial incentives were given to respondents in this study. An average of 15 (± 4.3) words was recorded per a respondent to the question, "*From your personal view, are males (men/boys) vulnerable in any way at all?*" Remarkably, varied arguments were submitted by the respondents that informed our thematic analysis in the result section of this paper.

Data Analysis

In accordance with the research designed to explore the overarching objective of discovering male vulnerability in the Ghanaian setting, the authors integrated thematic analysis (thick descriptions), descriptive statistics, and inferential testing in this study. Indeed, pie charts and frequencies were generated from participants' demographic data and their responses to the "*Yes"* and "*No"* questionnaire items. Several protocols have been suggested by mixed method experts (Collins et al., 2006); but Yin's (2011, p. 177) five data analysis phases (compiling, disassembling, arraying, interpreting, and concluding) represented a concise protocol for 32 initial open-codes from 174 samples (non-response rate of 8% ($n = 15$)) for the current study (see initial sample size of 189).

Reassembling (arraying) of the initial codes ($n = 32$) produced nine overarching themes (economic, parenting, phycological, cultural, relationship, crime, morale dilemmas, health, and affirmative action) on male vulnerability in this study. Finally, we subjected the nine themes to a one-way chi-square goodness-of-fit test, which is convenient for data from participants belonging to independent groupings (Heiman, 2011, p. 353). Specifically, the goodness-of-fit test is used to perform a hypothesis about the distribution of categorical (qualitative) or discrete (quantitative) variables, with only finitely several possible scores (Weiss, 2012, p. 582). The categorical variables

Table 1. Gender Categorization of Male Vulnerability.

	Responses					
Sex	No	% No	Yes	% Yes	Total	% Total
Male	21	40.4	65	47.4	86	45.5
Female	31	59.6	72	52.6	103	54.5
Total	52		137		189	100.0

Source. Survey data, 2019.

generated from the narrative data supported the authors' decision to test goodness-of-fit statistics at 0.05 alpha level. The 145 observed frequencies (responses), constituting the nine themes were suitable for estimating the fit-indices of the emergent themes in a 9×2 contingency table. Hence, we tested the hypothesis that the nine emergent themes observed and the expected frequencies fairly represent the male vulnerability data in a Ghanaian setting. IBM—Statistical Package for Social Sciences (version 23) and Microsoft Excel application were used for the data analysis. The outcomes of the research objectives are presented in the next segment.

Results

An intra-case analysis in Table 1 shows 86 male and 103 female respondents' views on male vulnerability construct in a Ghanaian context. Indeed, 76% ($n=65$) males tagged themselves as vulnerable with 24% ($n=21$) declining (perhaps, a recognition of masculinity trait of men). Similarly, 70% ($n=53$) females stated that males were vulnerable in the current study.

Overall, 72% ($n=137$) respondents ascribed to the view that Ghanaian males were susceptible to diverse vulnerabilities. The current study proceeded to explore these categorizations in an open-ended questionnaire item for the purpose of informing the Ghanaian gender discourse on male issues as opposed to the current female-dominant discussion in the gender literature (*see* Brown, 2004).

An Analysis of Male Vulnerability Issues in the Ghanaian Context

Table 2 illustrates the nine overarching themes, generated from the open-ended question on male vulnerability in a 9×2 contingency table. At the 5% significance level, the study tested the hypothesis;

Table 2. A 9 × 2 Contingency Table on Male Vulnerability Categorization.

Male vulnerability themes	Male (f_o)	Male (f_e)	Female (f_o)	Female (fe)	Total
Parenting/Childhood issues	3	4	5	4	8
Economic issues	19	14	6	11	25
Psychological	26	23	16	19	42
Cultural	11	15	15	11	26
Relationship issues	5	5	4	4	9
Crime	9	9	7	7	16
Moral dilemmas	2	2	2	2	4
Health	2	3	3	2	5
Lack of affirmative action policies	4	6	6	4	10
Total	81		64		145

Source. Survey data, 2019.

