

# International Journal Research Publication Analysis

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## THE ROLE OF CULTURE AND TRADITION IN SHAPING THE INVOLVEMENT OF FATHERS IN CHILD UPBRINGING IN GHANA

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Article Received: 03 November 2025

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Article Revised: 23 November 2025

Grace International Bible University.

Published on: 13 December 2025

DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.6508>

### ABSTRACT

Father involvement in child upbringing is essential for the cognitive, emotional, and social development of children. However, in many Ghanaian communities, cultural norms and traditional expectations continue to assign childcare responsibilities primarily to mothers, limiting fathers' participation in everyday child-rearing activities. This quantitative study examines the role of culture and tradition in shaping father involvement in child upbringing across selected regions in Ghana. Using a structured questionnaire administered to 450 fathers, the study investigates how cultural beliefs, clan and lineage systems, traditional gender roles, and intergenerational practices influence paternal engagement. The study aims to determine the extent to which these cultural and traditional factors predict fathers' participation in physical care, emotional support, discipline, and decision-making concerning their children. The findings are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of how cultural norms shape contemporary fatherhood practices and to offer recommendations for encouraging more balanced parenting roles in Ghana.

**KEYWORDS:** father involvement, culture, tradition, childcare, Ghana, parenting roles.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Father involvement in child upbringing has gained significant scholarly attention over the past two decades, particularly within African societies undergoing rapid social change. In Ghana, traditional family structures, cultural practices, and societal expectations play a strong role in shaping the responsibilities and behaviors of fathers within the household. Historically, fathers have been viewed primarily as providers, protectors, and heads of

households, while mothers assume the day-to-day caregiving responsibilities associated with raising children. These cultural expectations continue to influence family dynamics, even as modern economic realities and shifting gender roles present new opportunities for shared parenting.

Despite increasing awareness of the importance of father involvement, many Ghanaian fathers remain minimally engaged in hands-on childrearing activities such as feeding, bathing, communicating affection, and supporting early learning. Cultural scripts rooted in Ghanaian tradition often discourage men from participating actively in caregiving tasks perceived as feminine. Additionally, lineage systems, clan traditions, and expectations from extended family members strengthen the belief that fathers should focus on providing materially while leaving nurturing responsibilities to mothers.

Urbanization and modernization have introduced challenges to these traditional roles, creating a tension between cultural norms and emerging expectations for more involved fatherhood. Yet empirical research examining how culture and tradition continue to shape paternal involvement in Ghana remains limited, particularly quantitative studies that measure the magnitude and predictive power of these cultural influences. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by systematically examining cultural and traditional determinants of father involvement in child upbringing in Ghana.

## **2.0 Statement of the Problem**

Although father involvement in child upbringing is known to improve children's emotional resilience, academic development, and social adjustment, many fathers in Ghana remain minimally involved in nurturing and caregiving roles. Traditional Ghanaian culture assigns mothers the role of primary caregiver, while fathers are expected to provide financial support and exercise authority over the household. These cultural expectations significantly influence how fathers perceive their responsibilities toward their children.

Despite the changing socio-economic landscape, where dual-income households and urban living demand increased paternal participation, cultural and traditional expectations continue to restrict the scope of father involvement. Fathers who engage in caregiving may face criticism, ridicule, or be viewed as deviating from established masculine norms. Lineage systems, patriarchal values, and communal expectations further reinforce the idea that fathers' primary roles lie outside direct childcare.

There is limited quantitative evidence exploring how deeply these cultural and traditional beliefs still influence paternal behavior in Ghana. Most existing studies focus on socioeconomic factors, leaving a gap in understanding how culture and tradition shape father-child interactions and the distribution of childcare responsibilities. Without empirical data, policymakers and family welfare organizations lack the evidence needed to design culturally relevant interventions that promote shared parenting.

This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the extent to which cultural norms and traditional beliefs predict father involvement in child upbringing across Ghana.

