
THE CHALLENGES OF RAISING CHILDREN WITH A PURPOSE AFTER DIVORCE IN RURAL AND URBAN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study employed a triangulated methodology combining participant observation, peer perception interviews, and family profiling to explore the challenges of raising children with a sense of purpose following parental divorce in rural and urban Ghana. Drawing upon Social Constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and Ubuntu Philosophy (Gyekye, 1997), the study conducted 120 hours of participant observation across twelve family settings (six rural and six urban), 36 peer perception interviews with extended family members, neighbours, and teachers who evaluated each other's parenting effectiveness, and family profiling of 48 divorced parents to map household composition, economic resources, kinship support networks, and educational aspirations for children. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) integrated with observational field notes and family profile coding. Six overarching themes emerged from the triangulated data: the stigma paradox, wherein divorced parents in rural settings faced intense social condemnation while urban settings offered greater anonymity but also greater isolation; the economic precarity cascade, wherein divorce triggered downward economic mobility that directly undermined parents' capacity to invest in children's purposeful development; the kinship reconfiguration, wherein extended family networks simultaneously provided essential support and imposed competing demands that fragmented parenting authority; the purpose transmission dilemma, wherein parents struggled to model and instil purpose when their own post-divorce identities were fractured and uncertain; the urban-rural resource divide, wherein urban parents had access to educational and extracurricular resources but lacked the communal oversight that rural parents relied upon; and the triangulation divergence, wherein parent self-reports of purposeful parenting diverged significantly from child outcomes and peer observations, revealing a gap between aspiration and practice. The study contributes to

the understanding of how divorce disrupts the intergenerational transmission of purpose in Ghanaian contexts, offering methodological contributions to triangulated family research and practical insights for social workers, religious institutions, and policymakers supporting divorced parents and their children.

KEYWORDS: *Divorce, purposeful parenting, Ghana, Ubuntu, Social Constructionism, triangulation, rural-urban comparison, kinship, stigma.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Ghanaian family is undergoing a profound transformation. Rising divorce rates, increasing urbanisation, and the erosion of extended family supports have created new challenges for parents raising children alone (Amoateng & Boadi, 2022). Divorce, once rare and heavily stigmatised in Ghanaian society, has become increasingly common, particularly in urban centres where exposure to global norms of individual autonomy and marital choice has reshaped expectations of marriage (Takyi & Oheneba-Sakyi, 2021). Yet the cultural residue of stigma persists, especially in rural communities where marriage remains a communal institution rather than a private arrangement. Divorced parents in these contexts navigate a double burden: managing their own emotional and economic recovery while simultaneously raising children with a sense of purpose in a social environment that may marginalise or pity them.

The concept of raising children "with a purpose" carries particular significance in Ghanaian cultural contexts. In Ubuntu philosophy, personhood is achieved through contribution to community, and children are raised not merely to succeed individually but to fulfil roles that sustain family and community wellbeing (Gyekye, 1997; Metz, 2011). Purpose, in this framework, is relational: it is about becoming someone who matters to others, who upholds family honour, who contributes to collective welfare. Divorce threatens this purpose transmission in multiple ways. Economically, divorce often reduces household resources, limiting investments in children's education and extracurricular development (Adjei & Adomako, 2023). Socially, divorce may fracture the kinship networks that traditionally provided mentorship, modelling, and moral guidance. Psychologically, divorced parents may struggle with depression, anxiety, or identity disruption that impairs their ability to model purposeful living for their children (Amponsah & Appau, 2022).

Despite the growing significance of understanding how divorce affects purposeful parenting, empirical research in Ghana has been limited by methodological challenges. Most studies

have relied on single-method designs (surveys or interviews) that capture parents' self-reports but cannot verify actual parenting practices or child outcomes. Few studies have incorporated direct observation of parent-child interactions, and fewer still have triangulated observation with peer evaluations and family economic data. The absence of triangulated inquiry is significant because purposeful parenting is a multidimensional construct that includes parent aspiration (what I want for my child), parent behaviour (what I actually do), child perception (what my child understands), and community evaluation (what others see). These dimensions may diverge: a parent may express strong aspirations for their child's purpose but provide limited practical support, and peers may perceive parenting failures that parents themselves do not recognise.

This study addresses these gaps by employing a triangulated methodology that combines participant observation (capturing parent-child interactions in home and community settings), peer perception interviews (capturing how extended family, neighbours, and teachers evaluate parenting effectiveness), and family profiling (capturing household composition, economic resources, kinship networks, and educational investments). By integrating these three methods, the study aims to map the challenges of raising purpose-driven children after divorce, identifying not only what parents say they do but what they actually do and how others perceive their parenting.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite growing recognition that divorce creates unique challenges for parenting in Ghanaian contexts, significant gaps exist in empirical knowledge about the specific challenges of raising children with purpose after marital dissolution. These gaps carry both theoretical consequences for understanding family transformation in Africa and practical consequences for interventions supporting divorced parents and their children.

First, the differential challenges faced by divorced parents in rural versus urban Ghana have not been systematically compared. Rural divorced parents operate within communities where marriage is highly visible, and divorce remains stigmatised; urban divorced parents operate within more anonymous settings where divorce is more accepted, but social isolation may be greater. These contextual differences may produce different parenting challenges requiring different interventions, but empirical comparisons are lacking.

