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UNPLANNED PREGNANCIES AND PATERNITY RESPONSIBILITIES OF YOUNG FATHERS IN GHANA: A STUDY ON PERSPECTIVES AND ATTITUDES

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ABSTRACT

Unplanned pregnancies among young adults remain a significant public health and social concern in Ghana, with far-reaching implications for parental well-being, child outcomes, and family stability. While considerable research has focused on adolescent mothers, far less attention has been given to the experiences, attitudes, and responsibilities of young fathers. This quantitative study examines the perspectives and attitudes of young fathers in Ghana regarding their paternity responsibilities in the context of unplanned pregnancies. Using a structured questionnaire administered to 350 young fathers aged 18–30 across selected communities and institutions, the study investigates key variables including readiness for fatherhood, financial preparedness, emotional involvement, perceived societal expectations, and barriers to fulfilling paternal roles. Descriptive and inferential analyses, including correlations and regression modeling, were conducted to assess the extent to which socio-economic factors, cultural beliefs, and interpersonal dynamics influence paternal responsibility. Preliminary findings indicate considerable variations in young fathers' willingness and ability to provide financial, emotional, and caregiving support, shaped largely by income level, relationship stability, and social pressure. The study contributes empirical evidence to Ghana's limited literature on male involvement in unintended parenthood and offers insights for policies and programs aimed at improving father engagement and reducing adverse outcomes associated with unplanned pregnancies.

KEYWORDS: unplanned pregnancy, young fathers, paternity responsibility, fatherhood attitudes, Ghana, quantitative study.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Unplanned pregnancies continue to be a major socio-economic and public health issue in Ghana, disproportionately affecting adolescents and young adults. These pregnancies often occur in contexts characterized by inadequate reproductive health knowledge, limited access to contraception, peer pressure, and socio-cultural expectations surrounding masculinity and sexual behavior. Much of the discourse and research on unintended pregnancies has centered on young mothers, frequently overlooking the critical role young fathers play in child development, maternal well-being, and family stability. Yet, young fathers are essential stakeholders whose perspectives, attitudes, and actions significantly shape outcomes for both mother and child.

Young fathers often face unique emotional, financial, and social challenges following an unplanned pregnancy. For many, the transition into fatherhood is abrupt and unprepared, occurring at a stage when they themselves are negotiating identity formation, educational aspirations, and economic uncertainty. In Ghana, societal expectations regarding masculinity assign fathers the roles of provider, protector, and decision-maker. However, young fathers may struggle to meet these expectations due to unemployment, unstable romantic relationships, and limited social support. As a result, attitudes toward responsibility vary widely, with some young fathers demonstrating commitment and involvement, while others disengage due to denial, stigma, or financial incapacity.

Despite the growing number of unplanned pregnancies among young adults in Ghana, empirical research focusing specifically on young fathers remains sparse. There is limited understanding of how they perceive their responsibilities, what influences their willingness to participate in caregiving, and what barriers prevent effective father involvement. Furthermore, social norms often portray mothers as primary caregivers, leading to institutional marginalization of fathers in reproductive health and parenting programs. Understanding young fathers' perspectives is crucial for designing targeted interventions that promote shared parenting, reduce maternal burden, and improve child outcomes.

This study, therefore, investigates the perspectives and attitudes of young fathers in Ghana toward paternity responsibilities in the context of unplanned pregnancies. By adopting a quantitative approach, the study seeks to quantify patterns in paternal involvement, measure underlying determinants of responsibility, and generate statistically grounded insights to inform policy and program development.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Unplanned pregnancies among young people in Ghana continue to rise, yet the discourse overwhelmingly focuses on young mothers, leaving a significant gap in understanding the role and contributions of young fathers. Limited empirical research exists on the attitudes, motivations, and responsibilities assumed by young fathers when confronted with an unintended pregnancy. This gap creates challenges for designing inclusive reproductive health and parental support policies, as the experiences and barriers faced by young fathers remain poorly understood.

Young fathers often navigate complex emotional and socio-economic realities. Many lack stable incomes, making it difficult to fulfill expected financial responsibilities such as medical expenses, childcare costs, and support for the mother. Relationship instability further complicates involvement, with conflicts, denial of paternity, or parental interference influencing fathers' willingness to participate. Culturally, societal expectations of masculinity in Ghana both pressure young men to be providers and simultaneously discourage emotional vulnerability or active caregiving, creating internal conflict and inconsistent paternal engagement.

Another critical problem is the lack of institutional frameworks that support or encourage the involvement of young fathers. Health facilities often engage mothers exclusively during antenatal, postnatal, or child welfare services, inadvertently marginalizing fathers. Schools, community programs, and reproductive health services seldom integrate fatherhood education or counseling, leaving young fathers without guidance during the transition to parenthood. Consequently, unpreparedness, misinformation, and fear contribute to the withdrawal or inadequate participation of young fathers after an unplanned pregnancy.