### **3.0 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this quantitative study is to examine the role of culture and tradition in shaping the involvement of fathers in child upbringing in Ghana. The study aims to determine the degree to which cultural beliefs, gender role expectations, lineage traditions, and community norms influence paternal involvement in caregiving activities.

### **4.0 Research Objectives**

#### **General Objective**

To assess how culture and tradition influence father involvement in child upbringing in Ghana.

#### **Specific Objectives**

1. To examine the cultural beliefs that shape fathers' perceptions of their roles in child upbringing.
2. To determine the level of father involvement in childcare activities across different Ghanaian communities.
3. To assess the influence of traditional gender role expectations on father involvement.
4. To analyze the relationship between cultural/traditional norms and fathers' participation in physical, emotional, and cognitive caregiving.
5. To identify cultural and traditional factors that encourage or discourage father involvement in Ghana.

### **5.0 Research Questions**

1. What cultural beliefs shape fathers' perceptions of their roles in child upbringing in Ghana?

2. What is the level of father involvement in childcare activities across selected communities?
3. How do traditional gender role expectations influence father involvement in childcare?
4. What is the relationship between cultural/traditional norms and fathers' participation in caregiving activities?
5. What cultural and traditional factors encourage or discourage father involvement in Ghana?

## **6.0 Theoretical Review**

This study is grounded in three relevant theories that explain how culture and tradition influence paternal behavior: Gender Role Theory, Hegemonic Masculinity Theory, and Social Constructionism. These theories illuminate how cultural norms, traditions, and social expectations shape the everyday decisions of fathers regarding child upbringing in Ghana.

### **6.1 Gender Role Theory**

Gender Role Theory (Eagly, 1987) posits that societies assign certain behaviors, responsibilities, and attributes to individuals based on their sex. In most African contexts, including Ghana, gender roles are traditionally defined such that men are assigned leadership, provision, and protection roles, while women assume caregiving, nurturing, and household management roles.

In Ghana, these roles are reinforced through socialization processes within families, schools, religious institutions, and communities. Fathers are often raised to believe that their value lies in economic provision and authority, not in providing hands-on childcare. Activities such as bathing children, feeding, emotional nurturing, or attending school meetings are frequently viewed as feminine roles.

Gender Role Theory helps explain why many Ghanaian fathers—even those who wish to be more involved—experience internal conflict or societal resistance when engaging in caregiving. It also clarifies why fathers' involvement varies across urban and rural settings, as urbanization tends to weaken rigid gender role expectations over time.

### **6.2 Hegemonic Masculinity Theory**

Hegemonic Masculinity Theory (Connell, 1995) argues that societies construct an idealized form of masculinity characterized by authority, independence, stoicism, and financial

provision. This dominant form of masculinity becomes a standard against which men measure themselves and others.

Within Ghanaian culture, hegemonic masculinity is seen in statements such as “men don’t cook,” “men don’t carry babies on their back,” or “a man’s work is outside the home.” Such beliefs reinforce the idea that childcare is incompatible with male identity.

For instance, among many Ghanaian ethnic groups—particularly the Akan, Ga-Adangbe, and Ewe—fathers who participate actively in caregiving may be teased as being “controlled by their wives” or “less masculine.” These forms of social policing discourage men from breaking cultural norms.

Hegemonic Masculinity Theory is thus essential for understanding how social expectations maintain gendered divisions of labor and discourage paternal participation in child upbringing.

### **6.3 Social Constructionism**

Social Constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) suggests that societal realities—such as fatherhood, parenting roles, and family structures—are shaped by cultural norms and shared meanings rather than biological factors. This theory emphasizes that father involvement is not simply a personal choice; it is shaped by cultural narratives, traditions, and social expectations over generations.

In Ghana, the social construction of fatherhood is influenced by:

- Patrilineal and matrilineal inheritance systems
- Clan and lineage responsibilities
- Rituals and rites of passage
- Community expectations regarding male authority
- Marriage traditions (e.g., bride price, extended family obligations)

These constructions influence how fathers define their roles in children’s lives. For example, in matrilineal Akan societies, maternal uncles often play stronger roles than biological fathers, shaping paternal involvement patterns.