H$_o$: *Emergent themes on male vulnerability will not statistically differ for male and female participants in this study.*
H$_a$: *Gender differences on male vulnerability themes will be statistically different in the Ghanaian setting.*

Using equation; ([Row Total *Column Total/Grand Total]), the authors computed the expected frequency (f_e) from the observed frequency (f_o) (*see* Table 2). The authors coded 145 respondents from both sexes expressing views on male vulnerability with 56% (n=81) males and 44% (n=64) females.

Therefore, the study proceeded to compute the chi-square good-of-fit statistics with the equation:

$$x^{2obs} = \sum (fo - fe) / fe$$

The results showed that:

$$x^2\text{obs} = \frac{(3-4)^2}{4} + \frac{(5-4)^2}{4} + \frac{(19-14)^2}{14} + \frac{(6-11)^2}{11} + \frac{(26-23)^2}{23} + \frac{(16-19)^2}{19} + \frac{(11+15)^2}{15} + \frac{(15-11)^2}{11} + \frac{(5-5)^2}{5} + \frac{(4-4)^2}{4} + \frac{(9-9)^2}{9} + \frac{(7-7)^2}{7} + \frac{(2-2)^2}{2} + \frac{(2-2)^2}{2} + \frac{(2-3)^2}{3} + \frac{(3-2)^2}{2} + \frac{(4-6)^2}{6} + \frac{(6-4)^2}{4} = \mathbf{10.836}$$

Since the X^2_{obs}, 10.84 < X^2 critical, 15.51 (*see* chi-square distribution table) at the 0.05 level of significance, the authors retained H_o and

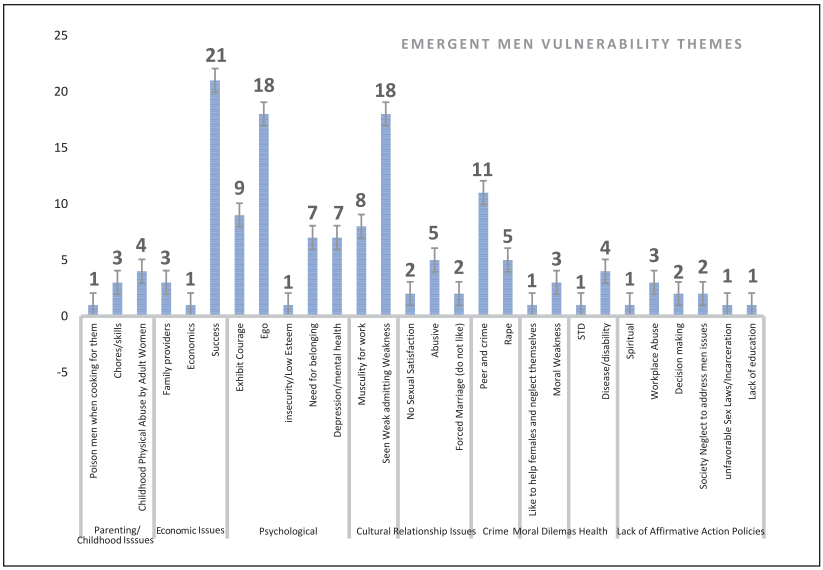

Figure 1. Word counts of male vulnerability themes in the Ghanaian context.
Source. Survey data, 2019.

concluded that males and females did not differ on their views on male vulnerability themes in this study. Thus, 95% of the time when similar samples are involved, their categorization of male vulnerability based on sex might not be different.

Detailed sub-themes are shown in Figure 1. Lack of affirmative action plan in support of male issues generated six sub-themes with five sub-themes under *psychological vulnerability* factor (courage, ego, insecurity, low self-esteem and need for belonging, and mental health risk). *Parenting issues* themes represented males' lack of skills in home chores, physical abuse by adults, and possibility of food poisoning from benevolent female suitors. Men's expectation to be the bread-winners and to succeed financially were classified under *economic vulnerability.* Also, *Cultural, relationship, moral dilemma, health*, and *lack of affirmative policies on males* emerged from the field data. The subsequent section provides multiple responses item narratives from respondents to support the nine focal themes shown in Figure 1.