Second, the specific mechanisms through which divorce disrupts the transmission of purpose from parent to child have not been identified. Does divorce disrupt purpose transmission through economic deprivation (reducing resources for purposeful development), through

psychological distress (impairing parental modelling), through social network fragmentation (reducing mentors and role models), through identity confusion (parents unsure of their own purpose), or through all of these mechanisms operating simultaneously? Different mechanisms require different interventions.

Third, the role of extended family networks in supporting or complicating purposeful parenting after divorce has not been examined. In Ghanaian kinship systems, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and older siblings traditionally play significant roles in child-rearing (Nukunya, 2016). Divorce may activate these networks (as family members rally to support children) but may also complicate them (as family members take sides, impose competing expectations, or undermine parental authority). The net effect of kinship reconfiguration on purposeful parenting is unknown.

Fourth, the relationship between parent self-perception of purposeful parenting, peer evaluation of parenting effectiveness, and observed parent-child interactions has not been examined using triangulated methods. Existing research relies on parent self-reports, which may be inflated by social desirability or clouded by wishful thinking. Children's experiences of purposeful parenting may differ dramatically from parents' reports. Without triangulated methods, these gaps cannot be identified or addressed.

Fifth, the methodological gap in family research the absence of triangulated designs that combine observation, peer evaluation, and economic data has limited confidence in existing findings about post-divorce parenting. The present study addresses this gap by employing a triangulated design that allows cross-method validation and the identification of gaps between aspiration, behaviour, and perception.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this triangulated qualitative study is to explore the challenges of raising children with a sense of purpose after parental divorce in rural and urban Ghana, using participant observation, peer perception interviews, and family profiling to map patterns of parenting practice, community evaluation, and family resource allocation.

4. Objectives of the Study

The following specific objectives guided this study:

- To observe and document parent-child interactions across rural and urban divorced family settings, focusing on practices that support or undermine children's sense of purpose.

- To conduct peer perception interviews capturing how extended family members, neighbours, and teachers evaluate the parenting effectiveness of divorced parents.
- To develop family profiles capturing household composition, economic resources, kinship support networks, educational investments, and parent mental health status.
- To map patterns of convergence and divergence among parent self-perception, peer evaluation, and observed parenting behaviour.
- To compare the challenges of purposeful parenting after divorce in rural versus urban Ghanaian contexts.
- To examine how extended family networks support or complicate purposeful parenting after divorce.

5. Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

Research Question One: What are the specific challenges divorced parents in rural and urban Ghana face in raising children with a sense of purpose?

Research Question Two: How does the rural-urban context shape the nature and intensity of these challenges?

Research Question Three: How do extended family networks support or complicate purposeful parenting after divorce?

Research Question Four: What is the relationship between parent self-perception of purposeful parenting, peer evaluation of parenting effectiveness, and observed parent-child interactions, and what explains areas of convergence or divergence?

Research Question Five: What resources and strategies do divorced parents employ to instil purpose in their children despite the challenges they face?

6. LITERATURE REVIEW

6.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical perspectives: Social Constructionism and Ubuntu Philosophy. Social Constructionism, as elaborated by Berger and Luckmann (1966), posits that social reality, including the meaning of divorce, the significance of purpose, and the expectations of parenting, is actively constructed through shared meanings, language, and symbolic interaction (Gergen, 2015). From this perspective, the challenges of raising children with purpose after divorce are not fixed or universal but are constructed differently in rural and urban contexts and shaped by economic status, kinship

networks, and cultural narratives about marriage, family, and success. Divorce in rural Ghana is socially constructed as a failure, a source of shame, and a threat to lineage continuity; divorce in urban Ghana is increasingly constructed as a private decision, a second chance, or even an act of empowerment, particularly among educated women. These different social constructions shape the experiences of divorced parents and their children, influencing the availability of social support, the nature of stigma encountered, and the resources available for purposeful parenting.

Ubuntu Philosophy, the second theoretical pillar of this study, provides a culturally grounded framework for understanding what it means to raise children "with a purpose" in Ghanaian contexts. The Ubuntu principle, encapsulated in the Akan proverb *obi nkye obi* (one person does not exist without others), posits that personhood is constituted through relationships and communal participation (Gyekye, 1997; Metz, 2011). Purpose, in this framework, is not individual achievement (career success, wealth accumulation) but relational contribution: becoming a person who matters to others, who upholds family honour, who contributes to community wellbeing. Divorce threatens this understanding of purpose in multiple ways. It fragments the family unit that traditionally transmits purpose; it disrupts the modelling of relational commitment; it may reduce the resources available for children's development; and it may create identity confusion for children who must navigate divided loyalties between parents and extended family members. The study examines how divorced parents navigate these threats, seeking to instil purpose in their children despite the fragmentation that divorce creates.

6.2 Divorce in Ghanaian Contexts

Divorce in Ghana has historical roots in customary marriage practices, where divorce was possible but rare, constrained by economic interdependence, kinship obligations, and social stigma (Nukunya, 2016). Traditional Akan marriage, for example, involved the transfer of bridewealth (*nsa*), which created economic and social bonds between families that made divorce costly and shameful (Amoateng & Boadi, 2022). Divorce was more common in matrilineal than patrilineal societies, but in all contexts, it was a last resort, deployed only in cases of infertility, severe abuse, or chronic neglect.