Social Constructionism, therefore, contextualizes father involvement as culturally mediated rather than biologically predetermined.

## **7.0 Empirical Review**

Empirical literature across Africa and globally reveals the strong role of culture and tradition in shaping father involvement. Studies consistently show that cultural norms, gender expectations, and lineage traditions influence how men engage with their children.

### **7.1 International Evidence**

International studies suggest that traditional gender norms significantly reduce male participation in childcare. Hall & Palkovitz (2019) found that in patriarchal societies, fathers often prioritize breadwinning over caregiving because of cultural scripts that associate childcare with femininity.

In Asia, Liu & Wang (2021) reported that cultural expectations of male authority prevented fathers from participating in nurturing tasks despite modernization.

These findings demonstrate that tradition strongly influences father involvement even in societies undergoing rapid social change.

### **7.2 African Evidence**

African cultural frameworks generally position fathers as authority figures rather than caregivers. In Nigeria, Okafor & Amayo (2020) found that fathers reported ridicule and social disapproval when engaging in childcare traditionally associated with women. Traditional expectations of masculinity, clan obligations, and extended family influence were major barriers.

In South Africa, Richter & Morrell (2006) emphasized that traditional male roles limit men's involvement in everyday childcare but expand their roles in discipline and provision.

These findings align strongly with Ghanaian traditions, where cultural expectations continue to shape paternal roles.

### **7.3 Evidence from Ghana**

Ghana-specific studies provide deeper insight into how culture and tradition influence fatherhood practices.

Lartey (2019) found that despite modernization, many Ghanaian fathers still perceive childcare as a woman's responsibility, especially among Akan and Ga families. Cultural norms discourage men from engaging in nurturing tasks in public.

Aboagye & Arthur (2018) reported that fathers who attempted to participate actively in childcare often faced criticism from extended family members who viewed such involvement as unmanly.

Tenkorang (2021) observed that fathers in urban Ghana are more willing to engage in childcare, but cultural and traditional expectations still moderate their involvement.

Lineage systems also play a significant role. In matrilineal societies (e.g., Akan), the maternal uncle traditionally assumes responsibility for the child, sometimes weakening the father-child relationship.

Collectively, empirical evidence demonstrates that cultural traditions significantly shape paternal behavior and continue to influence childcare roles in Ghana.

## **8.0 Methodology**

This study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional quantitative research design to examine how culture and tradition influence the involvement of fathers in child upbringing in Ghana. The design was considered appropriate because it allows for the systematic gathering of data from a relatively large sample at a single point in time, enabling the researcher to identify prevailing patterns, perceptions, and relationships among variables. Given the aim of assessing the extent to which cultural and traditional beliefs shape paternal behavior, the quantitative approach provided a suitable framework for generating measurable and comparable insights across different socio-cultural contexts.

The study was conducted in four major urban centers—Accra, Kumasi, Cape Coast, and Tamale—representing diverse socio-cultural environments across Ghana. These cities were selected because they reflect a blend of traditional Ghanaian values and modern family dynamics, making them ideal for a study that seeks to understand how cultural and traditional expectations influence paternal involvement in rapidly evolving social settings. Each location offered unique cultural characteristics, enabling a comprehensive exploration of how traditions operate within urban households.

The target population for the study comprised fathers aged 18 years and above who had at least one child between the ages of 0 and 12 years. This age range was chosen to ensure that respondents were actively engaged in child-rearing or were expected to take part in their children's early developmental stages. Fathers within this bracket are also more likely to experience cultural and traditional pressures related to their roles within the family structure. A sample of 450 fathers was determined using Cochran's widely accepted formula for sample size determination in large populations. This ensured adequate representation and statistical power for conducting correlation and regression analyses.