Males' Psychological Vulnerability

Out of 145 views expressed, psychological factors dominated, with 28.97% ($n = 42$). For instance, 18 respondents believed that ego issues posed

vulnerability to men under the psychological construct in the current study. Four other sub-themes (*need for belonging; show of courage; insecurity/low self-esteem; and depression/mental health*) were reported by 24 participants. On *ego theme, a* male respondent with a basic education and a Librarian background shared that "*men/boys are taught from infancy to swallow bitter pill [sic] so are not encouraged to share their problems*." A similar view on ego was posted by a 38-year-old health worker and married woman as, "*they* [men] *have ego problem* [sic] *and are quick tempered*." An unmarried male worker with a first degree echoed society's expectations of men in this quote, "*they [*men*] normally go through emotional issues too and are good at it* [emotions]." Varied emotions have been ascribed to men in this response by a 29-year-old single female who worked as an administrator in this line, "*men are capable of different emotions and at their down [depressed] moment [sic] they can be vulnerable*." Another respondent, a 24-year-old male compared males' emotions to females', and stated that "*men are more vulnerable to loneliness than women* [comparison] *they have a* [sic] *greater need for belonging and connection, put themselves out* [exposes] *and are open to possibilities* [sic] *and opportunities* [weaknesses]." However, it begs to ask, how do these ego and emotional masculinities impact Ghanaian males' social, familial, wellbeing? Probably, such assumptions could hinder Ghanaian men's psychological help seeking behavior. It appears that such conceived weaknesses of man's emotions are yet to be documented in the African traditional setting. Hence, this study provides an avenue for gender advocates as well as guidance and counselling experts to review their notes on supporting males' psychological and continuous learning.

Parenting Issues

From respondents' perspectives, traditional child upbringing practices, where parents tend to exclude boys from household chores, had emerged as a vulnerability trait in this study. Eight individuals expressed views on the parental upbringing theme, as they mentioned that men appear incapable of taking care of homes, which could lead to women poisoning them in case of marital disputes, and even suffering from adults' physical abuse. A 55 year-old married woman with a first degree qualification stated, *"In my personal view men / boys are vulnerable because most of them are not trained or encouraged to work at home. When they separate from their parents, they are unable to do things [perform household chores] for themselves*." A 37-year-old married male also acknowledged that male vulnerability due to differential parenting roles for the adolescent boy in this

statement, "*when men are raised by parents, they tend to be exempted from household duties*." Another married male-respondent with a first degree confirms the poor household training for boys in this narrative, "*when they* [men] *have not be nurtured well* [not received good training], *they find themselves in vulnerable situation* [s]."

Participants also believed that males suffer childhood physical abuse from significant others with responsibility for education (both at home and school), as illustrated by an unmarried male who was an administrator by profession that "*they* [boys] *are abused by teachers and parents with even older girls sometimes abusing boys on our various campuses* [schools]." Parents' failure to provide adequate housekeeping skills to their boys has equally been identified by a 27-year-old female as a *risky behavior*, since some men can be poisoned by their female partners in this comment, "*men can be vulnerable in the area of food eating* [sic], *since most* [sic] *men allow women regardless of how well they know them* [as acquaintances] *to cook for them, they might easily be poisoned if the so called cook* [suitor] *intends to*."

