

# **An Examination of the Cultural and Socio-Economic Profiles of Porters in Accra, Ghana**

Muriel Adjubi YEBOAH

*Virginia Union University, USA*

&

Kwame APPIAH-YEBOAH

*The Martin Agency, USA*

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the cultural and socio-economic profiles of porters in Accra, capital of Ghana. Porters are individuals who carry goods in and around markets and commercial centers in cities for a fee. A majority of the porters migrate from northern or rural parts of the country to live and work in southern cities. Findings indicate that porters have very little or no education and are from very poor socio-economic backgrounds. Male porters tend to be slightly older, have a little education, married and living with their families in Accra. Female porters are younger, temporary porters, and in addition to low socio-economic background are affected by cultural factors.

*Keywords: Porters, Culture, Socio-economic, Gender, and Ghana.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Ghana, like most developing countries, faces a host of problems. Among the list of problems is the issue of migration that manifests itself in several forms. At one end, highly trained and educated professionals including doctors, pharmacists, and engineers migrate abroad to seek higher paying jobs. Developed countries, especially the United States and United Kingdom, are favored destinations for these professionals (Mouton, et al., 2007; Ogilvie et al., 2007; WHO, 2004). At the other end, unskilled rural youths move from the underdeveloped regions, farming communities, and hinterlands to the cities to work menial jobs (Boakye-Yiadom and MacKay, 2007; Twumasi-Ankrah, 1995). A majority of these low skilled migrants end up working in the informal sector, in occupations requiring very little or no education and skills – as porters, petty traders, seasonal laborers on cocoa farms, etc. (Hashim, 2007). Porters, from the latter group are the focus of this study. Porters are individuals who carry goods for shoppers or traders in and around commercial centers for a fee. The main objective of this paper is to examine the socio-economic and cultural factors that compel individuals to migrate from their villages to live and work in the cities as porters.

Porters are used as a case study in this paper because, among others, there have been relatively few studies on porters in Ghana. Among the few that have been done, Agarwal et al. (1997), Apt and Gierco (1997), and Opare (2003) based their analysis only on female porters. Though some of these studies explored the reasons for migration, their investigations highlighted the survival strategies of female porters in the cities. Other studies have provided analysis of porters as street children (Beauchemin, 1999; Hickey, 2000; Korboe, 1996, 1997). While there are street children who work as porters and there are young porters who fall within the age group of street children, there is a distinction between the two. For those who fall into the category of street children, Agarwal et al. (1997) argue that it is inappropriate to categorize them as street children because porters are not abandoned by their families nor have they run away from home to become street children. Porters are embedded in family structures but due to cultural and low socio-economic conditions they are forced to move to the cities to earn a livelihood.

This study focuses on both male and female porters and relates their activities to their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The paper contributes to African development studies as it presents and analyses the underlying causes of the rural-urban migration as it pertains to porters. Specifically, how the lack of education, skills, and opportunities interact with other cultural factors and lead to the engagement of such an activity. The livelihood and survival activities of porters are not discussed in this paper. For a full description of the survival and livelihood strategies of the porters, see Agarwal et al. (1997) and Yeboah (2008). There are five sections in the paper. The preceding section provided background and introduced the objective of the paper. The next section is a review of the literature on porters in Ghana. This is followed by a description of the methodology and study design. The fourth section presents the results, which describes the socio-economic backgrounds of porters and also some social and cultural factors that motivate the migration of individuals to cities to work as porters. A discussion of the results and conclusion completes the paper.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Migration into cities in Ghana has manifested itself in two peculiar forms. One form is the normal migration of young men and women from rural communities into cities and urban areas to find any kind of job. The other form is the migration of men and women mainly from the three peripheral northern regions (Northern, Upper East, and Upper West), southwards to cities like Accra, Kumasi, and Sekondi/Takoradi to work as porters. These porters, commonly referred to as “Kayayei<sup>1</sup>” for women and “truckpushers<sup>2</sup>” for men, operate in

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<sup>1</sup> “Kayayei” is the plural of “Kayayoo” a term used by the Ga people, an ethnic group in the Greater Accra region, to describe women who engage in carrying goods for a fee.

commercial areas, mostly in and around market centers and major bus terminals. These areas are crowded and tight spaces with humans, vehicles, and goods all competing for space. Vehicular movement is severely restricted and access to the center of markets is near impossible (Agarwal et al., 1997). Porters, employed by travelers, shop owners, general shoppers, or traders are used to offset the difficulty of vehicles accessing the center of the markets to load or discharge goods.