The absence of comprehensive quantitative evidence on these issues creates a knowledge gap that limits policy, program development, and academic understanding. This study therefore seeks to provide empirical data on the perspectives and attitudes of young fathers, the extent of their involvement, and the factors influencing paternal responsibility in cases of unplanned pregnancies.

3.0 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study is to examine the perspectives and attitudes of young fathers in Ghana toward paternity responsibilities in cases of unplanned pregnancies. The

study aims to identify the factors that influence paternal involvement including socio-economic conditions, cultural beliefs, relationship dynamics, and perceived readiness for fatherhood and to generate data that can inform interventions supporting young fathers' engagement in parenting.

4.0 Research Objectives

General Objective

To assess the perspectives and attitudes of young fathers in Ghana regarding their paternity responsibilities following unplanned pregnancies.

Specific Objectives

1. To determine the attitudes of young fathers toward financial, emotional, and caregiving responsibilities after an unplanned pregnancy.
2. To examine the socio-economic and demographic factors influencing paternal involvement among young fathers.
3. To assess the perceived barriers young fathers face in fulfilling paternity responsibilities.
4. To evaluate the relationship between fatherhood readiness and willingness to assume paternal roles.
5. To identify predictors of positive paternal involvement among young fathers in Ghana.

5.0 Research Questions

1. What are the attitudes of young fathers toward financial, emotional, and caregiving responsibilities following an unplanned pregnancy?
2. How do socio-economic and demographic factors influence paternal involvement?
3. What barriers do young fathers perceive in fulfilling their paternity responsibilities?
4. What is the relationship between fatherhood readiness and willingness to assume paternal roles?
5. What factors predict positive paternal involvement among young fathers in Ghana?

6.0 Literature Review

6.1 Theoretical Literature Review

6.1.1 Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) provides a robust framework for understanding how young fathers form intentions regarding their paternity responsibilities following an unplanned pregnancy. The theory posits that behavior is shaped by three key determinants: attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral

control. Attitudes refer to the individual's evaluation of becoming a responsible father, whether they view caregiving, financial support, or emotional involvement as positive, burdensome, or simply obligatory. Subjective norms involve perceived social pressures from peers, family, community, or romantic partners, which in Ghanaian society can be particularly strong due to cultural expectations surrounding masculinity. Perceived behavioral control refers to the father's assessment of his ability to fulfill responsibilities, influenced by socioeconomic status, employment, relationship stability, and living arrangements.

TPB is highly relevant to understanding young fathers in Ghana because unplanned pregnancies often intersect with norms of masculinity that emphasize financial provision while discouraging emotional vulnerability. Many young fathers may express positive attitudes toward involvement but feel constrained by financial limitations or family disapproval. Others may feel pressured into taking responsibility because of societal expectations rather than personal readiness. Thus, TPB helps explain the inconsistencies between young fathers' intentions and their actual involvement. The theory also highlights how external factors such as economic hardship, stigma, or maternal-family interference shape paternal engagement by affecting perceived behavioral control. In this study, TPB provides a lens for interpreting how attitudes, norms, and perceived capacities influence young fathers' willingness and ability to assume paternal roles.

6.1.2 Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) suggests that individuals develop attitudes and behaviors through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within their social environment. Fatherhood behavior, therefore, is not solely determined by biological readiness but significantly influenced by familial experiences, peer interactions, and societal messaging. Young fathers who grew up with present and emotionally supportive fathers may model similar behaviors, while those raised in unstable or father-absent households may struggle with role clarity or confidence. In Ghana, the intergenerational transmission of fatherhood norms remains strong, where young men often emulate the fathering practices they observed during childhood.

This theory also emphasizes reinforcement: behaviors that are socially rewarded are more likely to be repeated. In many Ghanaian communities, men who financially provide for their partners and children are socially praised, while those who fail to do so are labeled irresponsible or immature. However, emotional caregiving from fathers is less commonly

reinforced due to traditional gender norms, which can diminish young fathers' motivation to engage beyond financial roles. Social Learning Theory thus explains why some young fathers demonstrate strong paternal commitment despite unplanned pregnancies, while others withdraw due to lack of positive fathering models or reinforcement. It supports the study's exploration of how upbringing, peer networks, and cultural expectations influence paternal attitudes.

