Kayayei: A Consequence of Inadequate Family Support and Government Policy Failure

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Abstract

This paper focuses primarily on the current conditions of girls engaged in the 'Kaya' business in commercial markets in urban areas in Ghana. The paper aims at establishing the failure of the family and government in addressing the 'kayayie' phenomenon in Ghana. The specific objectives are to find the causes, consequences, and attempts made by government to address the phenomenon, and the way forward. The methodology for writing this paper is essentially that of a desk review of available literature and information from the Ministry of Gender Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP), supplemented with academic materials and personal observations. The paper poses the question: why has the family and government failed to address the 'kayayei' phenomenon in Ghana? It is positioned on Everett Lee's Push and Pull Model (1960) which explains migration as having factors that either push or pull individuals to move out of places of origin. A major finding of this paper is that budget challenges affect the government's capacity to provide funds and sustain projects aimed at improving the welfare of kayayei. The paper does not only recommend that issues relating to 'Kayayei' should be prioritised but also that a national data collection exercise be embarked upon to collect accurate figures to enable government take informed decisions, and to enhance monitoring and evaluation.

Introduction

This paper examines the causes, effects and situations of children engaged in 'kaya' business, the role and significance of the family as a social institution to protect children from engaging in kaya, the initiatives put in place by the government of Ghana, and the way forward for addressing the phenomenon. A brief history of migration trends in the country is provided at the beginning of the paper zeroing in on the current high migration movements of young girls from the north to the south of the country to engage in 'kaya'. Brief insights are also given on the role and

significance of the Ghanaian family in providing family care to children. A cursory assessment of the capacity of the Ministry of gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) to manage the phenomenon has also been done, and suitable recommendations made to address the problem in question. A desk study approach was mainly utilized for the compilation of this paper.

Migration has always been a livelihood strategy for most migrants in developing countries, as a result, labour migrants form the bulk of the migration stock in this part of the globe ((Ratha et al., 2016). Disparities in social

and economic development between origin and destination areas to a large extent account for most of migration (Ratha et al., 2016). For developing countries such as Ghana, rural–urban migration is mostly common, and it results from developmental policies adopted during the colonial and post-colonial era (Abdul-Korah, 2011; Mabogunje, 1990; Pickbourn, 2011). The focus of government policies during this era was on industrial development of urban cities with the import of labour from the rural areas to work in the mines and on cash crop farms, among others. Government also committed huge investments to developing the south of the country, leaving the north with barely any a major investment, and deepening imbalances between these two areas (Nabila, 1975; Kwankye et al, 2007; Songsore, 2009; Van der Geest, 2011). The practice therefore created developmental and resources disparities and inequalities not only between rural and urban areas but also between the northern and the southern (Abdul-Korah, 2011). This phenomenon has adversely impacted on family incomes and wellbeing as most families in the rural north became poor as a result of the lack of decent livelihoods, making it difficult for them to support their families (Awumbila et al., 2014). Thus, the occurrence of internal migration in Ghana was occasioned by the inequalities created by government policies at the time. The stage for rural-urban migration was subsequently set, as many household heads moved in search of better social services, infrastructure, and decent livelihoods to enable them take care of themselves and their families. This has been the pattern of internal migration over the past decades. These patterns are a reflection of regional disparities and differential rural-urban poverty in the country (MOI, 2014; GSS, 2014).

It is important to note that the family has a crucial role in ensuring the survival, protection and development of every individual, including the child, and as result has a huge task in making sure children do not migrate. Family is defined as a group of people related by blood, marriage, law (in the case of adoption), common identity as well

