



‘I Do Not Want Her to be Doing Anything Stressful’: Men’s Involvement in Domestic Work during pregnancy in Ghana

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Abstract: Drawing on qualitative research from rural and urban areas, this article contributes to evolving social research in Ghana on possible changes in the gendered distribution of domestic labour. Formulated within debates on ‘doing gender’ and ‘undoing gender’, this study examines the extent to which acts of gender transgression may potentially occur during peak reproductive periods in the lives of Ghanaian couples. The findings of the study indicate that the participants reiterated normative gendered definitions of men as primary providers and women as primary domestic caretakers. Nonetheless, it was noted that during their partner’s pregnancy, men in both urban and rural areas were willing to modify their daily schedule to incorporate more housework. Simultaneously, men’s involvement in all or most of the household chores was perceived as potentially dangerous to the gendered balance of labour in the family and could, according to the participants, stimulate laziness among female partners. Despite the apparent resistance to male performance of domestic chores, the article argues that men’s willingness to do housework during their partner’s pregnancy may be an early indicator of slow but steady transformations in gender relations in Ghana.

Key words: Gender relations, household gender relations, doing gender, undoing gender, male involvement, domestic work, Ghana

I. Introduction

In his article ‘A Radical Agenda for Men’s Caregiving,’ Barker (2014: 87) argues that alongside the global efforts to elevate the value of women’s work in domestic and reproductive arenas, it is equally essential to encourage men to participate in domestic and care work. In many contexts, domestic work and caring for children are still primarily defined as feminine tasks, irrespective of women’s increased participation in paid labour (Ayentimi et al., 2020; Barker, 2014; Bosak et al., 2017; Doyle

et al., 2014; Kato-Wallace et al., 2014; Morrell and Jewkes, 2011). Women’s responsibility for the bulk of house and care work keeps their wages proportionately lower than the wages of men; furthermore, it impedes women’s career development goals and promulgates unbalanced gendered power relations in social and political spheres (Barker, 2014: 87; Matteazzi and Scherer, 2020). Subsequently, Barker (2014) suggests a global plan that envisages men and boys doing 50% of domestic and care-related work. This suggestion is

based on the postulation that an increase in men's uptake of unpaid domestic work may transform dominant gendered responsibilities in a manner that will translate into improved global gender justice (Barker, 2014; Barker et al., 2010; Dover, 2014; Doyle et al., 2014; European Union [EU], 2013; Morrell and Jewkes, 2011; United Nations [UN], 2011).

Advocating for an increase in men's uptake of domestic work implies the need for more local studies that investigate the perceptions, experiences and practices of men and women surrounding men's work in the household. Studies conducted in the past 10 years have discovered an evolving tendency towards a more equal distribution of domestic chores among intimate partners in Sub-Saharan Africa (Comrie-Thomson et al., 2019; Kwansa, 2012; Mkandawire and Hendriks, 2019; Morrell and Jewkes, 2011). Our article attempts to add evidence to the claim of a possible shift in household gender relations, focusing on men's participation in domestic labour during the period when the couple is expecting a child, that is, when the woman is pregnant.

In the Ghanaian context, according to data from 2014, women reportedly spent twice as much time on unpaid domestic services than men (GSS, 2014: 153). This trend in the distribution of domestic work has been largely linked to gendered expectations in the local culture. The dominant household arrangement expects men to take a leadership role in their families and provide the family's income, while women perform domestic and care duties (Adomako Ampofo, 2001; Adomako Ampofo and Boateng, 2007; Awinpoka Akurugu, 2019; Bosak et al., 2017; Dako-Gyeke and Owusu, 2013; Frost and Dadoo, 2010; Lambrecht, 2016; Nukunya, 2016; Sikweyiya et al., 2020). This pattern of household labour division is reinforced through proverbs and daily social discourses that hold people accountable when they engage in gendered behaviours that are perceived as inappropriate (Adomako Ampofo, 2001; Adomako Ampofo and Boateng, 2007; Awinpoka Akurugu, 2019; Dako-Gyeke and

Owusu, 2013). For example, the proverb, 'the hen also knows that it is dawn, but it allows the cock to announce it' (Adomako Ampofo, 2001: 199), illustrates the expectation of women not to interfere with men's leadership roles.

Simultaneously, Ghanaian women have consistently been acknowledged for their engagement in economic activities outside the home to boost household material resources (Clark, 1994; Oppong, 1980; Salifu, 2020). Women's involvement in economic activities outside the home became even more notable following the implementation of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) of the 1980s (Avotri and Walters, 1999; Waterhouse et al., 2017). During the same period, men ventured into economic activities, like petty trading, that were hitherto viewed as 'feminine' (Overå, 2007: 559). Nonetheless, the expectations and ideals encompassing the domestic arena have remained associated with femininity. This expectation is entrenched in Ghanaian society to the extent that women may experience intimate partner violence for not doing housework (Dako-Gyeke et al., 2019).