Though porters perform a vital role in facilitating trading activities in the cities, their living and working conditions makes them vulnerable. The biggest challenge the migrant porter face in the city is decent accommodation. They hardly earn enough money to enable them to invest in quality accommodation. The living arrangements of porters put them into four distinct groups. The first group share rented kiosks and contribute to the payment of the rent. The second group consists of porters who live as squatters in uncompleted buildings in and around the city. The most vulnerable is the third group who sleep in front of stores or on city pavements during the night. The last group of porters lives with relatives or kinsmen in the city. All the groups work from dawn to dusk and retire to their various places of accommodation to sleep at night.

Shelter is a basic human need and the lack of it exposes porters to great peril. The men are sometimes recruited to join armed robbery and other criminal activities. The women among them can be, and have been, raped, assaulted, and preyed upon. The young girls are lured into prostitution or are coerced into exchanging sexual favors sometimes for simple basic human needs (ILO, 2004). Teenage pregnancies among the young girls are common. Essel et al. (2007), in an article in the Ghanaian newspaper "The Statesman," highlights porters' exposure to physical and reproductive health risks. The authors described the porters' general poor living and working conditions, and vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.

Porters are exploited by their patrons and are occasionally harassed by the police, drivers, and city guards. Patrons sometimes refuse to pay them or pay less for the services they perform (Agarwal et al., 1997; Beauchemin, 1999; Opare, 2003). They are also harassed by patrons who insult and ridicule them. There are occasions when they are assaulted if they spill, lose or damage patrons' goods. Susu collectors (informal bankers) who act as safe-keepers of their money also abscond with their monies at times. Family members who provide accommodation for the porters have been known to spend money the porters give them for safekeeping without paying back (Opare, 2003). Money remitted to family back home sometimes never reaches intended recipients.

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Etymologically, this term is derived from two words, one from Hausa and one from Ga: 'kaya' from Hausa meaning wares or goods, whilst 'yoo' is from Ga meaning woman. Coffie, 1992:6 (quoted from Agarwal et al. 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Men are called "truckpushers" because instead of carrying the loads, they use flat-bed four-wheeler trolleys.

The very nature of the portering business exposes the porters to great danger. Porters are forced to dash in and out of traffic, competing with vehicles and pedestrians on congested roads and market areas for limited space. To get to their destinations faster, porters have to weave in and out of traffic. The result is accidents, sometimes with fatalities. The physical demands on the porters are great. They carry heavy loads, sometimes over considerable distances just to make enough money for two meals a day. Bodily aches and pains are frequent, as is malaria, which they are susceptible to due to their poor sleeping arrangements and environmental conditions. Porters are also susceptible to gastro-intestinal diseases due to unhygienic and insanitary conditions under which their food is prepared. Additionally, porters do not make enough money to seek medical attention from qualified personnel. Thus, self medication is a very common practice among the porters.

The question is why would anyone leave home and risk life and limb to make subsistence living in a hostile, faraway place? What socio-economic conditions push these individuals to move to the cities to work as Kayayei or truckpushers? What role does the lack of education or vocational skills play in this portering business? What local or cultural factors are embedded in this portering process and finally, how can education be used to channel young men and women into meaningful employment in society? These are some of the questions this paper seeks to answer. To help answer these questions, a selection of porters from Accra, the capital and largest city of Ghana, were used as a case study.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study uses questionnaires and focus group discussions to investigate porters living and working in four commercial market sites in the central business district of Accra. The sites are: Makola, the biggest market in Accra; Tema Station, a major bus terminal, surrounded by a small niche market; Cocoa Marketing Board (CMB), is a combination of a bus terminal and a market; and Abogbloshie, a predominantly foodstuffs and vegetable market.

For the study, 120 participants were selected mainly through a snowball sampling method. Snowballing is a purposive sampling approach, where one participant gives the researcher the name of another subject, who in turn provides the name of another, and so on (Vogt, 1999). It works as a chain sequence of recommendation or introduction from one respondent to another.