To select participants, the study relied on stratified sampling to ensure equitable representation from each study location. Within each stratum, households were approached using systematic random procedures. Fathers who met the inclusion criteria were invited to participate. This sampling approach enhanced the generalizability of the findings across urban Ghana, as it allowed the study to capture a wide spectrum of cultural influences and fatherhood experiences.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed specifically for the study. The instrument consisted of sections capturing demographic information, cultural and traditional beliefs, father involvement in childcare, and traditional gender role expectations. All key variables were measured on a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questionnaire was reviewed by experts in family studies and sociocultural research to enhance content validity. A pilot study involving 30 fathers outside the sample confirmed the reliability of the instrument, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.82 to 0.89 across the major scales. These results indicated that the instrument exhibited strong internal consistency and was suitable for the main study.

Data collection was carried out by trained research assistants who administered the questionnaires in person. Respondents were informed of the study's purpose and were assured that participation was voluntary and anonymous. To reduce social desirability bias—common in studies involving parenting roles and cultural expectations—respondents were encouraged to answer honestly and were provided opportunities to complete the questionnaires privately.

Completed questionnaires were entered and analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics, including means, frequencies, and standard deviations, were used to summarize

respondent characteristics and general patterns in father involvement and cultural beliefs. Inferential analyses, such as Pearson correlation and multiple regression, were employed to examine relationships and to determine the extent to which cultural and traditional norms predicted father involvement in childcare. Statistical significance was set at the conventional  $p < 0.05$  threshold.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. Approval for the study was obtained from an accredited Institutional Review Board. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequences, and all collected data were handled confidentially, with no identifying information recorded. This ensured the research adhered to ethical standards while preserving the dignity and privacy of participants.

## **9.0 Results and Data Analysis**

This section presents the statistical findings from the responses of 450 fathers across Accra, Kumasi, Cape Coast, and Tamale. The analysis focuses on the influence of cultural beliefs, traditional gender expectations, and lineage norms on father involvement in child upbringing. Descriptive statistics, correlation tests, and multiple regression analyses were conducted to address the study's objectives.

### **9.1 Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables**

Three key constructs were measured:

- Cultural and traditional beliefs
- Traditional gender role expectations
- Father involvement in childcare

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Major Study Variables. (N = 450)**

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cultural and Traditional Beliefs	3.92	0.68
Traditional Gender Role Expectations	3.78	0.74
Father Involvement in Childcare	3.16	0.82

#### **Interpretation:**

Cultural and traditional beliefs recorded a high mean ( $M = 3.92$ ), indicating that respondents perceive cultural norms as strongly shaping fatherhood roles. Traditional gender expectations were also high ( $M = 3.78$ ), suggesting that participants still view caregiving as primarily the

responsibility of mothers. Father involvement, however, recorded a moderate mean ( $M = 3.16$ ), reflecting inconsistent or partial involvement in daily childcare activities such as bathing, feeding, emotional nurturing, and early learning support.

## **9.2 Correlation Analysis**

A Pearson correlation test assessed the relationships among the study variables.

**Table 2: Correlation Matrix.**

Variables	Cultural Beliefs	Gender Role Expectations	Father Involvement
Cultural Beliefs	1	.681**	-.548**
Gender Role Expectations	.681**	1	-.602**
Father Involvement	-.548**	-.602**	1

**Note: Correlation significant at  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed)**

**Interpretation:**

There is a strong negative relationship between cultural beliefs and father involvement ( $r = -.548$ ), indicating that stronger adherence to traditional culture reduces fathers' participation in childcare. Traditional gender role expectations also showed a strong negative relationship with father involvement ( $r = -.602$ ), suggesting that more traditional views about gender lead to lower caregiver participation. The strong positive correlation between cultural beliefs and gender role expectations ( $r = .681$ ) demonstrates that these constructs are closely connected and mutually reinforcing.

## **9.3 Regression Analysis: Predictors of Father Involvement**

Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine whether cultural and traditional beliefs significantly predict father involvement.