Although the 'male breadwinner' and 'female domestic-caregiver' discourse is still dominant in Ghana, research has documented that gender relations in the household have to some extent been amended in practice (Boni, 2002; Clark, 1999; Nave, 2017). As long as 20 years ago, Gracia Clark (1999) and Stefano Boni (2002) showed how women negotiated the performance of household duties, like cooking, in exchange for the provision of economic resources for the family. Studies from the past 10 years have similarly noted the growing expectation of men to do domestic work (Ampim, Haukenes, and Blystad, 2020; Bougangué and Ling, 2017; Ganle, 2015; Kwansa, 2012). Existing studies argue that young men, men in monogamous relationships, educated young men and men in urban areas are likely to be less patriarchal and are more accepting of performing domestic duties that are culturally marked as feminine (Arnot et al., 2012; Bougangué and Ling, 2017; Kwansa,

2012). Such emerging studies have primarily been conducted in urban settings and do not examine how shifting gender practices in the household are negotiated and potentially resisted.

Our study attempts to expand the discussion of evolving evidence of gender transgression in household arrangements using qualitative data from urban and rural contexts. We explore how Ghanaian couples ‘do gender’ (West and Zimmerman, 1987) in the household during the time of pregnancy. The pregnancy period is our study’s focus because this period has been documented as a time when gender norms in the household setting may be reworked irrespective of cultural expectations (Carter, 2002a; 2002b; Gutmann, 2007). Against the backdrop of these adjustments in gender practice, we shed light on the negotiations that take place between men and women concerning housework performance and the possible implications of men’s temporary participation in domestic chores in the Ghanaian context. Based on our study material, we provide insights into modifications of gender relations in the household as well as resistance to such transformations and discuss how these contrasting patterns may influence the broader global agenda of seeking gender equity in the performance of unpaid domestic labour.

‘(Un)doing Gender’ and the (Re)distribution of Household Labour

Candace West and Don Zimmerman’s work (1987) revolving around the concept of ‘doing gender’ remains a groundbreaking theoretical framework that has inspired further theorization about gender. West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender constitutes the everyday enactment of practices, behaviours and attitudes that are deemed socially/culturally appropriate for maleness or femaleness. They argue that ‘gender is not a set of traits, nor a variable, nor a role’ (West and Zimmerman, 1987: 129), but something that individuals are

expected to accomplish and are critically assessed when they adhere to or deviate from appropriate gendered norms (Fenstermaker, West, and Zimmerman, 2002; Hollander, 2018). Moreover, this framework points out that gender is performed in space and time. Actions and interactions are judged as gender-appropriate or gender-inappropriate within particular contexts, and hence, as societies change, practices and interactions will be modified accordingly (Hollander, 2018; West and Zimmerman, 1987).

Researchers have problematized the manner in which the ‘doing gender’ framework has been adopted in empirical studies to explicate how gender norms persist rather than how they transform. In her article ‘Undoing Gender’, Francine Deutsch (2007) argues that although the original formulation of the framework includes both conformity and resistance to gender norms, ‘doing gender’ has been commonly misinterpreted as a concept of frozen gender roles and, as such, conceals acts of resistance. According to Deutsch (2007: 121), small acts of gender transgression can expand individuals’ space of action and inspire others. She encourages researchers to search for processes of both doing and undoing gender to generate discussions of how the gender system could be destabilized, thus heightening the pursuance of gender equality. Similarly, Barbara Risman argues that ‘doing gender’ has been misappropriated as a concept that underscores a binary organization of women’s and men’s spheres in the household and posits that this adaptation does not support the feminist agenda of attaining equality in the domestic sphere (Risman, 2009: 82). New kinds of gender-appropriate behaviours may evolve as societies transform. Additionally, people may display behaviours that do not follow the local cultural script (Risman and Davis, 2013: 741–42). Hence, researchers should investigate both acts that conform to cultural ideals in the local context, that is, ‘doing gender,’ and acts that do not follow the local gendered expectations, which are

categorized as 'undoing gender' (Risman and Davis, 2013: 742).

'Doing gender' presents a starting point to illuminate the culturally expected distribution of tasks among women and men in the Ghanaian household. In line with Deutsch (2007), Risman (2009; 2018) and Risman and Davis (2013), we find it equally important to probe alterations in the cultural repertoire and explore when and how the distribution of household labour is degendered. The primary purpose of this article is to examine how gender is done in the household when couples are expecting a baby and identify the extent to which acts of gender transgression may potentially take place during this peak in the reproductive lives of Ghanaian couples. We analyse the (re)distribution of household labour between intimate partners and discuss men's and women's perceptions, expressed experiences and practices of distributing tasks and negotiating gender relations in the household.

II. Materials and Methods

The empirical material presented in this article is part of a qualitative study that the authors conducted to elucidate the dynamics between local gender norms, household gender relations and men's involvement in the care for their partners and households during pregnancy. The study was conducted in Accra, Ghana's capital, and in a rural community anonymized as Sakora, located in the Afram Plains North District of Ghana between June 2017 and May 2019. One key goal of the broader study from which the data for this article are drawn was to explore men's participation and experiences in maternity care services. Subsequently, maternity clinics were a convenient source for identifying expectant mothers and fathers. Accra participants were recruited from the maternity and child welfare clinics of a government-owned and managed hospital. In Sakora, we recruited participants from the community through the community-based health planning services (CHPS) compound.