Cultural Norms, Relationship, and Economic Vulnerabilities

Surely, "masculine" view, as associated with men from cultural norms that see men as built for physical work, has been identified by respondents as a vulnerability in this study. A 43-year-old female teacher shared that projecting males as "tough" and capable of facing every danger could rather put them in harm's way in this comment, "*since men are normally the ones seen* [sic] *on rescue teams* [s] *and are the ones* [men] *that face violence, they become vulnerability* [sic]." This position has been supported by a 22-year-old male respondent that perceiving boys as strong has seen boys in hazardous jobs early in life and child labourers in this narrative, "*males* [considered] *as strong tends to create situation* [s] *where young boys are exposed to hard work* [sic] *above their age and strength* [sic]."

Traditionally ascribed leadership roles for men were also mentioned in this study as a probable vulnerability trait exposing men to unilateral decision-making as portrayed by a 26-year-old male, "*we can make mistakes because we are the head and make final decision* [s] *without regard to our partner* [s'] *views*." Admittedly, a married male-respondent had this to say on masculinity and concealing abuse from the opposite sex, "*often* [males are] *suspected of being aggressors in conflict with women, a man cannot admit to being beaten or raped by a woman because it indicates weakness*." Another female respondent buttressed the earlier views on masculinity and emotional suppression:

> *We live in a society where men are expected to be brave and to have a certain status in order for* [sic] *them to be seen as men, they must show no emotions, make it in life or else they are regarded as failures in life.*

Indeed, male aggression view could expose them to mental disorders, since they might not be willing to discuss emotional issues with spouses. O'Neil et al. (1995) as well as Levant and Pollack (1995) noted the possible harm of masculinity to males' psychological well-being.

Following the machoism image ascribed to men, another theme on male vulnerability was from respondents' perception on relationship issues in this study. Some Ghanaian ethnic groups choose marriage partners for their men and this practice has been considered as a vulnerability due to marital incompatibility for males. An unmarried female pointed this out that "[just as] . . . *a lady boss can distract* [seduce] *a boy's* [male's] *life* [sic] *at office for the boy* [male] *to fall* [victim of sexual harassment] *or grant the boss's wish, a boy can also be forced to marry a lady you* [he] *don't like*." In this study, abuse has not been limited to only females in the Ghanaian society, as shared by a 25-year-old female-respondent: "*men are vulnerable as much as women are because they are all human beings. Men are susceptible to violence and some men do in case of kidnap* [ping], *child trafficking etc*." Indeed, men could be victims of anxiety or depression from sexual expectations as innocuously captured in a 37-year-old, married lady's view in this study, "*men become vulnerable when they discover that they can't satisfy* their [sexual] *partners*." Serendipitously, sexuality issues could also expose men to aphrodisia and their female partners to infidelity.

Finally, society's perception of males as leaders also appears to expose them to economic vulnerability. Our narrative data appears to support this position as well as the views of a 47-year-old female divorcee; "*economically men are vulnerable since culture sees* [sic] *them to be in a position to care for families so when they lack that capability* [are capable], *they psychologically become dysfunctional* [could experience anxiety or depression]."

Moral Dilemmas and Males Health Risks

Closely aligned with male relationship vulnerability were moral dilemmas and health risks in this study. It appeared that leadership roles associated with males in the Ghanaian society compelled men to exhibit altruistic behavior of helping females beyond their means. In the words of a 37-year-old unmarried man, "*most* [some] *men for best of my knowledge* [in my opinion] *do help ladies and women. Nonetheless they do not assist or help themselves, therefore, they are vulnerable in many ways*." The pressure to support the opposite

sex might have compelled some men to commit crimes, as acknowledged by some sections of Ghanaian indigenous groups whichc cherish the birth of boys to be their heirs, as indicated by a 36-year-old unmarried male, "*In Africa if a woman didn't* [sic] *give birth to a boy the husband will be worried who will take over from him*."

