WELCOME-AKWAABA

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MA Women’s and Gender Studies
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Study Focus

The health of most market women in Ghana is in or near jeopardy due to their poor work environment.

However, one crucial aspect of market women’s health that has completely been ignored (in terms of research, financial, legal, and technical assistance) is the concern for maternal market traders.

This research therefore investigates the occupational health challenges of maternal market traders in Accra and suggests some measures to address the situation.
In Ghana, women play a major role in cultural transfer; whether it is teaching children languages at home or instructing them on cultural etiquette or meal preparation. As such, women form an indispensable part of the socio-cultural structure.

However, discrimination against women remains a widespread practice whether in national leadership or in a home of three.

The influence of certain religious and cultural practices is a central basis for such discrimination against women.

Hence, there are several limitations on the social, economic, and political opportunities available to women although women constitute about 51% of the population.

Currently, women in Ghana have profited from international and institutional reforms ensuring more rights, freedoms, and contributions to national development.
EXPLANATION OF TERMS.

**Occupational Health**- Occupational health deals with all aspects of health and safety in the workplace and has a strong focus on primary prevention of hazards (World Health Organization, 2018).

**Informal Economy**- The informal economy is characterized by units engaged in the production of goods/services with the primary objective of generating employment and incomes for the persons concerned. Economic activities and workers are not regulated or protected by government’s legal and welfare systems (International Labor Organization, 1993).
EXPLANATION OF TERMS.

- **Maternal health** - The health of women during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period (World Health Organization, 2018).

- **Market Traders** - Individuals involved in the selling of general merchandise including textiles, food items, second-hand clothing and others in market areas in Accra, Ghana.

- **Open-air market** - A public marketplace where food and merchandise are sold.
Objectives of Study.

- To identify the work hazards that maternal market traders face in their work/marketplace.
- To identify the occupational health challenges of maternal market traders.
- Suggest some occupational health and safety measures.
- Discuss the role of international organizations and appropriate partnerships in promoting the occupational health of maternal market traders (and women in the informal economy).
Improving women’s health is a critical global health concern. The health of women is closely linked to some biological and social factors that makes being born female detrimental to one’s health (Skolnik, 2016).

Often times, research on maternal health focuses on women’s reproductive health and, as a result, very little is known about the impact of occupation on maternal health (World Health Organization, 2006).

Women are not just mothers but are also workers who represent about 42% of the global paid working population (WHO, 2004). For that reason, it is important to promote their occupational health and safety.
Highlights of Introduction.

- 374 million workers are injured and 2.28 million die each year in occupational accidents and 68-157 million new cases of occupational diseases (WHO, 2016; Hämäläinen et al., 2017).

- Informal enterprises/workers are much more vulnerable in experiencing the occupational challenges.

- Both males and females are actively involved in informal economy employment but the proportion of females involved has remained between 60 and 80% worldwide (International Labor Organization, 2016).
Ghana’s informal sector employs about 90% of the country’s population (15 years and older) with a higher proportion of females accounting for 54.9% and males 45.1% (Ghana Statistical Service, 2016).

Whist agricultural activities dominate in the rural areas, the wholesale and retail industry employs the highest number of females in urban areas- 40.5% (Ghana Statistical Service, 2016).

Most markets in Ghana are either situated within or around slum areas and as such, they exhibit similar environmental characteristics as slums. The Greater-Accra region which is Ghana’s capital city has the highest number of slums with over 300 slum settlements.

The dominance of women in vulnerable employment in Ghana and worldwide implies that their occupational health and safety should be given maximum attention.
The **person-environment-occupation model**, developed by Law et al. (1996) was used to guide the overall purpose of this research.

**Effect of Occupation on Health and Well-Being**

The connection between people and their occupation is not linear but a constantly interacting relationship that influences the way they perform daily tasks and activities. This performance, in turn, is believed to influence health and well-being (Law et al., 1998). As such:

- The experience of work control and choice work process may lead to an improved life satisfaction (Strong et al., 1995).

- Hazardous working conditions, such as engaging in manual/unskilled jobs or less secure and low pay jobs can have adverse effects on a person’s health (Lokk, Arnetz, & Theorell 1993; World Health Organization, 2004 & 2009).