We selected these two locations to facilitate a comparative analysis of rural and urban contexts.

The inclusion criterion for men was first-time expectant fathers, to allow for an exploration of their before and after parenting expectations and experiences. This inclusion criterion for fathers was appropriate in Accra, but in Sakora, where many first-time expectant fathers were teenagers living separately from their partners, this criterion was challenging. Thus, except for one father, the participating expectant fathers from Sakora already had children during the data collection period. The women who participated in the study were expectant mothers and mothers with children and comprised both partners and non-partners of men who participated in the study. A total of 11 men and 24 women (seven of whom were partners of the male participants) were recruited in Accra. A total of 12 men and 12 women (eight of whom were partners of the male participants) were recruited in Sakora.

The Accra male participants, aged between 28 years and 39 years, worked outside the home as traders and artisans or in the formal sector as sales personnel and in occupations like graphic design. The Accra female participants, aged between 18 years and 51 years, worked primarily as artisans and traders, and a few worked in the formal sector. All female partners of the Accra male participants were engaged in economic activities outside the home. Among our Accra female participants, 11 were first-time expectant mothers, and 13 had between 1 and 3 children. All participants in Accra lived in a nuclear family structure in one of the following kinds of accommodation: houses with private compounds, bathrooms and kitchens; apartments with shared compounds but with private bathrooms and private kitchens; and apartments with shared compounds, shared bathrooms and shared kitchens.

All our participants in Sakora worked as farmers, and a few supplemented farming with petty trading and the provision of motorcycle transport services. All female partners of the

Sakora male participants were engaged in economic activities outside the home. The age range of the participants in Sakora was 21–48 years for men and 18–48 years for women. Except for two women who were first-time expectant mothers, our female participants in Sakora had between one and four children. In Sakora, married or cohabiting couples lived together in privately owned (small) houses. It was common to find two or more small houses of nuclear families from the same kin group located on one common compound with shared bathrooms and shared kitchens. Thus, some co-parents lived alone, while others lived as part of an extended family and yet others lived in a connected series of households.

The first author (Ampim) collected the data using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and observations. Interviews and FGDs were conducted with a guide that centred on the following topics: fatherhood and masculine norms within the Ghanaian social context; expecting fathers' responsibilities during pregnancy; the practical daily routines of expecting fathers; and the forms of social support for expecting fathers and their nuclear families. As the primary participants of the study, the men were scheduled to be interviewed to describe their domestic tasks and responsibilities when they were expecting a baby. In total, 22 semi-structured interviews with men and 3 with women were conducted in Accra and Sakora. Qualitative interviews provided participants with the opportunity to share their own experiences and potential changes in practical routines during pregnancy. The women were engaged in FGDs to gather a broad range of opinions on the forms of household-related support that they expected and received from their partners when they were pregnant. Five FGDs (5–10 participants per group) were conducted with women and one with men. Both the FGDs and interviews lasted an average of 1 hour and were conducted in Twi and English. Interviews and FGDs in Accra were conducted at the health facility, at the

homes of study participants and at meeting places in the city. In Sakora, interviews were conducted in participants' homes, and FGDs were conducted under a shed in the village square.

Although FGDs were scheduled with only women, one FGD was facilitated for men in Sakora. We found that the men in Sakora discussed their experiences, practices and perceptions about men's responsibility in the family more openly during the FGD than during interviews. Engagements with Sakora men during interviews were more formal in nature and did not generate in-depth reflections. This situation could be related to the men's discomfort of discussing their personal lived experiences with Ampim, a young woman from Accra who was being educated abroad. It appeared that FGDs facilitated an atmosphere where group members influenced each other in a manner where it became easier and 'natural' for men to share personal stories similar to articulations in the methods literature (Green and Thorogood, 2018).

Interviews and FGDs were supplemented with observations at the selected hospital's premises in Accra and at some of the participants' homes in Accra and Sakora. In Accra, Ampim observed men's engagement at maternity clinics and in chores that men and women carried out at home. In Sakora, she observed the daily activities of the residents in the village, for example, what men and women carried from the farm, what chores they performed in their households and how they spent time in the evenings after farm work. Ampim also engaged men and women in the village in informal conversations related to the topics under study.