Snowballing offers many practical advantages as it helps the researcher to identify people of interest from other people the researcher has interacted with (Hay, 2000). Porters are highly mobile during the day and thus very difficult to track across the city and the business districts (Opare, 2003). They also do not have fixed or permanent places of residence. Additionally, porters live and work in closely-linked groups held together through strong social networks.

Snowballing made porters more accessible as porters knew friends, relatives, and other people from their ethnic groups who were also engaged in portering activities. Previous empirical research on porters by Apt and Grieco (1997) and Opare (2003) had used purposive sampling to select participants. It is important to note that when this type of sampling procedure is used, the researcher does not aim to draw any generalizations or make inferences. The goal of using this method was to obtain an in-depth knowledge of the cultural and socio-economic background of porters. The introduction of respondents by previous participants allowed subsequent participants to open-up right from the beginning.

The field study was conducted from the middle of June to middle of December 2005. One field assistant was employed to aid the data collection process and also to serve as an interpreter when necessary. Different data generation processes were employed, including a survey, focus group discussion, individual in-depth interviews, and observations. Themes for the interviews covered broad areas like migration, education, family structure, and household relations. One-hundred and twenty respondents made up of eighty women and forty men were surveyed for this study. The justification for having more women than men is that initial observations in the study areas confirmed that there were more female porters than male. Six focus group discussions were organized with participants drawn from the one hundred and twenty respondents who took part in the survey. Participation was based on willingness to engage in the research. Each group discussion had between eight and twelve participants. Four out of the six focus group discussions were conducted for women while two were conducted for men simply because there were more women participants than men. Each of the four selected study sites had one focus group discussion done for the women. The men's group discussion was at the Makola and Abogbloshie market sites where men porters usually operated. In addition to the focus group discussion, twenty individual in-depth interviews were conducted. As before, participants were selected from the initial 120 survey participants based on their willingness to participate. Of the twenty-five individual in-depth interviews, fifteen were with women and ten with men.

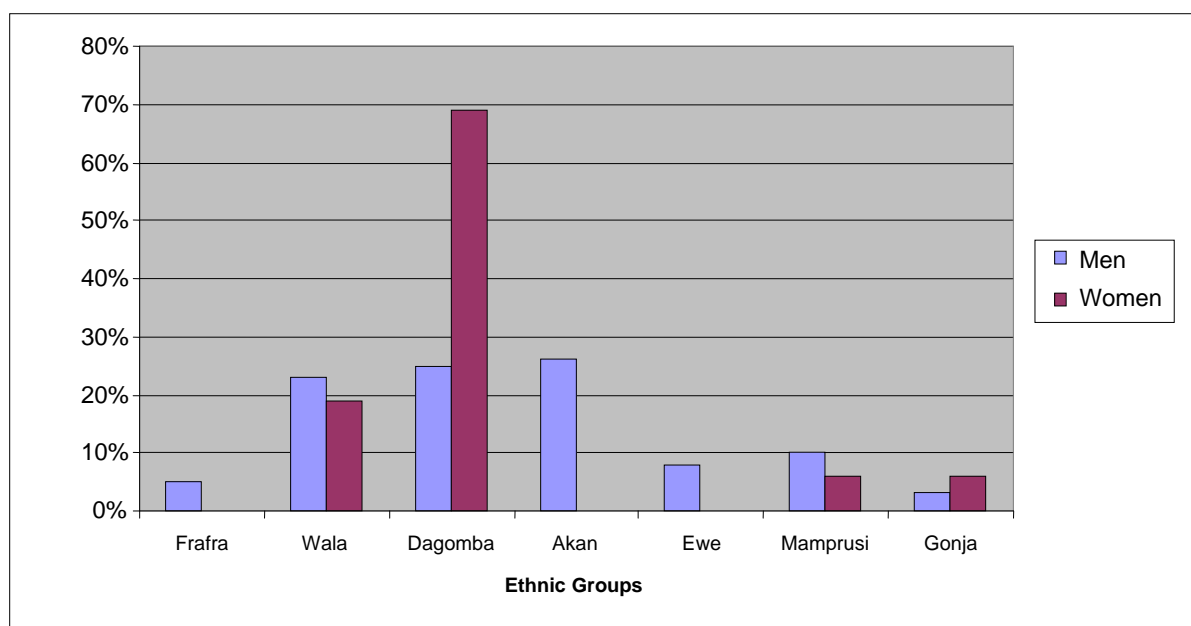
Prior to the focus group discussions and interviews, four key informants were interviewed to share their opinions about porters and their activities in Accra. The key informants (three women and one man) provided valuable background information and reviewed the study questionnaires. Two of the women work for a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) providing assistance to porters while the third is a development officer for the National Council for Women and Development, a governmental agency tasked with the welfare of women. The only male is the head of a task force unit set up by the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) to help porters.