as lineage and ethnic group (Government of Ghana, 2014). Distinction is sometimes drawn between a nuclear family, which is typically defined as a family group that consist of only mother, father and children, and the extended family, which is typically defined as a family that includes near relatives in addition to the nuclear family (Government of Ghana, 2014). In Ghana, the extended family for many years has been the traditional unit of society in Ghanaian communities, providing social and economic security to various family members in times of need. This system has an in-built safety net, which provides for the care of children within the family (MoGCSP, 2013). In other words, the system rests on a customary assumption that each person within the family is another's keeper; everyone is helped by another person and it goes round in circles to help other family members in the future. The system encourages well-to-do members to take care of less endowed and vulnerable members within the family (MoGCSP, 2013). Among most ethnic groups in Ghana including those in the north, it is usually the responsibility of uncles to take care of their nephews and nieces, in the absence of their biological parents or when these parents are in financial difficulty. However, according to So (1990), the structure of the traditional family has been altered by contemporary global practices. The extended family has shrunk into nuclear families with a less complicated structure hence it being unable to carry-out its expected roles (Assimeng, 1999; Nukunya, 2003; Therborn, 2004). Thus, the emergence of modern systems through social change and the promotion of economic growth, and other pressures from urbanization have contributed to a gradual decline and nucleating of the extended family system (Assimeng, 1999; MoGCSP, 2013; Nukunya, 2003). This is partly due to the fact that many families have in the recent past become urbanized, moving from rural communities to urban communities and in the process shifting the focus to providing for the needs of nuclear families instead of the external family thereby making it difficult for poor family members to support their

own. The lack of support from both the extended and nuclear families, and the lack of job opportunities have compelled a huge number of young people to migrate in search of jobs in the southern parts of the country (Anarfi, Kwankye. et al. 2003). The large number of young people who migrate independently from the north to the south, including young women and girls, have migrated to become head porters and engage in other informal ventures such as petty trading. They have come to be referred to as “Kayayei”, (Awumbila and Schandorf, 2008:171). The word *kayayoo* was derived from two languages that are commonly spoken in major markets in Accra. *Kaya* comes from the Hausa language, meaning luggage, load or goods, and *Yoo* is a Ga word meaning a woman. The word *kayayoo*, is a combination of the two words, meaning a young woman or a teenage girl who carries other people's loads on the head for a fee. The plural form of *yoo* is *yeyi*, hence *kayayeyi* are women head porters. Because such women are ubiquitous in the towns and cities of southern Ghana, the terms *kayayoo* and *kayayeyi* have become part of the Ghanaian commercial vocabulary (Opare, 2003).

A common migration trend in Ghana is the constant rise in migration of young women from economically deprived areas in Ghana into the cities and commercial centres (Abdul-Korah, 2011). These are mostly young women and girls with little or no formal education who move independent of their families from rural agricultural communities in the north to urban centres in the south to work in the informal sector. They work in the low scale economic bracket, mostly unskilled occupations such as the Kayayei. The conveyance of loads from one point to the other in typically major markets, is their primary occupation (Awumbila and Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2008). This however does not mean that all Kayayei working in southern Ghana are from the northern part of the country (Opare, 2003). Official statistics from Ghana Statistical Service indicate that about 90 percent of all migration in Ghana is internal (GSS, 2013). The Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS 5) and the 2010

Population Census likewise suggest that internal migrants constitute over 50 percent of the Ghanaian population, and close to half of this proportion are women (Ackah & Medvedev, 2010; Ghana Statistical Services, 2013). Despite the rise in independent female migration and its attendant consequences (Adepoju, 2010), this trend of migration has received less research and policy recognition compared to other forms of migration. Studies posit that internal migration of young women will continue to increase as long as the driving forces of this occurrence still remain unattended (IOM, 2014).

Nonetheless, the exact figure of children engaged in the Kaya business in Ghana is not known. This is because there has not been any national census conducted on the phenomenon (MoGCSP, 2014). Again, quantifying this phenomenon in Ghana has proved difficult due to the mobile nature of these children. This explains the inconsistencies in the projections of the number of children involved. In 2003, the Catholic Action for Street Children (CAS) estimated that there are more than 20,000 street-involved children in Accra, the capital city (CAS, 2003). An NGO, The Peoples Dialogue and the Ghana Federation of Urban Poor (PDGFUP) also estimated the number of Kayayei around 15,000 (PDGFUP, 2011). The PDGFUP study also found that 92 percent of all kayayei sampled were from the three northern Regions of Ghana. According to Kwankye et al (2009), only a very small part of the Kayayei come from other parts, including surrounding southern areas. In a statement by the Hon. Minister of Gender Children and Social Protection to Parliament (MoGCSP, 2014), she indicated that all the statistics and projections available in the country show that most Kayayei are migrants from the northern parts of Ghana. These projections seem to confirm the assertion that kayayei is a migration related phenomenon.