With the permission of our participants, all interviews and FGDs were tape-recorded, and then translated and transcribed by Ampim and a research assistant. Ampim audited all transcripts to ensure language consistency. Data analysis was inspired by Victoria Braun and Virginia Clarks' description of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Thematic

analysis emerged as beneficial in this study because of its applicability to working with data generated from different research methods and sources (Nowell et al., 2017). After transcription, Ampim developed a coding manual based on a detailed reading of a small number of transcripts. She then individually coded all transcripts in NVivo software by allocating codes to significant extracts of text, as suggested by Saldaña (2016). Codes that described recurrent topics in the data were merged into categories during later stages of the analysis. After identifying categories, Ampim shared an overview of the codes and categories with the co-authors for iterative review and discussion. Finally, we worked together to search for and agree upon the overarching themes. The findings presented in this article are particularly based on two of the identified categories: men's responsibilities during pregnancy and motivation for men's involvement in household tasks and care for their pregnant partners.

The study was guided by the ethical standards of the Norwegian Institute for Data Protection (53570/3/ASF) and received ethical approval from the University of Ghana College of Health Sciences (CHS-Et/M.6 – PI.12/2017–2018). We presented the study protocols to the health facility in Accra and the Afram Plains North District Health Directorate. In Accra, permission was granted by the selected hospital's central administration, the maternity clinic and the child welfare clinic. In the Afram Plains, the District Health Directorate approved the study protocols and granted permission for the study to be conducted. We moreover sought and received permission from the leadership of the CHPS in Sakora. Written or oral informed consent was obtained from all participants after the purpose of the study was thoroughly explained (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). We informed the participants that they could withdraw their consent during the session without any consequences, and that information gathered during the study would

remain anonymous. All participants were given pseudonyms upon the transcription of the data.

III. Findings

The study findings are organized in two parts. The first part seeks to outline expectant fathers' practical responsibilities in the household in Sakora and Accra and illuminate apparent changes in tasks performed by men and women during pregnancy. The second part explores our participants' perceptions and accounts of ostensible tensions that emanate from men's involvement in domestic work.

Practical Male Responsibilities in Sakora Households

In Sakora, farm work usually began before sunrise, and by 6 a.m., most farmers were already headed to their farms located in the outskirts of the village. Couples usually managed their separate individual farms (sometimes in the same field), and men and women commonly cultivated different crops. For example, in one household, while the husband produced diverse crops such as maize, yams and vegetables, the wife grew only cassava. Most men spent long hours each day working on the farm. It was also common among farmers in the village to have a farmhouse in their fields where they would stay for several days a week. Even if women cultivated their own crops and thereby contributed to household income, the participants' narrative of men's and women's responsibilities in the household was largely consistent with the dominant gendered pattern of 'male breadwinner' and 'female domestic caregiver'. Men were expected to provide the family with material and financial resources, while women were expected to cook, wash clothes, care for children, and fetch water and firewood. One male participant summarized men's responsibilities as follows:

Well, mostly what people expect is that the man would be able to cater to the woman's hospital bills and provide the children's

clothes and shelter. Those are what people expect from men. (Kwabena Yeboah, 36 years old, Sakora)

As providers for their households, men performed more work on the farm and therefore were not expected to be involved in domestic work as indicated in the following excerpt:

In this community, our primary source of livelihood is farming. Men here have more problems than women because we do not have any other business in the community apart from farming. So as a man, if I go to the farm, you will realise that the workload on me is more than that of the woman, but if I come home and there is some work to do, I would be willing to do that if I am not tired. (Yaro, 48 years old, Sakora)

However, during their partner's pregnancy, men were expected to do housework. Both men and women expected men to carry out domestic chores during their partners' pregnancy, and there were no differences in tasks that men and women expected men to perform. Men were expected to cook, fetch firewood from the farm, fetch water from the community borehole and even nurture the farms that women usually cultivated. Male participants acknowledged that during pregnancy, women could be more tired than usual and needed the support of their partners to perform housework.

We carry firewood into town. Although people laugh at us, we never give up, we still do. We do a lot to support our wives. Sometimes I would get home with the foodstuffs and then go straight into the kitchen to prepare food for us. You know when a woman is pregnant, she becomes a little weaker than her usual strength, so I do my very best to support her at home. (Kwakye, 39 years old, Sakora)

Fetching firewood from the farm was noteworthy in this narrative because people in the community would identify it as a feminine task. Moreover, participants who stayed at the farmhouse for several days a week tried to make up for the time away from home, as one pregnant mother recounted:

For instance, my husband is not always around [that is, he is on the farm], but he makes sure that he helps me with the housework whenever he comes. He is the one who sweeps the house and sometimes washes clothes by hand. I cook and bathe the children, so we share the work and that is how it has been for us. (Mawuena, 31 years old, Sakora)

Participants stated that men who engaged in housework, such as fetching water, carrying firewood and cooking, were at times ridiculed as doing 'women's work', and their partners were accused of bewitching them. This can be seen, for example, in Kwakye's earlier quote. Female participants indicated that some men were discouraged from performing housework because of such negative comments. For example, Patricia said the following about men doing housework:

Some people start thinking the woman has charmed him or something, because it is not the norm in this community, men are not expected to do such works. When the men do the things and later hear such comments from town, they start acting differently. (Patricia, 25 years old, Sakora)

Nevertheless, most of the male participants held that community members' teasing did not prevent them from doing housework. One father Asiedu, for example, said, 'She is my wife. How I treat her depends on me. I will not listen to anyone or make decisions according to what they say. This is my family'. Similarly, Yaro said:

As for me, if I want to help my wife in the house or do any form of housework, I do not pay attention to what people would say or do because I do not have time to go to people's houses to see what they do for their wives, so what is the point of paying attention to what they would say? I only focus on what I can do for my wife and family.