Contemporary Ghana has experienced significant increases in divorce rates, particularly in urban areas where exposure to global norms of individual autonomy, romantic love, and gender equality has reshaped expectations of marriage (Takyi & Oheneba-Sakyi, 2021). Urban women, in particular, have greater economic independence and access to legal protections, enabling them to leave unhappy marriages that their mothers and grandmothers

would have endured. However, this increased divorce rate has not been accompanied by a corresponding cultural shift in attitudes toward divorce, particularly in rural areas where traditional norms remain strong. Rural divorced women face intense stigma, social exclusion, and economic hardship, while rural divorced men face less stigma but may struggle with the loss of children to maternal kin in matrilineal systems (Adjei & Adomako, 2023).

6.3 Divorce and Parenting in African Contexts

Parenting after divorce in African contexts differs from Western patterns due to extended family involvement. In many African societies, divorce does not end the co-parenting relationship between extended families; grandparents, aunts, and uncles continue to play significant roles in children's lives, sometimes more significant than the divorced parents themselves (Nsamenang, 2011). This kinship involvement can be protective, providing children with emotional support and continuity when parents are struggling. However, kinship involvement can also be complicating, creating competing demands, divided loyalties, and conflicts over child-rearing authority.

Research on post-divorce parenting in Africa has found that mothers typically retain primary custody, while fathers' involvement declines significantly, particularly if they remarry (Amponsah & Appau, 2022). This maternal burden creates economic challenges, as women generally have lower incomes and fewer economic opportunities than men. Extended family support can mitigate these economic challenges but may also create relational challenges, as mothers must negotiate parenting authority with grandmothers, aunts, and other relatives who may have different views on child-rearing (Nukunya, 2016).

Research on purposeful parenting oriented toward developing children's sense of meaning, direction, and contribution is limited in African contexts, but existing studies suggest that purpose is strongly linked to family honour, community contribution, and religious faith (Lomotey, 2023). Parents in African societies typically define purpose not as individual self-fulfilment but as fulfilling roles that sustain family and community. This relational understanding of purpose may make post-divorce purposeful parenting particularly challenging, as divorce disrupts the family structures that traditionally transmit purpose.

6.4 Rural-Urban Differences in Parenting and Divorce

Rural-urban differences in parenting after divorce in Ghana are substantial but understudied. Rural communities are characterised by lower population density, stronger kinship ties, greater social surveillance, and more traditional norms; urban communities are characterised by higher population density, weaker kinship ties, greater anonymity, and more cosmopolitan

norms (Adjei & Adomako, 2023). These contextual differences shape divorced parents' experiences in multiple ways.

Rural divorced parents face greater stigma, more intense social surveillance, and fewer economic opportunities. However, they also have greater access to extended family support, more community oversight of children, and clearer cultural scripts for parenting. Urban divorced parents face less stigma and greater economic opportunities but may experience more isolation, weaker kinship support, and less community oversight of children. The net effect of these rural-urban differences on purposeful parenting is unknown, but it is likely that the challenges differ in kind as well as intensity: rural divorced parents may struggle more with social stigma and economic precarity, while urban divorced parents may struggle more with isolation and role ambiguity.

6.5 Triangulated Methodology in Parenting Research

Triangulation, the use of multiple methods to study the same phenomenon, is a hallmark of rigorous qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In parenting research, triangulation is particularly valuable because parent self-reports, peer evaluations, and observed behaviour often diverge. Parents may overestimate their involvement in children's lives (social desirability bias); peers may be influenced by friendship or rivalry in their evaluations; observers may miss private parenting moments that occur when not observed. Despite these advantages, triangulated parenting research is rare in African contexts. Most studies rely on parent self-report, typically surveys or interviews. The present study addresses this gap by intentionally triangulating participant observation, peer perception interviews, and family profiling.

6.6 Gaps in the Literature and Contribution of This Study

The literature review reveals that no study has employed a triangulated methodology (participant observation, peer perception interviews, family profiling) to examine the challenges of raising children with purpose after divorce in Ghana. The present study addresses this gap by generating rich qualitative data across multiple methods, contributing both to empirical understanding of post-divorce parenting in Ghana and to methodological development in family research.

7. METHODOLOGY

7.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative, interpretive research design employing methodological triangulation across three data collection strategies: participant observation, peer perception

interviews, and family profiling. Triangulation was used to capture multiple dimensions of parenting (observed parent-child interaction, peer evaluation of parenting effectiveness, family structural position) and to enable cross-method validation of findings. The study was conducted across twelve family settings: six rural sites (villages in the Eastern and Central Regions of Ghana) and six urban sites (neighbourhoods in Accra and Kumasi). These settings were selected to capture variation in rural-urban context, economic status, and kinship support among divorced parents.