- The occupational health & safety of market traders and women in general was underestimated (not given enough attention) despite the fact that most women were concentrated in vulnerable employment (Alfers, 2009).
- This was as a result of the gender-based discrimination women in Ghana face (Offei Aboagye, 1994; Sossou, 2006;).
- Market and street traders faced various occupational health challenges as a result of poor working conditions; which in turn had significant physical and psychological impact on their health (Alfers, 2009).
LITERATURE/RESEARCH REVIEW

RESEARCH GAP

There’s NO study on the occupational health challenges of maternal market traders in Ghana so this research intends to fill the gap.

WHY PREGNANT AND BREASTFEEDING TRADERS?

1. Most workers are in their reproductive years and as such, both pregnant and nursing mothers are common in workplaces.

2. Expectant and new mothers’ have been found to have very high susceptibility to health risks because of the hormonal & psychological changes that occur during pregnancy & childbirth (European Commission, 2000; Rylander et al., 2013; Feinberg & Kelley, 1998; Sappenfield et al., 2013).

3. The health of unborn and new babies are closely linked to that of mothers (European Commission, 2000; World Health Organization, 2009).
Influence of Occupation on Maternal Health.

- Studies to determine whether women who engage in multiple social roles (occupational & maternal) experience more stress suggested that “super women” (women who are engaged in the wife/mother/worker), do not experience higher stress or reduced life fulfillment in comparison with women who engage in only occupational roles (Sumra & Schillaci, 2015; Avrech Bar & Jarus, 2015).

- Alternatively, Foroughipour et al. (2013) in their research concluded that women who perform multiple roles (maternal and occupational) experience high levels of pressure and stress that affects their mental and physical health.

Conclusion.

- Maternal and occupational roles although interrelated, are complex practices affected by both personal and social factors such as supporting systems, work conditions, and cultural situations.

- The influence of work on maternal health is not risky but contributing factors such as stress and poor work conditions can have extreme consequences on maternal health (International Labor Organization, 2011; Salihu, Myers, & August, 2012).
RESEARCH METHOD.

- Participant observation (generating knowledge and understanding by watching and taking notes) and face-to-face interviews at the marketplaces (Tracy, 2013).

- 24 participants (12 pregnant and 12 nursing) market traders who sold a wide array of both farm produce and manufactured products in the Ashaiman, Makola, Madina and Kaneshie markets.

- While I did not collect demographic information from my participants, my observations and interviews revealed some important information about them. Example: Less education, ages of participants 18-35 years, babies from 6 months to 1 and a half years.

- Collected data, coded data to make it relevant in answering research questions, reviewed data, and finally generated bigger concepts/themes to answer research questions well.
RESULTS/DISCUSSION.

The first research question asks about the health hazards existing in the marketplaces.

1. Poor sanitation
2. Over crowdedness
3. Fire outbreaks
4. Harassment from local officials
5. Extreme weather conditions
6. Excessive workloads

Through personal observation, I noticed some health hazards in the market environment which were not mentioned by participants.

- Prevalence of rodents and flies.
- Babies playing in dirt.
- People accidentally stepping on babies.
- Traders sneezing and coughing without covering their mouths and using dirty hands to sell.

Lonely Infant at the Ashaiman Market
POOR SANITATION.

- Ghana’s sanitation coverage has improved, but services still only reach around 14% of the population, accounting for one of lowest in Africa (WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program, 2015).

- In various developing countries such as Ghana, the issue of poor sanitation is not just a slum issue but a nationwide problem.

- The poor sanitary environment has been a major cause of communicable diseases like malaria, diarrhea, and cholera in major cities and marketplaces in Ghana.
The impact of weather and climate change on human health is significant and varying (Baalbus et al., 2016). For instance, people living in tropical areas are more likely to get infected by malaria because the climate in tropic regions supports the growth and spread of mosquitoes.

Ghana is located on the equator and so the country is warm throughout the year. Average annual temperatures are around 26°C, with higher temperatures in the north and during the dry season (United States Agency for International Development, 2017).

Market traders complained badly about how the high temperatures and rainfall affected their health and the smooth running of their businesses.
Traditionally, women in Ghana are responsible for the overall upkeep of the home by performing activities such as cleaning, bearing and raising children, as well as taking care of the extended family (Nti, Inkumsah, & Fleischer, 1999).

However, apart from being mothers and household keepers, they also play a vital role in the labor market especially as the major players in food chain activities.

The participants talked about their stressful workloads which usually resulted in fatigue and other health issues.