Yaro continued to emphasize that he did not believe that social ridicule would influence men because what they did was their own decision:

I do not think anything is preventing them. Some minutes ago, we saw a man carrying

his baby on his back [referring to a man who passed by during the interview], so I do not think there is anything that prevents us. It is a choice.

When Ampim visited Yaro's home a few days later, he and his pregnant wife were cooking together in their open compound. Most mothers also confirmed that their partners' tasks during pregnancy were not determined by what other people said.

When I was pregnant, from my seventh month, I could not go to the farm. My husband was the one going to the farm and doing everything for us. If he were to follow what people say, he would not have done that, and I would not know whom to turn to. (Julie, 30 years old, Sakora)

However, most men in the village did not attend maternity care services unless health workers specifically invited them and barely discussed what happened at the clinic with their partners.

In the above-mentioned examples, we have demonstrated that men in Sakora carried out domestic chores when the family was expecting a child. In performing household duties, men and their partners were not free from accusations and judgement for enacting 'inappropriate' gender behaviours. However, the men framed their activities within the household as a choice that was independent of cultural norms. In the next section, we consider the practical household routines of the men in Accra during their partner's pregnancy.

Practical Male Responsibilities in Accra Households

Among our study participants in Accra, it was common that both men and women worked outside the home for long hours daily. Although both men and women engaged in economic activities and therefore contributed to the family's income, men were consistently described as the primary breadwinners. In contrast, women were said to be responsible for the bulk of household chores. One mother summarized these expectations in the following

way: 'In our society, the principal responsibility of a father or a man is taking care of the family's financial needs. Customarily, the woman is the one who is supposed to do the domestic chores of the household' (Agnes, 51 years old, tailor, Accra).

However, women mentioned that current family dynamics in the city would be difficult to navigate without men's help with housework. Indeed, they admitted that men's performance of domestic chores during their partners' pregnancies was expected and quite common and provided examples of tasks that their partners would commonly perform. Lizzy, for example, said, 'My husband also does many things at home. He washes clothes by hand, cooks, and all that. When you both help in doing the housework, there are fewer problems' (Lizzy, 36 years old, hairdresser, Accra).

The Accra female participants said that women could become tired quickly during pregnancy or sometimes experience complications and would hence be unable to carry out housework. Consequently, men were expected to take up most of the housework. One man recounted that he took over the bulk of the domestic chores from the second trimester of his wife's pregnancy:

She [his wife] used to do all the household chores, but I told her not to do those things anymore for about three months now. I do not want her to be doing anything stressful, so I do not allow her to do anything at home, such as washing clothes and cooking. I do not let her wash or cook. (Derrick, 32 years old, truck driver, Accra)

Other expectant fathers expressed similar views and mentioned that they assisted their partners with household chores such as cooking, cleaning the house and washing clothes at the time of pregnancy. 'I do not like washing. I cook, although, since she [his wife] cannot be standing for now, I must be the one doing the washing. I do not have any choice. So I am doing my best' (Charles, 30 years old, graphic designer, Accra)

Similar to the study participants in Sakora, the male participants from Accra mentioned that they could be teased for doing housework. Men such as Derrick preferred to perform these chores out of friends and family's sight to avoid social ridicule:

A friend came to my house and saw me washing and started making some comments. That is why I always do not like people seeing me doing what I do in my house to support my wife. People talk so much about other people's privacy and what they do. You know, people make negative comments, and they may sometimes be convincing, so I do my thing privately.

From Derrick's statement, we come to understand how people's comments or ridicule when they see men doing housework can at times discourage some men from carrying out such chores. Unlike Derrick, who felt uneasy about his friend's comments, most of our male participants in Accra believed that the decision to do housework depended on themselves and their love for their partners rather than on expected social norms, as one father indicated:

You do it because you love her. If you love your partner, it does not matter. It would help if you shared the responsibilities, whether they are meant for women or not. Sometimes men would see that their wives are going through a lot during pregnancy, but they refuse to help. It is their lifestyle, and it is not about what men are expected to do or not do (Thomas, 39 years old, commercial driver, Accra).

The women also talked about how love motivates men to support their partners by doing housework: 'Some [men] do it [housework] because of the love they have for their wives, but do not see it as their responsibility' (Adwoa, 39 years old, petty trader, Accra). Another woman similarly said: 'If you show the man how you love him and how you both understand each other, the man will always listen to you when you ask him for help with housework' (Lizzy, 36 years old, hairdresser, Accra). Women

continued to describe men who loved their partners as interested in building their families and spending their non-working hours at home with their partners. These accounts show the importance attributed to love in the way that women and men talked about men taking on household chores during pregnancy.