Destinations of the Kayayei in urban areas

Kayayei are found in small numbers in the other regional capitals yet, Accra and Kumasi

have traditionally stood out as their most preferred destinations (Kwankye et al., 2017; Awumbila & Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2008). Extractions from a Bibir Ghana Report indicates that a greater proportion of Kayayei in Accra live in areas such as: Tema station, Old Fadama, Konkomba market, Makola market, Mallam Atta Market, Madina Market, Alajo and Kaneshie Market. Kumasi being the second largest city in Ghana and the closest to the north also has a huge Kayayei presence mostly in markets of the following suburbs of Kumasi: Kejetia, Aboabo, Angloga, Adum, Ash-town, Alla Bar and Moshie Zongo. Accra and Kumasi being the biggest commercial capitals in Ghana explain why Kayayei will choose these places as their preferred destinations. However, the choice of destination is not only influenced by a higher probability of getting regular and well-paid job, but also on where one has a strong social network. For most potential and new entrants into the kayayei trade social networks play very important roles in migration decision making, choice of destination, acquiring resources for the journey, arrival and then accommodation and also for securing work (Shamsu-Deen, 2015). As a consequence, the role of social networks in ameliorating a successful migration and reducing the risk and vulnerabilities associated with the trade cannot be underestimated.

Causes of Kayayie Migration

Every human being is rational and would like to live under favourable conditions. The usual motivation or common reason for people leaving their homeland is to have a better life elsewhere. This paper is positioned on Everett Lee's Push Pull Model (1966), which explains factors that usually enable movements of individuals from one destination to another. The Push Pull Model was popularized by Everett Lee in 1966. Lee postulated that push factors exist at the point of origin and act to trigger emigration; these include the lack of economic opportunities, religious or political persecution, and hazardous environmental conditions. Pull factors on the other hand exist at the destination and include the

availability of jobs, religious or political freedom, and the perception of a relatively benign environment. The factors can be positive meaning prevailing factors at the point of origin or destination is good, negative when factors are bad which usually push people from home, neutral when they are neither bad or good (Lee, 1966). The factors tend to serve as the basis for the decision potential migrants make to move. The movements of teenage girls and young women to the urban areas to engage in kaya could be explained within the context of Everett Lee's Push Pull Model. The failure of families to adequately provide care, support and protection, the lack of job opportunities, the poor and inadequate social services and infrastructure development by government leading inequalities and poverty of families, and other harsh and unfavourable living conditions at the point of origin somewhere in the north where the girls come from, serve as the major push factors Lee postulated in his model. On the other hand the perceived job opportunities (kaya), luxurious urban lifestyles, and the quest to get rich quick in the urban areas to support their families back home serve as the pull factors that attract the girls to the south.

Progressively, the numbers of children engaged in Kaya keep rising (MoGCSP, 2014, Kyei-Gyamfi, 2020), and incidentally, the new child migrants are younger compared to the earliest waves, who were deemed to be much older adolescents (Kwankye, 2009). The dynamics seem to have changed because of the failure of the family to provide basic support for children. Both the Constitution and the Children's Act provide guidelines for placement of children in a family environment. All members of the family play a part in the socialisation of children. The legal and cultural framework places a duty on family members, especially biological parents, to provide the necessities of life for the child. These necessities include education, health, food, shelter, clothing, warmth and affection. Section 15 of the Children's Act makes it a punishable offence for a parent or guardian to neglect his or her responsibility towards a child (Government of