7.2 Research Approach

A constructivist-interpretivist research philosophy guided this study. Constructivism assumes that social reality, including parenting and purpose, is constructed through meaning-making activities (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). The interpretivist approach holds that the researcher's role is to interpret the meanings participants ascribe to their experiences. This approach aligns with the study's interest in how rural-urban context shapes the meaning of divorce and purposeful parenting. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout data collection and analysis, documenting how prior knowledge of Ghanaian family structures and rural-urban differences shaped the interpretive process.

7.3 Study Setting

The study was conducted across twelve family settings: six rural settings (villages in the Eastern Region and Central Region, including Nsawam, Suhum, Mampong, and Dunkwa-on-Offin) and six urban settings (neighbourhoods in Accra, including Madina, Adenta, and Nima, and neighbourhoods in Kumasi, including Asokwa and Bantama). These settings were selected to capture variation in divorce prevalence, kinship density, economic opportunity, and access to educational resources. Rural settings were characterised by lower population density, stronger kinship ties, and more traditional norms; urban settings were characterised by higher population density, weaker kinship ties, and more cosmopolitan norms.

7.4 Study Population

The study population comprised Ghanaian divorced parents aged 28 to 55 years who had at least one child aged 6 to 18 years living with them or primarily in their care following divorce, and who had been divorced for at least two years (to ensure that the acute crisis phase had passed). Participants were sampled across the rural-urban divide and across the economic status continuum (lower, middle, upper) to enable comparative analysis of contextual effects.

7.5 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was employed across three stages. First, rural and urban sites were purposively selected to represent variation in divorce experience and parenting context. Second, within each site, participants were purposively sampled for family profiling and peer perception interviews to ensure representation across age, gender, economic status, and number of children. Third, participant observation focused on families who were willing to be observed in their homes and community settings. Economic status was assessed through household asset ownership, parental education, and subjective recollections of economic circumstances. Kinship support was assessed through proximity and frequency of contact with extended family members.

7.6 Sample Size

The study comprised 48 divorced parents across twelve settings (approximately 4 per setting): 24 rural parents (12 female, 12 male) and 24 urban parents (12 female, 12 male). Among the 48 participants, ages ranged from 28 to 55 years. Economic status distribution: lower-income (household assets below median, parental education below secondary), 16 participants; middle-income (household assets near median, parental education secondary or some tertiary), 16 participants; upper-income (household assets above median, parental education university or professional), 16 participants. Participant observation captured parent-child interactions across all 48 families. Additionally, peer perception interviews were conducted with 36 peers (extended family members, neighbours, teachers) across all sites.

7.7 Data Collection Instruments

Participant Observation Protocol. The researcher conducted 10 hours of observation per family setting (120 hours total across 12 settings). Observation focused on four parenting dimensions relevant to purposeful child development: parent-child interaction quality (warmth, responsiveness, communication), parental modelling of purpose (work, community contribution, religious engagement), parental investment in child development (educational support, extracurricular activities, mentorship), and parental management of divorce-related challenges (stigma management, co-parenting arrangements, kinship negotiation). Field notes were recorded in a structured template with descriptive observation and reflective commentary. Observations were conducted at varying times (early morning, midday, evening) and days (weekdays and weekends) to capture routine variation.

Peer Perception Interview Guide. Semi-structured interviews (45–60 minutes) were conducted with 36 peers (three per divorced parent: one extended family member, one neighbour, and one teacher where applicable). The guide elicited evaluations of parenting

effectiveness on dimensions relevant to purposeful child development: whether the parent instils values, whether the parent provides adequate resources, whether the parent models purpose, and whether the parent maintains appropriate authority and warmth. Prompts included: "Think of a divorced parent you consider to be raising their children well. What specifically do they do?" "Think of a divorced parent whose children are struggling. What is the parent doing or not doing?" "How does this community view divorced parents?" "What support is available for divorced parents?"

Family Profile Questionnaire. A structured questionnaire captured: household composition (who lives in the home, relationships, ages); economic resources (income, housing quality, asset ownership); educational investments (school fees, tutoring, educational materials); kinship support (proximity, frequency of contact, type of support provided); co-parenting arrangements (contact with ex-spouse, shared parenting); parent mental health (self-reported depression, anxiety, loneliness); and parent aspirations for children (educational goals, career aspirations, values to instil). Divorce history was assessed through duration since divorce, reason for divorce, and current relationship with ex-spouse.

7.8 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted between July and October 2026. Phase One (participant observation) was conducted first, allowing the researcher to develop familiarity with each family before interviews. Observation occurred in 2–3 hour blocks per visit, with visits scheduled across different days and times. The researcher took a moderate participant role (observing but not engaging in parenting activities except when necessary for rapport). Phase Two (family profiling and peer perception interviews) was conducted after observation was complete at each site. Interviews were conducted in private spaces away from children where possible. Phase Three (integration and triangulation) involved comparing observation field notes with interview transcripts and family profiles to identify convergent and divergent patterns.

7.9 Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022) reflexive thematic analysis, adapted for triangulated data. Analysis proceeded in three stages. Stage One: Separate analysis of each data source (observation field notes, interview transcripts, family profiles) to identify within-source themes. Stage Two: Cross-source comparison to identify convergent themes (findings consistent across methods), divergent themes (findings that differ across methods, prompting deeper analysis), and unique themes (findings emerging from only one method). Stage Three: Integrated analysis examining patterns across rural-urban contexts and

economic status categories. The co-facilitator independently coded a 25% sample of data from each source, and coding differences were discussed and negotiated. Triangulation validity was enhanced by systematically searching for disconfirming evidence across methods.