The research material from both Sakora and Accra contains accounts of practical tasks that men perform in the household during the period of pregnancy, and hence, it appears that the period of pregnancy entailed flexibility in local conventional gender norms in the household. According to the participants' accounts, men engaged in housework to support their pregnant partners, who may be more physically fatigued than usual or could experience complications during pregnancy. Unlike Sakora, it was more common among the Accra study participants that men accompanied their pregnant partners to maternity care services. Both rural and urban men simultaneously constructed themselves as self-determined by accentuating that doing housework was a choice they made, solidifying their image as autonomous subjects.

'The Lazy Woman': Perceived Implications of Men's Short-term Performance of Housework

This section moves from individual couples' practices to discussions about general social standards and their implications on the extent to which transgressing gender norms are permissible. It is interesting to observe that although Sakora and Accra have different socio-economic set-ups, the gendered cultural expectations of household arrangements that the participants in each location presented were similar. In both contexts, our participants emphasized that men's primary responsibility was to provide financial resources for the household. The participants' accounts, as we will see, exhibit a certain resistance towards a more permanent transformation of the normative pattern in the divisions of household labour. Men were envisaged as performing housework to support physically

tired expectant partners but were expected to not take over the primary responsibility for doing domestic chores either during pregnancy or afterwards.

The participants in Sakora contended that an increase in men performing housework could encourage laziness among women. Providing examples of this, the women in Sakora recounted how some expectant mothers neglected their domestic duties because their partners performed these duties:

Sometimes, it is the fault of some of the women. When the man starts doing the housework, they leave all the work for him to do. Because they know that, after all, the man is helpful, so even when the woman does not do it, the man would. When the man refuses to do it, they get angry. It is a very bad attitude. It must stop. (Doris, 45 years old, Sakora)

Another woman, Julie similarly said:

Others, too, can do the work all right, but they like to be pampered, and laziness sets in, so they burden the men. Honestly, some women are so lazy. Although we all advocate for men's support, some women take advantage of that to become lazy. They would leave all the work for the men. [Laughing] Some are lazy. Since they know that the men would do it, they would find ways to use sickness as an excuse to leave the work for the men. As we speak on our behalf, we should also speak for the men. Because some are very helpful, they make sure that they take good care of their wives. (Julie, 30 years old, Sakora)

Julie's account inferred that when an expectant mother is not physically tired or does not encounter health complications, she should not relinquish domestic duties to her partner. Many of our male participants in Sakora similarly talked about women becoming too comfortable with men doing housework, even after childbirth:

Some women also become used to the support you give them during pregnancy and would always expect us to do the work for them. Instead of sharing responsibility, she

would rather let you be the one to do all things. That attitude is not good. (Kojo, 27 years old, Sakora)

This view reinforced that of other men who said that housework was not a man's duty but a form of support given during pregnancy. However, women were reported to continuously demand that their partners perform housework, which made some men agitated. One father explained:

I truly help my wife at home, but sometimes she is the one asking and demanding that support. You know, we share the responsibilities, but it becomes too much sometimes. It is not nice at all. Just because we do these things does not mean they should take advantage to misuse us. (Phillip, 28 years old, Sakora)

In contrast to the descriptions of men's household contributions in Sakora, the women in Accra claimed that men's performance of domestic work should already be part of the household routine before a pregnancy. Indeed, they acknowledged that many men in Accra were involved in domestic chores. However, and similar to the narratives of the women and men in Sakora, the women in Accra emphasized that shifting the bulk of domestic duties to men because of their willingness to be supportive could present a danger to the 'normal' balance of gendered household labour. Adwoa, for example, said, 'I think it is the fault of the women sometimes. When some women realise that the men are helpful, they start leaving all the work for the men to do' (Adwoa, 39 years old, petty trader, Accra).

Other female participants in Accra claimed that women should prove themselves as hard-working to access their partner's help with household chores. Cecilia (32 years old, administrator, Accra) stated: 'It depends on how you both started in the relationship. When he knows that you are hardworking, he will always be available to help when you are tired'.

It was equally suggested by the Accra male participants that some expectant mothers intentionally avoided housework out of

sheer laziness and not because they were tired or experienced complications, as Elorm summarized:

Some women can do it [housework], but they are lazy. Even though they can do it, they will not do it because of laziness. That is why I said there should be some education to teach them that this laziness does not help. So some of these women must be advised. It is very bad, and they must change. Some women do not like doing things. They know they can do it, but they refuse to, with the excuse of being pregnant. It is just not acceptable. I think it must change. (Elorm, 30 years old, artist, Accra)

Elorm's view was consistent with that of other men who believed that women should not neglect their domestic responsibilities because men are willing to support them during pregnancy. Eric, for example, held the view that women will not receive support from their partners if they neglect simple tasks like sweeping. He said, 'Some women are lazy. They are so lazy. Once they are pregnant, they stop doing virtually anything. If you expect the man to do even the sweeping for you, then the man would not give you the help you need' (Eric, 30 years old, sales executive, Accra).