Ghana, 1998). Additionally, people who have adopted a child or fostered a child are legally bound to provide maintenance and guidance for that child (MOWAC, 2004). In spite of the legal provisions, many families in the northern parts of the country fail to provide adequately for children. Owing to this some children migrate even if they know that they could be facing harder times at their destination areas in the south. They are compelled to move since they have no meaningful support from their families and so they take all the related chances hoping to succeed (MoGCSP, 2013). Factors accounting for the Kayayei phenomenon are economic in nature (Kyei-Gyamfi, 2020). Most of the girls emigrate with the intention of raising capital to start a more profitable venture or to acquire the necessary items to enter marriage (Agarwal et al, 1997). Others migrate as a result of poverty (MOWAC, 2007) or when parents refuse to support them through school (UNICEF, 2009). Some of the girls moved to flee from being forced into early marriage (MoGCSP, 2013). Some of the girls engage in the head porterage business briefly to raise money to pay their school fees, and others are in the south as a result of the conflict that broke out in certain parts of northern Ghana. There are also other factors such as peer influences (MOWAC, 2007).

Working and Living Conditions of Kayayei

Most Kayayei operate within market areas since that is where their services are usually solicited (Awumbila and Schandorf, 2008). The work of the kayayei usually starts early in the morning when market women or people who have come to buy stuff at the market engage them to carry their wares from one point in the market to another (Kyei-Gyamfi, 2020). What makes the kayayei's work difficult is the fact that most of them work 12 hours a day and have to walk from place to place, looking for market women or other clients to engage them (PDGFUP, 2011; Kyei-Gyamfi, 2020). In spite of the strenuous nature of the work, there are instances where the kayayee faces situations of exploitation as she does not get

paid a befitting fee for the service rendered to her client (MoGCSP, 2014).

The girls live under substandard, unhygienic, and dangerous places. They sleep rough in kiosks, uncompleted buildings, wooden structures, in open spaces in the streets in front of closed shops. The lucky ones amongst them pass their nights in shops of their mistresses and masters (MoGCSP, 2014). Many Kayayei have encountered problems of sexual harassment and abuse (MOWAC, 2007). The work they do is deleterious and tends to affect their health and wellbeing (MoGCSP, 2014; Kyei-Gyamfi, 2020). A majority of the girls have children and their debilitating living conditions make it impossible to take adequate and proper care of their children. According to Badasu (2004) a parent's ability to provide proper child care include having the child immunized, determining when a child is ready to be weaned, choosing appropriate weaning food(s) and the best timing for the child to eat food prepared. Incidentally, because most of the girls have migrated without their families, they do not feed well and buy their food from food stands in the market area. In other words their children also fed from same source. These have health implications for the kayayie and their children. They do not also seek proper health care in times of ill-health given that many of them do not have access to National Health Insurance or are too poor to afford 'over-the-counter' medical services. Most Kayayei buy from the drug store or self-medicate whilst a little more than nine percent actually go to the hospital when they fall sick (MOWAC, 2007; Kyei-Gyamfi, 2020).

Vulnerabilities and Challenges among Kayayei

Despite the existence of the association, there is still high level of vulnerability faced by these Kayayei in the form of verbal and physical assault, exploitation by customers, sexual harassment. In addition, they are highly susceptible to all kinds of communicable and non-communicable diseases due to the nature of their surroundings and environment in which they live. Due to the slummy nature of the entire

community, any outbreak of epidemic like the recent epidemic outbreak of influenza is very likely to wipe away the entire community. Even though there are no cases to support this assertion, it is noteworthy that the issue of the unscrupulous behaviour of some government bodies such as the Metropolitan Market task forces, bad customers, and some other deviant intermediaries, has exposed some of young girls to more vulnerabilities. Occasional eviction comes as challenge to most Kayayei, especially, those in Old Fadama. The evictions are usually associated with their loss of property and other livelihood investments they have made over the years.

National Policy Response

The laws of Ghana provides for the protection of children from all forms of economic exploitation, which includes the kaya business engaged in by migrant girls. The 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana specifically makes provision in Article 28 guaranteeing protection to children against exploitative labour (GOG, 1992; MoGCSP, 2020). Further, The Children's Act prescribes sanctions against breach of the provision. The Children's Act places the minimum age for employment at 15 years and permits "light work" at age 13, but prohibits the engagement of children below 18 years in "hazardous labour". The Act provides that work should not interfere with the child's education, health and development. The Act also prescribes sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of Article 32 (2) of the CRC (Government of Ghana, 1998). Despite the protections espoused in the laws, the government has not been fully successful in preventing children and young people from migrating to engage in all forms of labour that are detrimental and hazardous in the cities in the southern parts of the country.