The Ghanaian inheritance system is dichotomously matrilineal or patrilineal based on the ethnic group. The patriarchal inheritance system preference for boys aptly feeds into anthropological theory of male dominance in social views that perceptually project men as superior to the females. The authors' findings also included the dominance of male roles in this comment by a 24-year-old male, "*because they [men] are perceived as the best in all* aspect [s] *especially on specific* issues [e.g. inheritance, leadership, physical work, etc]." Commenting on a feminist theory, Onwutuebe (2019, p. 3) despises patriarchal institutions as an establishment of power imbalance against women, and continuous gender disparity in Africa. In the view of the authors, gender equality movements should adopt anthropological lenses in exploring complementary roles of the sexes in adult education curriculum. Advocacy on cultural values and norms for every society must be engaged with effective negotiation skills rather than tagging men as sources of power at the neglect of women.

The dominant themes in the current study support the theory of men's vulnerability that include sexual weakness. Probably, such a strong image attributed to males can be a source of weakness from the perspective of a 33-year-old married woman; "*most men are very* [emphasis added] *vulnerable to the deceptions* [seduction] *of women because they* [men] *are morally weak so* [they can] *easily be lured into unacceptable behavior s*." Another 28-year-old female-respondent shared a view that males are sexually vulnerable when they fail to exercise sound judgements in the choices of sexual partners; "*they* [males] *get attached to anyone that gives them attention and care*." A male participant admitted, "*males are vulnerable because, we* [men] *intend* [sic] *to spend money on prostitutes whereas* [even when] *we become financially bankrupt* [sic]." Such sexual indiscretions can equally expose men to sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV-AIDS, gonorrhoea, and syphilis. In the view of a 23-year-old female, "*as humans we are bound to* [be] *weak in one way or the other. Males could be vulnerable with regards to sexually related issues such as rape and diseases*."

Skewed Affirmation Action Policies

The final theme that emerged from the respondents' narratives on male vulnerability was on lack of Integrated Affirmative Action policies. In the views

of the respondents, international and national action plans to address female participation in politics, health, social, cultural norms, education, and STEM over the years seemed skewed towards females. They fear that over-concentration of affirmative plans for women could endanger boys' well-being in most societies soon, and its reversal could be costly. The study uncovered views on lack of workplace action plans for men; civil society organisations (CSOs) neglect of male issues; unfavorable sex discrimination laws on rape and defilements that appear to incarcerate men; and no STEM policies on boy's education. Sympathising with men, a 29-year-old female worker submits, "*sexual offences laws in Ghana are generally* [accented] *to favour females over males, leaving them* [men] *at high risk to be incarcerated as opposed to females.*" Explaining the phenomenon of men's neglect, a 22-year-old single lady speculated, "*because the society perceive* [s] *them* [men] *to be strong most of their issues are left undealt with* [neglected]." Another female reiterated that "*issues concerning men are not properly addressed.*" In summary, advocates for gender equality must watch this space and begin to expand the gender discourse to include male vulnerability themes identified in the current study.

Discussion and Conclusions

The focus of the study was to document indicators of male vulnerability in the Ghanaian context. Nine overarching indicators emerged from the open-ended question. The research tested the goodness-of-fit of the count data between males and females, and established that males and females did not statistically differ on their views on males vulnerability themes, generated in this study. It appears that gender advocates have not devoted much attention to male vulnerability issues, hence there is seemingly patchy empirical evidence on the subject. At best, research on the issue has been anecdotal with Vogel and Heath (2016) attributing the oversight to socialization and masculinity perceptions.

Different social groupings also view males as projecting strength, independence, self-sufficiency, authority, fortitude, and would usually not express their emotions or show signs of vulnerability, for all of which would portray them as being weak (Baker et al., 2018; Horowitz, 1997). Similar commentaries on perceived male vulnerability appeared to support the masculine theory that imprisons men in patriarchy with difficulty in exhibiting emotional weakness (Clowes, 2013; Danson, 2008; Hooks, 2004; Ratele, 2006). This study contributes to extending the literature on the nine documented indicators of male vulnerabilities from an African perspective. Indeed, males and females, sharing similar views on indicators of

male vulnerability in the Ghanaian context, has challenged the patriarchal theory and chauvinistic position as perpetrators of gender inequality. By extension, females and males' balanced classification of the nine vulnerability themes in the present study supports our position that adult education programmes and counselling interventions should consider both sexes. This will definitely keep the balance on the fight against skewed affirmative actions that set women against men, a position also shared by Ruxton's edited piece (Brown, 2004), *Gender Equality and Men: Learning from Practice.*