Heavy workloads could be harmful to the physical, psychological and overall well-being of workers as well as the stability of their family relationships.
Market fires are one of the leading work hazards faced by market traders in Ghana (Alfers, 2009).

Participants mentioned fires as the second most threatening hazard in their work environment.

A study by Twum-Barima (2014) on the causes of fire outbreaks in Kumasi central market concluded that the top five causes were:

1. Power fluctuations.
2. Cooking in the market.
3. Overloading of electrical appliances.
4. Improper and old electrical wiring system.
5. Illegal tapping of electrical power.
Urbanization in Ghana usually occurs in major cities but the Greater Accra region experiences the fastest urban growth because it's the capital city.

Accra has experienced a rapid rate of growth and it is one of the fastest-growing cities in West Africa (Agyapong & Ojo, 2018).

In Accra, most people are situated in business zones such as marketplaces and so markets are heavily congested and usually surrounded by slums.
In Ghana, especially in busy places such as markets, decongestion exercises are carried out at least once in a year to clear hawkers and traders off roadsides and footbridges as part of efforts to decongest the city.

Harassment from security officials (police, military or task force) is a common act faced by market traders, especially those who sell along roadsides during decongestion exercises.

The physical harassment could be seizure or destruction of goods, physical abuse or even an arrest.

“Down the years, this exercise has proved to be highly ineffective. The traders move from their illegal spots, albeit temporarily only to move back when “the heat cools off” (Baiden, 2018).
The women’s accounts of their health challenges were intertwined in the descriptions of their daily activities in the market place. This showed their understanding of how their health was imbedded in the social and material conditions of their lives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical and Psychosocial Health Challenges</th>
<th>Related Causes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Musculoskeletal conditions, miscarriage</td>
<td>Heavy workloads, lifting, carrying heavy loads</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dehydration, dizziness, fatigue, headaches, infant death</td>
<td>Heavy workloads and High temperatures</td>
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<td>Malaria, diarrhea, cholera and vaginal infection</td>
<td>Poor Sanitation and Weather condition</td>
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<td>Worry, fear, confusion, unhappiness, loss of social relationships, low support and care from family, financial insecurity</td>
<td>Conflict between their occupational &amp; household duties, the uncooperative relationship with the government officials/traders, low support at home, low sales and other stress-related issues</td>
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Physical Health Challenges.

The doctor said I had “o-s-t-i-t-a-i-s-i-s”.

Aside fatigue and dizziness, the traders also experienced various forms of musculoskeletal conditions due to their occupational roles. The most reported bodily pains were neck, back, and abdominal pains.

“My left knee hurts so badly and it becomes stiff when I wake up in the morning or sit for a long time. At first, it wasn’t this bad but with time the pain and stiffness increased so I had to go to the hospital”

I further asked her what the problem was when she went to the hospital. She busted out with laughter and said, “I didn’t go to school so I can’t mention the name of the disease. All I remember was that the doctor said I had “o-s-t-i-t-a-i-s-i-s”. [Nursing mother/Ashaiman market/cassava and plantain].

Headaches have become a part of me now.

Headaches, dehydration, and heat rash were mentioned as part of the most occurring health challenges faced by the participants as result of their excessive workloads and high temperatures.

“What headaches have become a part of me now. No matter what I do, I still have headaches. Whether I sit, stand or sleep I experience headaches. The worst part is when the sun is up; it feels as if my head is constantly colliding with something. My headaches are always accompanied by nausea and dizziness sometimes.” [Madina market/ pregnant trader/cosmetics]
I was busily selling and not knowing my baby was laying half-dead.

- A very unfortunate incident of a baby’s death reported by a nursing mother from Kaneshie who sold okra and jute leaves was very striking. This was how she narrated the loss of her nearly 6 months old baby in early 2016.

“I don’t know what happened to my baby. As usual, I breastfed him and laid him under a table to sleep so I could also do some selling. But this time around, it took him so long to wake up so I had to check on him. Upon checking up, I realized my baby was sweating and wasn’t breathing well so I rushed him to the hospital. The doctor reported that my baby had a severe fever and sadly, we lost him that evening”.

Aww Fiifi...I’m sorry for being such a careless mother...She wails and continues to talk...

“The worst part of the incident was that I was busily selling and not knowing my baby was laying half-dead”
Psychosocial health challenges.