Currently, the MoGCSP is the lead government Ministry in charge of policy issues that relate to Women, children and vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities and the aged. In terms of government mandate, the kayayie issue remains the MoGCSP's oversight responsibility. The current structure of the

MoGCSP brings together all the main government departments with mandates to address the phenomenon. The departments are the Department of Social Welfare (DSW), the Department of Children (DOC) and the Department of Gender (DOG). The records of the Ministry shows that some earlier policy responses have been made to address the Kayayei phenomenon. These date back from 2002 and 2003 when UNICEF Ghana sponsored a programme called "Operation end child kayayei". The child porters were taken from various places in Accra to undergo training in dressmaking, hairdressing and batik/tie and dye and then returned to their homes. The main objective was to empower girls in income generating and wealth creation ventures to enable them remain in their communities rather than migrate down south in the quest for jobs. This programme failed when after about a year after sending the girls home, they found themselves in the same conditions that ignited their earlier movements. Their parents and other family members were in no position to support them, and with no means of livelihoods they had no other choice than to return to the streets to continue with the activity.

The Ministry also conducted a registration exercise of children engaged in street work (including Kayayei) in Accra (MoGCSP, 2018) with the intention of improving documentation on the children and makes it easier identifying, monitoring and providing them with assistance. From the registration, skills training in dressmaking and hairdressing were once again given to the girls. Sewing machines and hair dryers were given to them after completion of the training and sent back to their place of origin, those who preferred to go back to school were sent back to school in their communities. Unfortunately, this approach did not achieve its intended purpose because when follow ups were made by the Ministry, it was identified that the girls returned back to the urban areas such as Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi to become Kayayei. They returned because there were no job opportunities in their localities to utilise their

skills. Also, the money they earned as Kayayei was much more than what they earned from their new livelihood of dressmaking and hairdressing (MoGCSP, 2018).

The government of Ghana and its partners have introduced pro-poor initiatives to empower families economically and enable them take up responsibilities as heads of households. The Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) is one such social intervention designed for extremely poor households who cannot meet their minimum daily nutritional needs (MoGCSP, 2020). It was introduced in 2008 and funded partly by DFID, World Bank and GOG. Since 31st May 2018, the LEAP programme has been supporting poor households with cash grants. These cash grants have helped reduce the financial burden and improved parental responsibility in many poor households not only in the northern parts but across the entire country. The National School Feeding Programme also allows the feeding of millions of school children with one hot nutritious meal at school each school day. This has increased school enrolment, attendance and retention by 80 percent preventing children who would otherwise migrate to seek for funding for schooling. It has also served as incentive encouraging parents who do not favour girl education to place their girls in school to enjoy the benefits school feeding brings (MoGCSP, 2020).

In spite of these efforts, evidence suggests that the independent migration of adolescent girls into urban areas to work as porters in markets is growing (Awumbila and Ardayfio-Schandorf 2008), suggesting failure of the government policy responses to curb the phenomenon. The failure of government to address the kayayei issue is due to several factors. First, the kayayei issue has been wrongly perceived as many people fail to recognize it as the responsibility of both the family and government. In the aforementioned Minister's address to the Parliament of Ghana, she reiterated that many Ghanaians see it as the sole responsibility of the MoGCSP (MoGCSP, 2014), which is itself fraught with financial

challenges including the untimely release of government funds, annual Government of Ghana (GOG) budget cuts, and low budgetary allocations. The Minister also emphasized that an analysis of the budget allocation of the Ministry indicates that the Ministry has a constrained budget, which is not commensurate with its mandate and expected deliverables. The budget constraint in particular has become an annual occurrence which consistently affects performance and outputs of the Ministry. The budget challenges affect MoGCSP's capacity to provide funds and sustain projects aimed at improving the welfare of kayayei and other vulnerable groups in the country (MoGCSP, 2014; Kyei-Gyamfi, 2020).