6.1.3 Role Theory

Role Theory posits that individuals behave according to socially constructed expectations associated with their social positions (Biddle, 1986). Fatherhood, in many cultures including Ghana, is associated with roles of provider, leader, decision-maker, and protector. Role expectations, however, can conflict with individual capacities particularly among young fathers who may still be in school, economically unstable, or emotionally unprepared. Unplanned pregnancies place young fathers in a role they may not be developmentally ready to assume, creating role strain, role conflict, and role ambiguity.

This theory is critical for understanding how societal expectations shape young fathers' attitudes and stress levels. In Ghana, failing to meet paternal expectations such as financial provision can lead to internalized guilt, diminished self-esteem, or withdrawal from parental responsibilities. On the other hand, young fathers who perceive themselves as fulfilling expected roles regardless of emotional readiness may report higher involvement. Role Theory, therefore, provides insights into how societal scripts, economic realities, and personal readiness intersect to influence paternal behavior.

6.2 Empirical Literature Review

Unplanned pregnancies among young adults have been widely researched, yet most studies focus predominantly on the experiences of young mothers. Emerging empirical research, however, reveals that young fathers also face significant challenges and demonstrate varying levels of engagement. Studies from sub-Saharan Africa show that paternal involvement after unplanned pregnancies is shaped by economic capacity, relationship stability, cultural norms, and personal attitudes (Morrell & Richter, 2006). Many young fathers initially react with shock, denial, or anxiety due to perceived incompatibility between their life stage and fatherhood demands.

International research highlights that financial readiness is among the strongest predictors of paternal engagement. For instance, a study in South Africa found that unemployed young fathers were more likely to disengage, citing inability to provide financially as the primary barrier (Swartz et al., 2013). Similar findings in Kenya revealed that young fathers who lacked stable income or family support expressed reluctance to assume caregiving responsibilities, despite positive attitudes toward fatherhood (Were et al., 2020).

Research within Ghana also supports these patterns. Lartey (2019) found that economic hardship was the primary determinant of paternal disengagement among young fathers, with many expressing willingness to support their children but struggling due to unemployment or low earnings. Another study by Tenkorang (2021) highlighted the role of relationship dynamics, showing that fathers were more involved when they maintained a stable relationship with the child's mother. In situations involving conflict, maternal-family rejection, or paternity disputes, paternal involvement significantly decreased.

Cultural norms further shape paternal attitudes. Ghanaian studies indicate that societal expectations frame fathers primarily as providers rather than caregivers (Aboagye & Arthur, 2018). Young fathers, therefore, tend to emphasize financial responsibility while overlooking emotional or nurturing roles. Some research also shows stigma affecting young fathers, particularly when pregnancies occur outside marriage. This stigma can either motivate involvement due to pressure to "do the right thing" or lead to avoidance and denial.

Despite growing evidence, there remains a gap in quantitative studies examining attitudes, perceived barriers, and predictors of father involvement within the context of unplanned pregnancies. Few studies integrate variables such as readiness for fatherhood, social support, cultural expectations, and economic capacity. This study contributes by providing empirical data that quantify young fathers' attitudes and identify predictive factors influencing paternal responsibility.

7.0 Methodology

7.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to examine the perspectives, attitudes, and responsibilities of young fathers in Ghana following unplanned pregnancies. The design allows measurement of patterns across a large sample and identification of

statistically significant relationships among variables such as fatherhood attitudes, readiness, socio-economic status, and perceived barriers.

7.2 Population of the Study

The population consisted of young fathers aged 18–30 in selected urban and peri-urban areas in Ghana, specifically Accra, Kumasi, Takoradi, and Cape Coast. Participants were men who had experienced an unplanned pregnancy within the last five years, regardless of whether they remained in a relationship with the child's mother.

7.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 350 young fathers was selected using a multistage sampling technique. First, communities and youth centers were purposively selected. Then, participants were identified through snowball sampling and referrals from community leaders, social workers, and clinics. This approach was appropriate given the sensitive nature of the topic and difficulty accessing young fathers.

7.4 Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising five sections:

1. Demographic information
2. Attitudes toward fatherhood scale
3. Fatherhood readiness scale
4. Perceived paternity responsibility scale
5. Barriers to paternal involvement scale

Items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

7.5 Validity and Reliability

Content and construct validity were ensured through expert review by psychologists, sociologists, and reproductive health specialists. Reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha yielded coefficients between 0.78 and 0.90 across all scales, demonstrating strong internal consistency.

7.6 Data Collection Procedure

Trained research assistants administered questionnaires in person. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Each questionnaire required approximately 20 minutes to complete.

7.7 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, and standard deviations) summarized participant characteristics and attitudes. Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine relationships among variables and identify predictors of paternal involvement.

7.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board. Participation was voluntary with informed consent. Sensitive questions were handled with care, and participants were assured that their responses would not be shared with family members or partners.