7.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Ghana. All interview participants provided written informed consent. For participant observation, the researcher obtained family consent and informed all family members of the researcher's presence and purpose. To protect anonymity, family descriptions are generalised, and participant identifiers are removed. Child identities are protected; observations of children are reported only in aggregate and without identifying details. Peer perception interviews were conducted with care to avoid identifying specific parents; peers were asked to describe behaviours without naming specific individuals where possible.

8. FINDINGS

Reflexive thematic analysis of the triangulated data, participant observation (120 hours), peer perception interviews (36 peers), and family profiling (48 divorced parents) yielded six overarching themes.

8.1 Theme One: "They Pity You, Then They Blame You" The Stigma Paradox

The first theme concerned the paradoxical nature of divorce stigma in rural versus urban contexts. Divorced parents in rural settings faced intense social condemnation: they were pitied, gossiped about, and sometimes socially excluded. However, this same community scrutiny also provided accountability and support: neighbours watched children, provided meals, and offered unsolicited parenting advice. Urban divorced parents faced less overt stigma but also less support, experiencing a kind of isolated indifference that was described as "lonelier than condemnation."

Field notes from a rural village in the Eastern Region documented this pattern:

3:00 pm. Mother returning from farm. Neighbours gather as she arrives, greeting her children who are playing outside. Two neighbours bring food, groundnuts, and cassava, saying, "the children must eat." But later, when the mother is inside, neighbours whisper: "She brought this on herself. She was too proud. Now look at her, struggling alone."

A 42-year-old rural divorced mother (Site R1) with three children stated:

"People feel sorry for me. They bring food sometimes. They watch my children when I am at the farm. But they also blame me. They say I did not try hard enough to keep my marriage."

They say my children will grow up without discipline. The pity and the blame come together. It is confusing."

Urban divorced parents described a different experience. A 38-year-old urban divorced mother (Site U2) with two children stated:

"In Accra, no one cares that you are divorced. Everyone has a story. But no one helps either. I live in my flat, I go to work, and I come home. My children are with me. No one checks on them. No one brings food. No one asks if I am okay. The lack of stigma is good, but the loneliness is hard."

Economic profiling revealed that stigma intensity was inversely related to economic status. Upper-income divorced parents (particularly in urban areas) were able to use money to "buy insulation" from stigma: living in gated communities, sending children to private schools, hiring domestic help. Lower-income divorced parents, particularly in rural areas, had no such insulation and experienced stigma daily.

Peer perception interviews confirmed the stigma paradox. A 55-year-old rural grandmother (Site R1) stated:

"We judge them, yes. But we also help them. The children must not suffer because the parents failed. In the village, we all help raise the children. Even if the parents are divorced, the children belong to the community."

8.2 Theme Two: "I Used to Have, Now I Have Nothing" The Economic Precarity Cascade

The second theme concerned the economic consequences of divorce and their cascading effects on purposeful parenting. Across both rural and urban settings, divorce triggered significant downward economic mobility, particularly for women. This economic precarity directly undermined parents' capacity to invest in children's purposeful development: school fees went unpaid, educational materials were lacking, extracurricular activities were cancelled, and children were pulled from school to work.

Field notes from an urban low-income neighbourhood in Accra (Site U4) documented this pattern:

6:30 am. Mother preparing porridge for two children. No eggs, no milk. Children are wearing school uniforms that are too small, with holes in the sleeves. Mother says: "I will ask the school for more time to pay fees." 7:15 am. Children leave for school. Mother stays behind, unable to afford transport to her informal market job today. She will lose a day's income.

A 34-year-old urban divorced mother (Site U4) with two children stated:

"Before the divorce, my husband paid school fees. He bought the uniforms. He paid rent. Now, I do everything alone, and I earn half of what he earned. I cannot afford textbooks. I cannot afford tutoring. My children are falling behind. I tell them to work hard in school, to have a purpose, to be better than me. But how can they? I cannot even afford a textbook."

Rural divorced parents faced similar economic precarity but with a different structure. Rural women often retained access to land and farm income after divorce, but their earning capacity was limited, and the non-farm economy was weak. A 45-year-old rural divorced mother (Site R3) with four children stated:

"I have the land. I can farm. But farming does not pay for school. It feeds us, barely. My children help on the farm. They are not in school regularly because I need their labour. I know they need education. I know they need a future. But what can I do? We must survive today."

Economic profiling revealed that the economic precarity cascade was most severe for lower-income rural divorced women, who experienced the greatest percentage loss of household income and had the fewest resources for recovery. Middle-income urban divorced women were better able to maintain pre-divorce standards because they had formal employment and access to credit.

Peer perception interviews captured the community's assessment of this economic precarity. A 52-year-old rural neighbour (Site R3) stated:

"She works so hard. She is on the farm before sunrise. She never stops. But the children suffer. They have no shoes. They go to school hungry. We try to help, but we are poor too. It is a bad situation."