Whilst this study uncovered a shared view on male vulnerability, it also tested the liberalists' and expansionists' position (Butler, 1990; Gibson, 2011; Murphy, 2012) on non-violence and narrowed conceptualization of vulnerability. Out of the nine overarching emergent themes in this study, it has been established that only two themes (crime and cultural prescription of masculinity traits) were associated with males' violence traits. Gibson's view on extending the vulnerability discourse to include more human-centered issues was not far-fetched, in the authors' views. The informants in this study also believed that the boy-child was more likely to suffer abuse which did not depart from earlier similar findings by Sabatino (1999), where, between 5% and 10% of children from developing countries could be victims of violence. This appears to challenge gender advocacy that feminists are the worst victims of gender-based violence (Marshall et al., 1990; Shefer et al., 2007).

Our findings on "*psychological vulnerability*" (courage, ego, insecurity, low self-esteem and need for belonging, and mental health risk); *Parenting issues* (males' lack of home chores training, physical abuse by adults, and possibility of food poisoning); economic *vulnerability* (men's expectation to be the bread-winners and to succeed, financially); *Cultural, relationship, moral dilemma, health*, and *lack of affirmation policies* aptly affirm expansionists' view that vulnerability should broadly be seen from many human endeavors. The broad conception of vulnerability includes health seeking behavior of men in the gender literature with males' "heroism" likely to be a preventive factor when they are sick (Hooks, 2004; Ratele, 2006). Psychodynamic models application to men could be of interest in future therapy sessions (Trull & Prinstein, 2013, p. 153).

Based on the empirical findings in this research, it is concluded that indeed, the emergent themes on male vulnerability in the Ghanaian setting transcended self-serving bias for the male gender with statistically acknowledged females' shared views. Secondly, the dominant violence theory of vulnerability did not receive empirical support in the current study. Males' altruistic behaviorial patterns of being the pillars for their loved ones,

providing economic comfort for their households, and the desire to succeed were rather the major tenets of the Ghanaian males' vulnerability. Multicultural counsellors hold a view that psychotherapy's Euro—American origin with philosophical assumptions—control over people and the environment, future orientation, equal access and opportunity, and "mind body" dualism—seems to preclude people of color and can result in cultural oppression and treatment of marginalized groups (Highlen, 1996; Sue & Sue, 1999). Historically, courage, equality, and humanism of the African have always been documented when Nkrumah (1970, p. 79) conceptualized the *African Personality* in his book *Consciencism* that "the African Personality is defined by the cluster of humanist principles which underlie the traditional African society." Revisiting ideological connections between the *New Negros Movement* and the *Négritude* from 1920s to the 1940s, Camara (2020, p. 856) reaffirms that African identity, emotions, and intuitions are common to both movements as depicted in poetic works. Definitely, the study's contribution to the African male personality within gender equality, adult education, counselling, and parenting discourse must be emphasized.

Recommendations

Despite the inherent statistical generalization limitations associated with qualitative data used in the current study, the authors offer the following practical recommendations for gender advocates, adult educators, and counselling psychologists in addressing male vulnerabilities in the Ghanaian and similar Black cultures:

i. Guidance and counselling services for students' and employees (both group and individual) should be intensified to address men suffering from psychological, health, and economic vulnerabilities.
ii. Gender advocates must devote equal attention to men when addressing equity issues for Black men and women.
iii. The vulnerability themes (social, economic, mental, health, and psychological) explored in the current study could inform adult education curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation. Students and faculty with interests in Black studies and the promotion of the African personality could further engage men's vulnerability literature from their perspectives.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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