**Table 3: Multiple Regression Model Predicting Father Involvement.**

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t-value	p-value
Cultural and Traditional Beliefs	-0.33	0.06	-.32	-5.50	.000
Traditional Gender Role Expectations	-0.44	0.07	-.41	-6.91	.000
Model Summary	$R = .74$ $R^2 = .55$		$Adjusted R^2 = .55$		

**Interpretation:**

Both predictors significantly influenced father involvement. Traditional gender role

expectations emerged as the strongest predictor ( $\beta = -.41$ ), followed by cultural beliefs ( $\beta = -.32$ ). Together, cultural and traditional expectations explained 55% of the variance in father involvement, indicating a very strong model.

The results confirm that cultural and traditional norms are key determinants of whether or not fathers participate meaningfully in their children's upbringing.

## 10.0 DISCUSSION

The findings of the study demonstrate that culture and tradition play a significant role in shaping father involvement in child upbringing in Ghana. The high mean scores for cultural and traditional beliefs suggest that fathers continue to operate within a framework of long-standing socio-cultural norms that define male and female responsibilities. These results strongly support Gender Role Theory, which states that gendered division of labor is socially constructed and reinforced through generational practices.

The strong negative relationships between cultural beliefs, traditional gender expectations, and father involvement confirm the influence of Hegemonic Masculinity Theory, which argues that traditional conceptions of masculinity position men as providers and authority figures rather than caregivers. Fathers in the study appear to internalize these masculine norms, reducing their participation in nurturing activities.

Moreover, the regression results, which show a high predictive power ( $R^2 = .55$ ), highlight that cultural and traditional expectations are not peripheral influences—they are core determinants of father involvement. This aligns with earlier empirical studies in Ghana and other African settings showing that cultural norms significantly limit male engagement in caregiving activities.

The findings also support Social Constructionism by illustrating how culture and lineage systems—particularly in patrilineal and matrilineal societies—shape paternal involvement. For instance, fathers may feel less obligated to participate actively in childrearing when cultural norms assign responsibility to mothers or maternal relatives.

These results indicate that although modernization and education may influence perceptions of fatherhood, deeply rooted cultural beliefs still exert strong pressure, limiting change in everyday paternal behavior. The study contributes empirical evidence to ongoing discussions about transforming parenting norms and promoting gender-equitable caregiving in Ghana.

## 11.0 CONCLUSION

The study investigated the role of culture and tradition in shaping the involvement of fathers in child upbringing in Ghana. The findings reveal that cultural beliefs and traditional gender expectations significantly reduce father involvement. Despite emerging changes in urban family dynamics, traditional norms continue to define male roles narrowly, reinforcing the perception that childcare is a feminine responsibility. The study highlights the need for cultural transformation, policy intervention, and community engagement to encourage shared parenting responsibilities. By addressing traditional beliefs and gender norms, Ghana can promote healthier family structures and improve children's developmental outcomes.

## 12.0 Recommendations

- Community education programs should be intensified to challenge traditional beliefs that restrict paternal involvement and to promote inclusive parenting norms.
- Health facilities should integrate father-inclusive parenting modules into antenatal and postnatal services to normalize fathers' participation from pregnancy onward.
- Media campaigns should showcase positive images of fatherhood to counteract stereotypes that caregiving is solely a mother's role.
- Schools and religious institutions should include family life education programs that emphasize joint parenting responsibilities and gender equality within households.
- Government agencies and NGOs should design father-focused support programs that reframe caregiving as a shared parental responsibility consistent with modern Ghanaian family life.
- Workplace policies such as flexible leave arrangements and paternity leave should be strengthened to enable fathers to engage more meaningfully in early childcare.
- Traditional leaders and community elders should be involved in sensitization programs to support changes in cultural narratives around fatherhood.

Further research should be encouraged to explore how cultural norms evolve over time and how modernization influences caregiving practices in varying Ghanaian contexts.

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