8.3 Theme Three: "The Family Helps, Then the Family Fights" Kinship Reconfiguration

The third theme concerned the complex role of extended family networks in post-divorce parenting. Kinship networks simultaneously provided essential support childcare, economic assistance, emotional support and imposed competing demands that fragmented parenting authority and created conflict. This kinship reconfiguration was a central feature of post-divorce parenting in both rural and urban contexts, though it took different forms.

A 40-year-old rural divorced mother (Site R2) with three children described the support side of kinship:

"My mother and sisters help me. They take the children when I am in the farm. They help with school fees if they have money. Without them, I could not manage."

But she also described the conflict:

"They also tell me how to raise the children. They say I am too strict. They say I am too lenient. They say I spoil them. They say I neglect them. There is always something. Sometimes I feel like I am not the mother anymore. They have taken over. And if I complain, they say 'We are helping you, you should be grateful.'"

Urban divorced parents experienced kinship differently. Urbanisation had weakened kinship ties; many urban divorced parents lived far from their extended families and had only sporadic contact. A 39-year-old urban divorced mother (Site U1) with one child stated:

"My family is in Kumasi. I am in Accra. They call sometimes. They ask how we are. But they cannot help. They have their own problems. I am raising my child alone. No one tells me what to do, but no one helps either. It is a trade-off."

Observation confirmed these patterns. In rural settings, extended family members were regularly present in the home, providing childcare, sharing meals, and participating in parenting decisions. In urban settings, extended family members were largely absent, and parents managed childcare through hired help, school programmes, or arranging with other divorced parents.

Economic profiling revealed that kinship support varied systematically by economic status. Upper-income parents (urban and rural) could choose to accept or reject kinship support; they had the resources to hire help and did not need to tolerate family interference. Lower-income parents, particularly rural, had no such choice; they accepted kinship support on the family's terms.

Peer perception interviews captured the community view of kinship dynamics. A 60-year-old rural grandfather (Site R5) stated:

"We help because these are our grandchildren. We will not let them suffer because their parents failed. But we also know the mother needs to raise them. We try to help without taking over. It is not easy."

8.4 Theme Four: "How Can I Teach Purpose When I Have Lost Mine?" The Purpose Transmission Dilemma

The fourth theme concerned the challenge of instilling purpose in children when parents themselves were struggling to find purpose after divorce. Parents described a profound identity crisis post-divorce: they were no longer "wife" or "husband" in the same way; their social roles were fractured; they experienced depression, anxiety, and loss of meaning. This inner turmoil impaired their capacity to model purpose for children.

A 41-year-old rural divorced father (Site R4) with two children stated:

"I used to know who I was. I was a husband, a father, a provider. Now I am just a divorced man. I see my children on weekends. I pay what I can. But I do not feel like a father. I feel like a failure. How can I teach my children purpose when I have lost my own?"

A 36-year-old urban divorced mother (Site U3) with two children echoed this sentiment:

"I tell my children to be strong, to focus on their goals, to not let life defeat them. But inside, I am broken. I cry at night. I do not know what I am living for. My purpose was my marriage, my family. Now that is gone. I am pretending for my children. But they can see. They know."

Observation confirmed these self-reports. Parents who expressed high levels of identity crisis were observed engaging in less warm, less responsive parenting. They were physically present but emotionally absent: going through the motions of parenting without the affective engagement that children need to internalise values and purpose.

Peer perception interviews captured the community's recognition of this dilemma. A 45-year-old urban teacher (Site U3) stated:

"The parents are struggling. They are trying, but they are not okay. You can see it. They come to school events alone, looking tired, looking sad. The children notice. They act out. They are looking for something someone to help them make sense of their lives."

Economic profiling revealed that the purpose transmission dilemma was most acute for parents who had defined their identity primarily through marriage (full-time wives, mothers who had not worked outside the home). These parents experienced the greatest identity disruption after divorce and had the fewest resources economic, social, psychological to reconstruct purpose for themselves and their children.

8.5 Theme Five: "In the Village, Everyone Watches; In the City, No One Does" The Urban-Rural Resource Divide

The fifth theme concerned the systematic differences between rural and urban contexts in resources available for purposeful parenting. Rural parents had less access to formal educational and extracurricular resources but more access to communal oversight and informal mentoring. Urban parents had more access to formal resources (schools, tutoring, sports, arts) but less access to communal oversight and informal mentoring. This urban-rural resource divide created different challenges for purposeful parenting.

A 44-year-old rural divorced mother (Site R6) with three children stated:

"In the village, the children are never alone. Someone is always watching. If they misbehave, someone tells me. If they are struggling, someone helps. That is good. But we do not have good schools. We do not have sports. We do not have computers. My children cannot compete with city children."

A 37-year-old urban divorced mother (Site U5) with two children stated:

"There are many opportunities in Accra. Good schools, music lessons, sports. I can send my children to many places. But no one watches them. They come home from school, and I am still at work. They are alone. I do not know what they do. I do not know who they are with. I worry."

Observation confirmed these different patterns. In rural settings, children were observed in communal spaces playing with neighbours' children, helping with farm work, attending community events. In urban settings, children were observed in private spaces apartments, gated compounds with limited interaction with neighbours or community members.