The reliance on multiple sources of data allowed for a broader, in-depth understanding of the critical issues surrounding the low socio-economic status of porters. Transcripts from focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, stakeholders' interviews, and field notes were analyzed using QSR NVivo, a software program for the analysis of qualitative data.

### 3. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF PORTERS

All 120 respondents were Ghanaians who had migrated from different regions of the country to work and earn a livelihood in Accra. The primary reason for choosing Accra was because respondents had a relative or knew a kinsman living in Accra. Social networking is a determining factor in the choice of destination city by porters (Yeboah, 2008). Seven ethnic groups, comprising Akan, Dagomba, Ewe, Frafra, Gonja, Mamprusi, and Wala were represented in the sample (Figure 1.). With the exception of Akans and Ewes, all the remaining ethnic groups are from the northern parts of Ghana. The men were represented by all seven ethnic groups. The women were represented by only the four northern ethnic groups; Dagomba, Gonja, Mamprusi, and Wala. The fact that the women represented were all from northern Ghana supports Agarwal et al. (1997: 4) assertion that ‘kayayoo trade represents something of an ethnic occupational niche for northern females.’ As shown in Figure 1., ethnic groups from the three northern regions in Ghana accounted for the largest percentage of respondents in both men and women. Twenty-eight out of the forty men interviewed were from northern ethnic groups.

**Figure 1.** *Ethnicity of Respondents.*



The age distribution of respondents ranged from 11 to 55 years with the majority of them being young adults between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five years (Table 1.). The age distribution underscores the earlier reported observation by Agarwal et al. (1997) that portering is a different phenomenon from street children. The age distribution indicates that 82 per cent of the women are 35 or less, with very few in their late 40s or 50s. It must be pointed out that the active age of child bearing occurs within the same age group. This has implications for the welfare of children born to female porters. In this study, 10 per cent of the

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female porters had children living with them in Accra. An additional 20 per cent had left their children with family members in their villages in northern Ghana. Among the men surveyed, 88 per cent are between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five years. The remaining 12 per cent of the men fall into the older category. Sixty per cent of the male porters are above twenty-five years while only 38 per cent of female porters fall within this age group.

**Table 1.** *Age Distribution of Respondents.*

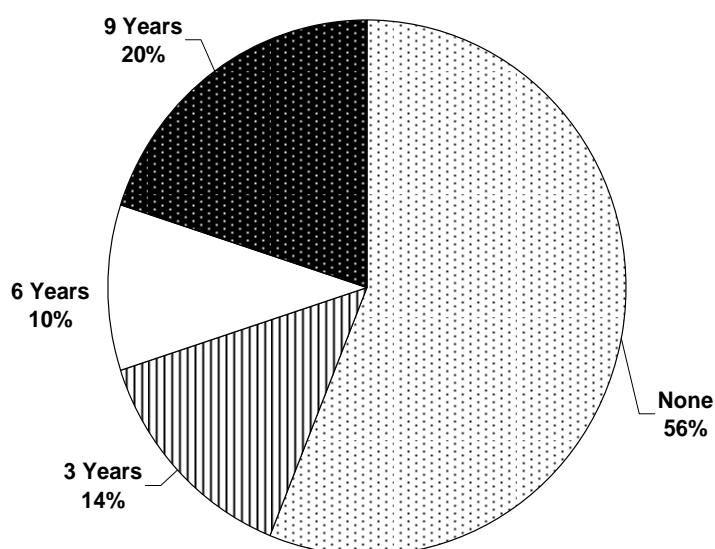
Age	Males		Female	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
10 and below	0	0	0	0
11–15	0	0	9	11
16–20	5	13	30	38
21–25	11	27	10	13
26–30	14	35	9	11
31–35	5	13	7	9
36–40	2	5	6	8
41–45	2	5	5	6
46–50	1	2	2	2
51–55	0	0	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