It can be extrapolated from the research material that both women and men in Accra and Sakora recapitulated normative gendered scripts that define housework as 'women's' work. Although the accounts from the Accra participants reveal that couples there share household chores on a more regular basis, in both study contexts, housework emerges as strongly gendered.

IV. Discussion

This article has endeavoured to contribute to the global debate about increasing male participation in unpaid domestic work (Barker, 2014). Although conventional gender norms are still tenacious, emerging social research has presented examples of more egalitarian household arrangements in Sub-Saharan Africa (Comrie-Thomson et al., 2019; Doyle et al., 2014; McLean, 2020; Mkandawire and

Hendriks, 2019; Smith, 2015). The present study underlines a series of apparent ambiguities in the temporary adjustment of culturally prescribed household gender norms in Ghanaian couples' lives when they are expecting a child.

The findings exemplify that 'doing gender', that is following culturally appropriate gender norms (West and Zimmerman, 1987), in both Accra and Sakora implied that men were expected to provide their families' financial income. In contrast, women were seen as responsible for the bulk of the domestic chores, even if they worked full time outside the home to earn an income. These are the norms that men and women are held accountable to in their daily lives and are necessary for achieving the position of a 'proper' man and a 'proper' woman (Hollander, 2018; West and Zimmerman, 1987). Remarkably, women's participation in paid labour or farming and their contribution to the household's income were not, on a normative level, considered in this male-female equation. Female accountability was limited to the performance of domestic tasks only. Nonetheless, the time of pregnancy was distinguished as a period when doing household chores became less gendered. The male participants from both urban and rural areas actively engaged in housework during their partner's pregnancies. In Sakora, although the men did not accompany their partners to maternity care services, they washed clothes, cooked, swept, cleaned, fetched water and firewood, and performed farm work on their partner's behalf. Similarly, the men in Accra cooked for their families, washed clothes and cleaned the house, in addition to attending maternity care services with their partners (See also; Ampim et al., 2021).

Our study findings resonate with research in Ghana that conveys the ongoing reworking of gender relations within the household (Ampim, Haukenes, and Blystad, 2020; Bougangue and Ling, 2017; Kwansa, 2012). It has been argued that educated urban men are less patriarchal and more accepting of men performing household tasks that are

typically considered feminine (Arnot et al., 2012; Bougangué and Ling, 2017; Ganle, 2015). Similarly, men in rural areas have been noted for upholding deep-rooted sociocultural practices that preserve unequal gender norms (Dako-Gyeke and Owusu, 2013). Our research material appears to illustrate that despite the sociocultural differences in rural and urban areas, during the period of pregnancy, men in both settings are willing to modify their daily activities to incorporate far more household chores.

A pertinent question that we raise based on our study findings is whether altered gender norms and practices at the time of pregnancy suggest that new ways of 'doing gender' are unfolding and that gendered relations are in the process of transforming (Deutsch, 2007; Risman and Davis, 2013; West and Zimmerman, 1987). It is vital to reiterate that both urban and rural male and female participants repeated that the primary responsibility of men was breadwinning. Women's participation in paid labour or farming and their contribution to the family income were obscured and were not included in spousal accounts of the division of labour. The observed shift in gender relations thus principally concerned men's participation in domestic chores to support pregnant partners. In this regard, the context of pregnancy generated circumstantial progress towards what has been called gender equality-oriented household arrangements (Bloksgaard et al., 2015).

The present study findings demonstrate that these acts of revision of household gender relations were tentative and temporary. Men's 'excessive' involvement in domestic work was perceived by both men and women as potentially creating imbalances in household labour distribution. This perception is partly allied to institutionalized and socially structured assessments of what makes a 'proper' man and a 'proper' woman. Irrespective of women's participation in waged labour and their contributions to household income, studies

from Ghana have shown that divisions of household labour are described according to male breadwinner and female domestic-caregiver ideals (Boni, 2002; Clark, 1999). This pattern of gendered divisions of labour that men and women are held accountable to was also reflected in the narratives of our study participants. Women were first and foremost appraised according to the performance of housework (and not according to their involvement in paid labour and contribution to household income). Hence, when their male partners engaged actively in housework, women ran the risk of being seen as lazy, thereby diminishing their social achievements as women.

Hollander (2018) explains gender accountability as hidden until people behave in ways that are deemed inappropriate for their assigned sex category. Moreover, gender accountability precedes actions since people are guided by anticipated reactions in lieu of the actual reaction (Hollander, 2018: 177). In anticipation of negative reactions from family, friends and others to gender transgressions in the domestic arena, our participants were eager to present men's involvement in domestic chores within the contours of providing support for a physically fatigued expectant mother. The participants' circumspection about who performs housework even during peak reproductive periods accentuates the pervasiveness of gender assessment in contexts where gender practice appeared to be more flexible. The way that gender accountability seemed to influence men's and women's actions in the research material is consistent with the assertion that 'doing gender' is ubiquitous (Hollander, 2018; West and Zimmerman, 1987).