- Participants shared a good amount of psychosocial health challenges they faced due to:
  - The conflict between their occupational and household duties.
  - The uncooperative relationship with the government officials/traders.
  - Low support at home and other stress-related issues.
  - Moreover, since there are no job controls in their workplace, the traders work more than the average work hours assigned to workers in the formal economy. As such, their psychological stress were extreme.

I don’t know why I always feel like something bad is going to happen to me.

“I usually wake up with heart palpitations. Others times, I get so much afraid of what might happen to my child or me. I don’t know why I always feel like something bad is going to happen to me” [Nursing mother/ Madina market/ sachet water]

Although she didn’t know the reason for her constant worry, it was quite evident that poverty and other work issues could be the cause.
Psychosocial health challenges.

I think I’m not a good mother to my children.

- “I spend most of the time in the market selling and by the time I get home, they are already seeping. I don’t know what to do make the situation better. My mother-in-law told my husband the other time that I’m not good mother because I spend very little time at home even on weekends. Yes, they’re right, I think I’m not a good mother to my children. But unfortunately, I don’t have a choice! [Nursing mother/ Makola market/vegetables].

He called me irresponsible.

- “We always try to solve our differences before the next day whenever there’s a misunderstanding between me and my husband. But last month, we had a misunderstanding and he called me irresponsible because I wasn’t available to take care of my oldest child when he returned sick from school. I understand it was a bad situation and it shouldn’t happen again but I was at work! How would I know that my son was sick? It’s so annoying how he expects me to know everything and do everything. He called me an irresponsible mother as if I’m the only person in charge of our kids! [Nursing mother/ Madina market].
LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS.

LIMITATIONS

- The term ‘Market traders’ was broad and difficult to conceptualize.
- The process of observing and approaching potential participants was quite intimidating.
- Language/Communication barriers.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- State emphatically the type of market traders you hope to study. As an example, a definite group could be “maternal street vending traders”.
- Demographics such as age, educational background and ethnicity should be included in future research.
- Employ professional interpreters and translators to mediate the language barrier between researchers and participants.
- Involvement of local government officials in research.
CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS BY TRADERS.

- Infrastructure Development.
  - Subsidized daycare centers.
  - Renovated sanitary facilities such as toilets and urinals.
  - The provision of health centers near markets.

- Incentives or Specialized Financial Structures.
  - Credits.
  - Interest-free loans.
  - Other business advisory and extension services.

- Good Social Support Structures.
  - Traders’ families.
  - Friends.
  - Coworkers and neighbors.
An enabling legal and regulatory framework to protect maternal health.

I. Feasible laws and regulations on insured earnings provided from social insurance or public funds for maternal market traders and the provision of health care during pregnancy and after childbirth.

II. Laws to expand social protection to cover traders who are affected by disasters such as floods and fire outbreaks.

III. A national policy aimed at promoting equality of opportunity and eliminating all forms of discrimination in employment and occupation.
PROPOSED HEALTH AND SAFETY MEASURES.

**Literacy and Education on Occupational Health and Safety.**
- Maternal market traders should be taken through legal literacy programs to make them aware of their rights and entitlements as informal workers and entrepreneurs to enable them seek redress in court when these rights are violated.

- Health and safety campaigns on better health and safety conditions in market traders’ places of work. Such campaigns help in raising awareness on the importance of ensuring safe workplaces and complying with safety regulations.

**Better perspective on Women’s Occupational Health Issues.**
- In the past, global health policies mainly consisted of the provision and funding of medical care; now we acknowledge that while medical care can better prognosis, the cultural/social, economic, and environmental conditions in which people live are critical factors in determining human health.

- Take into consideration (in the process of improving quality of jobs in the informal economy) the various the factors that restrict women in their daily lives and to also consider issues specific to them such as maternity protection and family support.
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND DEVELOPMENTAL PARTNERSHIPS.

- **Women’s Environment and Development Organization** - The organization’s mission is to ensure that women’s rights, economic, and environmental justice are at the heart of global and national policies.

- **Catalyst** - An international, membership-based nonprofit dedicated to increasing opportunities for women in business, mainly through the pioneering research.

- **Women in Informal Employment Globalizing & Organizing (WIEGO)** - Support livelihoods for the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy by granting them equal economic opportunities and rights.
COMMITTEE APPRECIATION.

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Questions?