Information gathered on their marital status indicates that majority of the porters, 63 per cent are married. Twenty-two per cent are betrothed or live with their boyfriends/girlfriends. Ten per cent have never married and 5 per cent are divorced, widowed or separated. For men alone, as much as 87 per cent are married and living in households with their nuclear family members. On the part of the women, 52 per cent are married but the majority does not live with their nuclear family members in Accra. Only one married woman was living with her spouse and family in Accra. The higher number of married women with families back home in the northern Ghana reflects the temporary nature of female portering compared to males. The married women alternate between working as porters in the cities with some time off with their families back home in the north. The younger female porters on the other hand, work continuously for years to raise capital and then move on to learn a trade or skills. Some of the younger females continue to move back and forth between the north and south even when they get married. The men however, live and work permanently as porters in the cities for years. The higher proportion of older male porters compared to females described in the previous paragraph is also a reflection of how the different genders view the business.

The level of education among the porters who participated in the study is very low, with the majority lacking basic education which is nine years of

schooling or in Ghana defined as kindergarten through junior high school<sup>3</sup>. Fourteen per cent of the respondents have three years of schooling, 10 per cent have six years of schooling, and 20 per cent have nine years of schooling. The majority, 56 per cent, lack any formal schooling. They have never been enrolled in any formal educational program (Figure 2.). This is rather high considering that approximately 87 per cent of primary school-aged children in Ghana are currently enrolled in school (UNESCO, 2007). More importantly, primary and lately junior high school education in Ghana is free and also compulsory (USDS, 2008). The low educational attainment of porters can be attributed to poverty and culture. Filmer and Pritchett (1999) in a cross national study of thirty-five countries observed that low enrollment or high dropout rates is very common among poor households. Poverty is endemic in the three northern regions of Ghana where the majority of the porters migrated from. These three regions suffer from disproportionately higher levels of poverty compared to the other regions in Ghana (World Bank, 2008).

**Figure 2.** *Educational Attainments of Porters.*



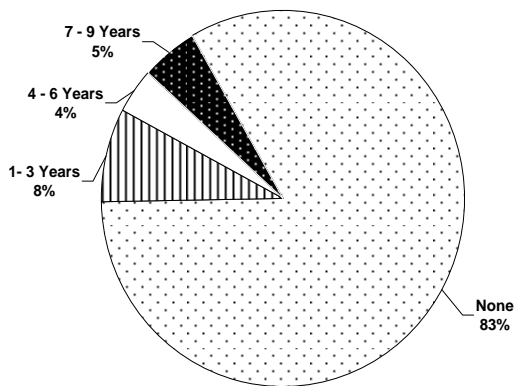
When the respondents' educational attainment is broken down by sex, 83 per cent of the women lacked any formal education compared to only 5 per cent of men (Figure 2.1a and 2.1b). The disparity is very high in contrast to national primary school enrollment for girls at 85 per cent and boys at 88 per cent (UNESCO, 2007). The disparity at the national level is only three percentage points but 78 percentage points among porters in this study. The low enrollment level by the female porters mirrors the generally low enrollment of girls in the

<sup>3</sup> The educational system in Ghana currently refers to basic education as two years of kindergarten, six years of elementary school and three years of junior high school. Therefore, basic education comprises of 11 years of schooling. However, when the study was conducted, basic education comprised of 9 years of schooling; primary 1 through to junior high school 3. Thus, all the computation in this paper is based on 9 years of basic education.

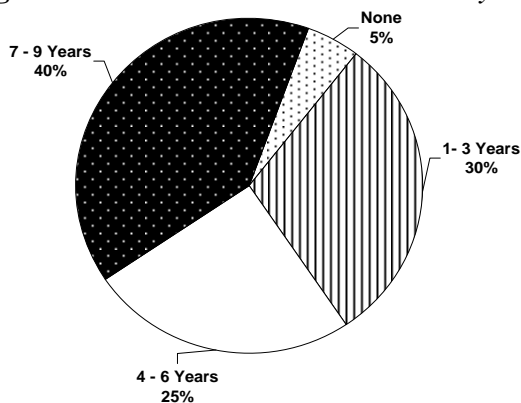


northern parts of Ghana. Approximately 40 per cent of girls at the basic level in the northern regions are not in school (USAID, 2007). Figures 2.1a and 2.1b also indicate that none of the respondents had any schooling beyond nine years. This corresponds to no schooling beyond the junior high school level and also a reflection of the fact that people with educational levels beyond junior high school may not engage in portering.