An additional explanation for our participants' critique of men's 'excessive' involvement in domestic work is that it could potentially disrupt the social order. Another Ghanaian study has similarly shown how women who transgressed into breadwinning responsibilities were perceived as distorting

the social regulations within a community (Tolhurst et al., 2008). In their research in a rural Ghanaian community, Rachel Tolhurst et al. (2008) found that the more economically independent women became, the more likely it was for men to neglect their responsibility for providing the family's income. Consequently, women themselves called for a shift back to the typical arrangement, where men were the primary breadwinners and women carried out the bulk of the household chores (Tolhurst et al., 2008). Silberschmidt's (2001) study in Tanzania similarly demonstrated that when women provided more of the family's income than men did, the latter tended to adopt aggressive behaviours or engage in extramarital relationships and overuse alcohol to reaffirm their masculinity. Drawing on these examples, our study suggests that men and women may resist radical transformations in gender practices to avoid the disruption of established social arrangements.

Our research material exemplified that hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) is powerful in operation, where male participants' involvement in housework was configured within a narrative of choice (Bach, 2017) (i.e., men can decide to contribute, but women should not ask them to). When men commented that their participation in housework could be mocked as not conforming with cultural standards, they again elicited the narrative of choice. In this way, the men constructed themselves as self-determined subjects with control over their decisions and households, congruent with dominant notions of masculinity in the Ghanaian context (Adomako Ampofo and Boateng, 2007).

As presented in this article, the revisions of gendered divisions of household labour correspond to what scholars have termed short-term responses to demanding life changes (Dermott and Miller, 2015). Feminist scholars have warned that temporary shifts in gendered provisions in the household should not be readily interpreted as an indication of change because they could be related to the

'personal traits' of the people involved (Bach, 2017: 352). However, as Deutsch (2007) has argued, small acts of transgression, whether related to personal traits or performed during exceptional circumstances, may expand peoples' space of action and motivate others. Following Deutsch's argument, even slight alterations, such as men expanding their uptake of domestic work during their partners' pregnancy, may amount to some degree of 'undoing gender' in the household (Deutsch, 2007). Moreover, men who participate in housework during pregnancy will learn the skills and may more readily engage in household chores beyond the period of pregnancy. Men who engage in domestic chores during the peak reproductive periods may also realize that doing additional household tasks does not entirely undermine their masculine roles in the family setting and subsequently feel more comfortable with the prospect of continuing to do more housework.

Our findings show that both men and women, especially in the urban area, drew on love as a propelling argument to explain (and defend) men's propensity to do housework. The participants discussed love as an element that could help men to disregard social mockery and oppose sociocultural gender norms. The accounts of love in this research material reverberate with the findings of a study conducted in Tanzania and Zimbabwe, which contended that men's participation in household chores was significantly connected to improvements in couples' relationships (Comrie-Thomson et al., 2019). Feminists have identified love as a component in the negotiation and contestation of gender relations among young couples and argued that love should be researched when exploring men's involvement in maternal and child healthcare (Bhana, 2013; Comrie-Thomson et al., 2019; Deutsch, 2007). Our participants' discussion of love corroborates the argument that young couples' relationships create a space where men and women can navigate new ways of doing gender (Comrie-Thomson et al., 2019).

V. Conclusion

This article has aimed to contribute to existing social research in Ghana and Sub-Saharan Africa on the seeming relaxation of gender norms encompassing the domestic sphere. The research material underscores the anticipation of modifications and actual changes in culturally expected gender practice in the household during peak reproductive periods. Although the documented changes appeared to be primarily of a temporary nature, men's active participation in housework during the time of pregnancy suggests that women would spend relatively less time doing domestic chores and thereby have less of a workload. The discussions articulated here reverberate with recent findings from Ghana that document more egalitarian practices in the divisions of household labour (Bougangue and Ling, 2017; Dery and Akurugu, 2021). As demonstrated in this article, these practices are not limited to urban areas or to educated men as proffered in the existing literature (Bougangue and Ling, 2017; Dery and Akurugu, 2021), but are also manifest in rural areas and among men with low education. Our findings suggest that existing experiences of (some) undoing of gender during pregnancy could potentially lead to negotiating space for a more equal gender division of domestic labour beyond pregnancy. Importantly, our findings indicate that building on these existing behaviours and working with men who decide to do gender differently during pregnancy could offer valuable contextually appropriate starting points.

Further research would be beneficial to facilitate the exploration of more permanent changes in gender practices beyond the time of pregnancy. For example, an investigation of men's performance of housework after childbirth, that is, during the postnatal/neonatal period, would be valuable to show continuation or withdrawal of men's active participation in housework beyond the time of pregnancy. Additionally, research on multiple stages of parenting, such as first-time parenting, parenting when couples live

separately, parenting during cohabitation and parenting during marriage, could illuminate the influence of family formation and relationship stability on gender practices in the household. More context-based research on when practices become less gendered in households could enhance suggestions on effective ways to promote broader global goals of gender equality and equity.

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