Secondly, government policy interventions have also not been sustained (MOWAC, 2008). New governments come with new programmes and abandon previous ones. As an example, the '*Operation Bring your Children Home*' initiated by the New Patriotic Party (NPP) in 2002 was not sustained by the National Democratic Congress (NDC) when it took over government. While it was not the intention of the latter government to abandon the project, when the project support term elapsed, the government of the time was not in a position to sustain it. An assessment of the financial capacity of government projects indicates that some government projects are heavily dependent on donor funding and so when the donor funding ends, the projects are either truncated or suspended until new funding is identified. The overreliance on donor and external funding affects the sustainability of projects that would have enhanced the welfare of the migrant children.

Thirdly, most of the kayayei interventions have failed because they tend to be short term ad hoc measures, which address the immediate problems the kayayei face (MoGCSP, 2014). Even though some attempts were made to reintegrate and resettle children back at home, the settlement packages have not been commensurate with facilities and living conditions at home (MoGCSP, 2018). The Kayayei, after living in

the cities and enjoying urban life become urbanized and find it extremely difficult to cope with rural life when they were returned home (MOWAC, 2008). Some kayayie faced serious opposition from family members, who were in disagreement with the decision to return them home (Kyei-Gyamfi, 2019). These unfavourable living conditions serve as further push factors to compel them to make a return to the urban areas.

Conclusion

In sum, though some major attempts have been made to address the Kayayie phenomenon, they have not been effective. National response to the kayayie phenomenon has failed owing to the fact that the conditions that caused the kayayie phenomenon have not been addressed. Extreme poverty, huge infrastructural inequalities, influence of abusive socio-cultural practices, and weak family support systems still prevail in the northern parts of the country. Additionally, government's response to the phenomenon has also been very unsuccessful, being characterized by inadequate funding to implement and sustain remedial programmes. Until these negative intervening factors are minimized, the kayayie issue will continue to remain a thorn in the flesh of the Republic of Ghana.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been proposed to enhance the roles of the family and government in addressing the kayayie phenomenon. In the short term, government through MoGCSP needs to prioritise the issue of kayayie by carrying out a national data collection exercise to collect accurate figures of the number of kayayie as this will constitute a solid basis for any decisions taken by government to be well informed. Such an exercise will also enhance monitoring and evaluation given that earlier projects have always been implemented on the basis of projections.

Ghana's current population has a youthful structure with a broad base consisting of large

numbers of children and a conical top of a small number of elderly persons (GSS, 2010). With this population structure, demographic dividend is a possibility in Ghana depending on the kind of policy decisions taken by government. Considering the circumstances of the kayayie children as presented in this paper, it is pertinent that government should give high priority to ensuring lowering fertility and child mortality by investing in child survival and health programmes. As already noted from the earlier discussion, most of the kayayie have children and to all intent and purposes the cycle could go on if the right steps are not taken to improve their lives and curtail the number of children they are likely to have. Some of the steps recommended are encouraging family planning, improving education of girls in order to delay marriage, and investing in their reproductive health needs.

Government could also consider establishing vocational training centres at the points of origins of the migrants to train girls in employment generation ventures. The centers should offer child day care, health care, family planning, nutrition services, reading and numeracy skills. Again, steps should be taken to establish small-scale manufacturing industries which processes or produce items such as garments, beads, pomade, soap, and certain food items, and a ready market sought for these industries to serve as source of motivation for them to stay within their localities.

Since the family has the primary role in addressing the needs of its children, there is the need to also intensify family life education in the sending communities as well as other migration prone communities, about the need to be more responsible about the upkeep of children. It is important to mention that though the government has adopted a national policy on migration, and two important family related policies; the Child and Family Welfare Policy and Justice for Children Policy, the processes for publicizing and implementing the contents of these policies have been slow. There is therefore the urgent need for government to provide requisite support to the Ministry of The Interior and the Ministry of

Gender, Children and Social Protection to expedite interventions on public awareness creation and execution of the projects in the implementation plans of these three policies. Pursuing this would add a major boost to the fight against the plight of the Kayayie and create a more conducive environment to tackling and minimizing the phenomenon.

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