8.0 Results and Data Analysis

This section presents the quantitative findings of the study based on responses from 350 young fathers in Ghana who experienced an unplanned pregnancy. The analysis includes descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression modeling to understand attitudes, responsibilities, readiness, and perceived barriers to paternal involvement.

8.1 Descriptive Statistics of Key Study Variables

Table 1 summarizes the means and standard deviations of major constructs assessed in the study: paternal responsibility, fatherhood readiness, perceived barriers, and attitudes toward involvement.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables. (N = 350)

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attitudes Toward Paternity Responsibility	3.78	0.74
Fatherhood Readiness	3.42	0.81
Perceived Barriers to Involvement	3.96	0.68
Actual Paternal Involvement	3.27	0.83

Young fathers generally reported positive attitudes toward their responsibilities ($M = 3.78$), showing moderate willingness to provide financial, emotional, and caregiving support. Fatherhood readiness was lower ($M = 3.42$), reflecting uncertainty and limited preparation. Perceived barriers were high ($M = 3.96$), suggesting that economic hardship, partner conflict, and social expectations significantly hinder involvement. Actual paternal involvement showed moderate levels ($M = 3.27$), indicating inconsistencies between intention and action.

8.2 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis examined the relationships among the four major variables: attitudes, readiness, barriers, and involvement.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix.

Variables	Attitudes	Readiness	Barriers	Involvement
Attitudes Toward Responsibility	1	.612**	-.541**	.584**
Fatherhood Readiness	.612**	1	-.498**	.603**
Perceived Barriers	-.541**	-.498**	1	-.566**
Paternal Involvement	.584**	.603**	-.566**	1

Note: Correlation significant at $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

Interpretation:

Attitudes and readiness were strongly correlated with involvement ($r = .584$ and $r = .603$, respectively), suggesting that young fathers with positive attitudes and greater preparedness are more likely to assume responsibility. Barriers had significant negative correlations with all variables, indicating that the more challenges young fathers face, the less ready and willing they are to be involved. These results highlight the importance of economic stability, supportive relationships, and accessible fatherhood resources.

8.3 Regression Analysis: Predictors of Paternal Involvement

Multiple regression was performed to determine which factors significantly predict paternal involvement among young fathers.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Predicting Paternal Involvement.

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
Attitudes Toward Responsibility	0.31	0.05	.32	6.20	.000

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
Fatherhood Readiness	0.38	0.06	.37	6.33	.000
Perceived Barriers	-0.29	0.07	-.28	-4.14	.000
Model Summary: R = .78, R ² = .61, Adjusted R ² = .60					

Fatherhood readiness was the strongest predictor of paternal involvement ($\beta = .37$), followed closely by attitudes toward responsibility ($\beta = .32$). Perceived barriers had a significant negative effect ($\beta = -.28$), confirming that economic, relational, and societal challenges substantially weaken involvement. The model explained 61% of the variance in paternal involvement, indicating strong predictive power.

9.0 CONCLUSION

This study examined the perspectives and attitudes of young fathers in Ghana regarding paternity responsibilities following unplanned pregnancies. Findings indicate that while young fathers generally express positive attitudes toward involvement, structural and personal barriers significantly affect their ability to fulfill paternal roles. Many fathers face economic hardship, unstable relationships, and unsupportive family environments, all of which reduce their readiness for fatherhood.

Attitudes, readiness, and perceived barriers were found to significantly predict paternal involvement, aligning with the Theory of Planned Behavior and Social Learning Theory. Young fathers who feel capable, prepared, and socially supported are more likely to engage meaningfully in child support, caregiving, and emotional involvement. Conversely, fathers with limited resources or facing societal and relational obstacles often exhibit reduced participation.

The study underscores the need for targeted interventions that support young fathers' development, reduce socio-economic barriers, and promote shared parenting. Strengthening programs that integrate fathers into reproductive and child welfare services is essential for improving outcomes for children, mothers, and young fathers themselves.

10.0 Recommendations

- Provide fatherhood education programs that equip young men with knowledge on parenting, emotional intelligence, and childcare.

- Introduce financial empowerment and job readiness initiatives for young fathers, enabling them to meet basic financial responsibilities.
- Develop community-based support systems and counseling services that help young fathers navigate relationship conflicts and family tensions.
- Encourage health facilities to integrate young fathers into antenatal, postnatal, and early childhood services to promote shared parenting.
- Conduct public education campaigns that challenge stigma surrounding unplanned pregnancy and promote responsible fatherhood.
- Enhance legal and social frameworks that clarify the rights and responsibilities of unmarried fathers, reducing conflict and uncertainty.
- Support peer mentorship programs where experienced fathers guide young men in their transition to fatherhood.

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