Peer perception interviews captured the community's view of these differences. A 40-year-old urban neighbour (Site U6) stated:

"In Accra, everyone minds their own business. We do not watch other people's children. We do not intervene. Maybe that is freedom, but maybe it is neglect."

A 50-year-old rural neighbour (Site R2) stated:

"In the village, everyone is responsible. If a child is doing wrong, I can correct them. If a child is hungry, I can feed them. We raise children together. It is not perfect, but it is better than being alone."

Economic profiling revealed that the urban-rural resource divide was moderated by economic status. Upper-income urban parents could afford private schools, hired childcare, and extracurricular activities that compensated for the absence of communal oversight. Lower-income urban parents had neither communal oversight nor formal resources, making them the most vulnerable group.

8.6 Theme Six: "I Say I Am Doing Well, But Am I?" Triangulation Divergence

The sixth theme concerned the triangulation process itself: comparing parent self-perception of purposeful parenting, peer evaluation of parenting effectiveness, and observed parent-child interactions revealed significant divergence across methods. Parents consistently rated themselves as more effective, more engaged, and more purposeful than peers rated them, and observation often revealed gaps between parent aspirations and actual behaviour.

A 42-year-old urban divorced father (Site U2) stated in interview:

"I am raising my children well. I work hard to provide for them. I am teaching them values. They will be successful."

Observation over 10 hours recorded this father engaging with his children for approximately 15 minutes across three separate visits brief exchanges about homework and meal times.

Most interactions were brief, transactional, and emotionally neutral. The children spent the majority of observed time on their own, watching television or playing on phones.

Peer perception interviews (teacher and neighbour) confirmed the observation pattern. The teacher stated:

"He is never involved. He does not come to parent-teacher conferences. He does not respond to my calls. The children are quiet but they are struggling. They need more from him."

When shown this divergence during member checking, the participant acknowledged:

"I want to be a good father. I believe I am. But maybe I am not doing as much as I think. Work takes so much of my time. When I am home, I am tired. I do the minimum."

A 39-year-old rural divorced mother (Site R2) stated in interview:

"I am teaching my children purpose. I am showing them how to work hard, how to be honest, how to help others."

Observation over 10 hours recorded this mother working constantly farming, cooking, cleaning with limited time for direct interaction with children. Children observed were helping with chores, but there was minimal conversation about values, goals, or purpose. The children were learning through observation and participation, but not through the explicit teaching the mother believed she was providing.

Peer perception interviews (grandmother) stated:

"She is a good mother. She works very hard. But she does not talk to the children. She does not teach them. She is too tired. I think she wants to, but she has no energy."

This triangulation divergence the gap between parent aspiration and actual practice was observed across all settings and economic status categories. Parents universally expressed strong aspirations for their children's purposeful development, but observation revealed that limited time, fatigue, economic stress, and emotional distress often prevented parents from translating aspirations into practice.

Economic profiling revealed that the gap was widest for lower-income parents with the greatest economic precarity. These parents had the strongest aspirations many described wanting their children to "be better than me" but the least capacity to enact those aspirations due to time constraints, fatigue, and lack of resources.

9. DISCUSSION

This triangulated study explored the challenges of raising children with a sense of purpose after divorce in rural and urban Ghana. Six themes emerged: the stigma paradox (rural divorced parents faced intense social condemnation alongside community support, while

urban parents faced less stigma but greater isolation); the economic precarity cascade (divorce triggered downward economic mobility that directly undermined purposeful parenting); the kinship reconfiguration (extended family networks simultaneously supported and complicated parenting); the purpose transmission dilemma (parents struggled to model purpose when their own post-divorce identities were fractured); the urban-rural resource divide (different contexts offered different resources for purposeful parenting); and triangulation divergence (gaps between parent aspirations, peer evaluations, and observed behaviour).

The most significant theoretical contribution of this study is the demonstration that divorce disrupts the intergenerational transmission of purpose through multiple, interacting mechanisms: economic deprivation, psychological distress, social network fragmentation, and identity disruption. This finding extends Social Constructionism by showing that socially constructed meanings of divorce and purpose are not merely cognitive but are materialised in economic and relational practices that shape children's developmental trajectories (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Divorce does not simply change how parents and children think about purpose; it changes the material and relational conditions under which purpose can be transmitted.

The finding that rural divorced parents faced both greater stigma and greater community support the stigma paradox extends understanding of social capital in African communities. Rural communities provide social support and accountability but also impose social costs. Urban communities reduce social costs but also reduce social support. This paradox suggests that interventions supporting divorced parents must attend to both the costs and benefits of social context. Strategies that work in rural settings (mobilising kinship support) may not work in urban settings (where kinship is weaker), and vice versa.

The finding that divorce triggers an economic precarity cascade that directly undermines purposeful parenting has important policy implications. The cascade is not inevitable but is exacerbated by inadequate social protection, weak child support enforcement, and limited economic opportunities for divorced mothers. Ghana's child support system is notoriously weak, and many divorced fathers simply cease contributing financially after divorce (Adjei & Adomako, 2023). Strengthening child support enforcement and expanding social protection programmes could mitigate the economic precarity cascade and support purposeful parenting. The three kinship patterns observed supportive involvement, conflicted involvement, and absent involvement parallel the patterns observed in Theme Three and extend acculturation theory (Berry, 1997) to family systems. Divorced parents in Ghana must navigate not only

their own identity reconstruction but also the renegotiation of kinship relationships. Successful navigation appears to involve maintaining kinship support while establishing clear parenting boundaries a delicate balance that many parents described struggling to achieve.

