

EPILOGUE: AFRICAN HOME SCIENCE

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A number of issues basic both for scientific research and teaching on the Ghanaian home and to child welfare and family planning programmes have been raised and discussed in this volume. The first was the location and definition of the unit of concern—whether it be the conjugal family of husband, wife and children; a domestic group of people co-residing in one house, however that may be defined; an individual parent and children, or some wider kin groupings. As the editor pointed out at the beginning much of the literature from Europe and America written for home scientists, family planning administrators and welfare workers assumes that the family is a co-resident, nuclear family with a male income earner. Obviously the Ghanaian home which does not fit this stereotype (and few do) will have different kinds of housing, management and welfare problems which need urgent identification and documentation.

Several of the contributions to this volume indicated the extent to which the model does not fit Ghanaian reality and documented in detail some common modes of deviation. Aryee, Bleek, Ofose Amaah and Gordon observed the extent to which the mother's contribution to the financial upkeep of her children is often crucial to their well-being and in a proportion of cases is the sole source of maintenance for them. Thus Aryee discovered that 54 per cent of his respondents in a large scale survey undertaken in Accra had at least one child living elsewhere (especially fathers—63 per cent) and of these, half did not send any regular monthly contribution towards their children's upkeep. Bleek, in his Akan micro-study, also gave data of a similar kind. He demonstrated with detailed vividness the reluctance of young men to assume the responsibilities of fatherhood while at the same time enjoying the pleasures of conjugal relations. In the Kwahu lineage he described, he says the role of father is seriously curtailed and unilateral filiation to the matrilineage is given more prominence than in the past. The burden of caring for the offspring of such reluctant fathers is left to be carried by the mother and her kin. In Ofose Amaah's sample more than a third of the children lived alone with their mothers and three quarters of the mothers worked, many as petty traders. On the average the fathers contributed less than two-thirds of the money for food. From 71 per cent to 84 per cent of the mothers in the various socio-economic groups represented contributed to the financial upkeep of their children by purchasing food, etc. Among some of the lower socio-economic group, fathers contributed on the average less than half of the children's material needs and it was left to the mother to provide the greater share. Again Gordon's paper based on data collected in the Upper Region gave concrete evidence to show that children in farm families living at the subsistence level in households in which the mothers had a cash income (for example, as pito brewers) had a more adequate food supply.

Their observations lead to the consideration of a basic problem of crucial importance for family welfare—one which Gordon raises in her paper and one which has widespread relevance for those living at the subsistence level. The question is how can the over-worked wife and mother manage to combine her strenuous food-producing and income-earning activities, whether on the farm, market or elsewhere, with her heavy and time-consuming domestic tasks, such as

grinding grain and vegetables, carrying firewood, drawing water and cooking, together with the tasks of feeding, nursing, bathing her babies and young children—tasks which also require a heavy investment of time and patient, relaxed care.

As is indicated for the Upper Region households a co-wife or an older daughter may provide the much needed help that the overworked housewife and mother needs, or a group of neighbours might co-operate so that she can carry out her several tasks. But in many households co-wives, neighbours and older daughters are not available and other solutions to the problem are required, if children are not to be left to suffer the effects of material and or emotional deprivation. Some of the agencies already functioning in Ghana to counteract these problems have been described in this volume. These included rural nutrition projects, nursery and school feeding programmes, school welfare assistance and the Family Planning Programme which can assist parents to space their births and to end their childbearing before they have too many children with which to cope. For, as is indicated with data from farm families in the Upper Region, when resources are inadequate large sibling group size is associated with poor physical development of children.

Apt also raised the important question of what happens to children when maternal care breaks down completely and the father and relatives are quite unable or unwilling to care for them. She described the case of the 70 children at Osu Children's Home. Over half the children have employed fathers. The biggest problem as seen by the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development is how to get the relatives of these children, including the fathers, sufficiently interested to be a little more responsible for the children's welfare.

As data from several papers in this volume have indicated there are many important changes currently taking place in Ghanaian family relationships. Many of these changes would appear to be direct consequences of the vastly increased personal mobility (both social and spatial) experienced by many segments of the population and the changing relationship of individuals to their major sources of material support.

An important emphasis of many papers is the need for more basic research. In particular more data is needed in the form of budget studies to reveal just how much time and energy people are spending on performing various types of tasks inside and outside the home, as well as how they are allocating their material resources.

An important focus for urgent research attention is the multiple and often conflicting roles of women, their occupational roles in farms, markets, shops and offices and their domestic roles—in particular their maternal responsibilities. For in new situations of urban living, kin dispersal, separation of spouses, rural migration, heavy and often conflicting demands are being made on women, all of which affect the needs and developmental processes of their growing children. Documentation of the dimensions of the problem will assist in the formulation and implementation of development and welfare-type programmes sufficiently far-reaching and broad in scope. In this process the home scientist has an important role to play in helping to forge the links in the chains of communication between the various research workers on the one hand, whose data is needed to illuminate the problems, and on the other hand the planners, administrators and policy makers in whose hands rest the ultimate decisions related to action.



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