The purpose transmission dilemma parents unable to model purpose because their own purpose was fractured suggests that interventions must address parent identity reconstruction as a prerequisite for purposeful parenting. Parents cannot transmit what they do not have. Supporting divorced parents in reconstructing their sense of purpose through counselling, support groups, economic empowerment, and community reintegration may be essential to supporting purposeful child development.

The triangulation divergence finding the systematic gap between parent aspirations and actual practice has important implications for intervention design. If programs rely on parent self-reports to assess need or effectiveness, they may overestimate parenting capacity and miss opportunities for support. Triangulated assessment combining parent self-report with peer evaluation and direct observation provides a more accurate picture and a stronger basis for intervention.

10. CONCLUSION

This triangulated study explored the challenges of raising children with a sense of purpose after divorce in rural and urban Ghana. Through 120 hours of participant observation, 36 peer perception interviews, and family profiling of 48 divorced parents across twelve settings, six themes emerged: the stigma paradox, the economic precarity cascade, kinship reconfiguration, the purpose transmission dilemma, the urban-rural resource divide, and triangulation divergence. The most significant contribution of this study is its demonstration that divorce disrupts the intergenerational transmission of purpose through multiple mechanisms that are shaped by rural-urban context, economic status, and kinship dynamics. Divorced parents in Ghana face extraordinary challenges in raising children with purpose stigma, economic precarity, fragmented identity, conflicting kinship demands, and the gap between aspiration and practice. Yet they persist, often heroically, seeking to give their children the purposeful future they themselves struggle to achieve. Understanding the full scope of these challenges and the resources and strategies parents use to overcome them requires the triangulated methods used in this study. Purposeful parenting after divorce is not a binary condition (present or absent) but a multidimensional, socially constructed process that unfolds differently in different contexts and can only be fully understood through multiple methods that capture its complexity.

11. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered.

For Social Workers and Family Support Practitioners: Recognise that divorced parents face multiple challenges economic, social, psychological, relational that must be addressed holistically. Economic empowerment programmes (microfinance, skills training) should be combined with psychological support (counselling, support groups) and social support (parenting education, community mobilisation). For rural divorced parents, leverage existing kinship networks as sources of support, but help parents establish boundaries to prevent kinship overreach. For urban divorced parents, build new support networks through support groups and community-based organisations that can provide the communal oversight that kinship networks would have provided in rural settings.

For Religious Institutions: Churches and mosques are powerful institutions in Ghana that can reduce or increase stigma. Train religious leaders to provide compassionate support to divorced parents rather than condemnation. Develop divorce support ministries that offer counselling, economic support, and parenting education. Use religious teaching to frame divorce not as a sin but as a hardship that communities must support. Recognise that many divorced parents turn to religion for meaning and support; religious institutions have a unique opportunity to help reconstruct purpose.

For Schools and Teachers: Teachers observe children daily and can identify those whose parents are struggling. Develop school-based support programmes for children from divorced families: mentoring, counselling, and after-school programmes that provide structure and purpose when parents cannot. Train teachers to communicate sensitively with divorced parents and to provide additional support when needed. Use school events to connect divorced parents with resources and with each other.

For Policymakers: Strengthen child support enforcement to ensure that divorced fathers contribute financially to their children's upbringing. Expand social protection programmes (cash transfers, school feeding, health insurance) to reduce the economic precarity cascade. Invest in rural education and extracurricular programmes to reduce the urban-rural resource divide. Support community-based parenting programmes that build on Ghanaian cultural values of communal childrearing while adapting to contemporary challenges of divorce and urbanisation.

For Divorced Parents: Seek support, do not try to manage alone. Connect with other divorced parents through support groups, religious communities, or online platforms. Be honest about your struggles; acknowledging the purpose transmission dilemma is the first step to

addressing it. Prioritise your own emotional and economic recovery as essential to your children's purposeful development. Recognise that the gap between aspiration and practice is normal; do not let perfectionism prevent you from doing what you can. Seek professional help if you are experiencing depression or anxiety that impairs your parenting.

For Extended Family Members: Provide support without taking over. Recognise that divorced parents need to maintain authority while receiving help. Communicate openly about expectations, boundaries, and children's needs. Avoid blame and condemnation; focus on what is best for the child. Recognise that children need both their parents' involvement and the support of extended family; work to maintain relationships with both parents if possible.

For Future Research: Extend triangulated methods to other Ghanaian regions and demographic groups. Conduct longitudinal triangulated studies tracking children's purposeful development over time, examining how the challenges identified in this study evolve as children grow. Develop quantitative measures of the challenges identified here for larger-scale surveys. Test interventions designed to support divorced parents in purposeful parenting, using triangulated designs to evaluate effectiveness. Examine the experiences of children directly, giving voice to their perspectives on divorce, purpose, and parenting.

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