**Figure 2.1a.** *Educational Attainments by Females.*



**Figure 2.1b.** *Educational Attainments by Males.*



When asked about the primary reasons they do not have any schooling, 60 per cent of the respondents who had no schooling claimed their parents did not have money to send them to school. This again is consistent with the observation by Filmer and Pritchett (1999) about the relation between low income and high dropout rates. Chambers (1989) also makes the assertion that poor households do not value investment in education when they can actually depend on labor from children. An additional 20 per cent of respondents claimed their parents did not find it necessary to send them to school, claiming it was a waste of time and resources. This was particularly evident in the case of the females. Forty per cent of the females with no schooling mentioned that they have brothers who were sent to school. This is consistent with the prevalent male gender bias in education in developing countries (Holmes, 1999; Stash and Hannum, 2001; Stromquist, 1989). Many reasons have been given for the gender bias in education but they are all variations of cultural or social traditions and socio-

economic factors that make parents invest in their son's education and not daughters (Stash and Hannum, 2001). In addition to the gender bias, the order of birth impacts parent's decision to enroll children, especially girls in school. Previous studies have reported that younger children were less likely to be enrolled in schools compared to their older siblings (Mooch and Leslie, 1983). About 20 per cent of the girls who had no education reported that they had older siblings who had been enrolled in schools. The men with no education did not have older siblings who had been enrolled in school.

Of the 44 per cent of respondents with one to nine years of schooling, the primary reason given for not furthering their education was economic difficulties faced by their parents. Twenty per cent of the respondents had nine years of schooling. That is, they had graduated from junior high school. Of this number, four were working as porters to raise funds to support their education at the senior high school level. Beauchemin (1999) reports that street children from northern Ghana who head south after the school term to work and save towards their education spend months in the cities. They do not readily go back to school when school re-opens; impacting their learning ability and consequently their educational standards. Beauchemin's (1999) assertion raises doubts about whether the four students who participated in the research will be able to continue their education. The remaining twenty had no such plans of furthering their education. The primary reason cited for not furthering their education was the lack of funds to support them. When probed on their performance in the Basic Education Certification Examination (BECE), they claimed their results qualified them for admission to senior high schools. There was no way to verify this assertion; however, their command of both spoken and written English was excellent. (Also, probing by the authors, who had a number of years of experience teaching at the junior high school level, appeared to support the respondents' claim).

Approximately 83 per cent of the respondents who had no schooling claimed one or both parents did not have any schooling. This is consistent with results by Jamison and Lockheed (1987), who reported that the level of schooling of parents have an impact on their children's school enrollment. Of the respondents who had at least six years of schooling, 50 per cent claimed at least one parent had six years of schooling. The responses also varied by gender. Among the women porters, when their mothers have had some schooling, their chances of also having some schooling increases significantly. Among the 17 per cent women who had some level of schooling, 77 per cent had mothers who also had some schooling. When compared to the 83 per cent who had no schooling, the results are very different. In the latter group, approximately 85 per cent of the mothers had no schooling. It is appropriate therefore, to conclude that when a mother has some schooling, the likelihood of her children staying in school increases (Boyles et al., 2007; Hindin, 2005; Marks, 2008).

Among the 20 per cent of female porters who had left their children with family members in their villages, 85 per cent claimed their children were in school. They frequently remitted money and school supplies back home to

support their children's education and other family members. Ten per cent of female porters who had children living with them in Accra had none of the children in school. The children were either too young to be in school, or were working as porters with their mothers. Although a larger proportion of male porters had children, 80 per cent of them claimed their children were enrolled in school. Also, there were no male porters working with their kids. This is partly a reflection of the higher proportion of males with schooling and also the different social roles of males and females in the Ghanaian society.

The preceding paragraphs showed that porters have very low educational attainment. Also apparent is the poor or marginal socio-economic backgrounds of the porters. The above two factors combine to limit employment opportunities available to porters in the cities. The poor backgrounds of porters limit available capital for petty or small scale trading activities. Porters are thus, forced to look for employment in areas that require little education, skills, or capital. Porterage is an ideal job as all one needs is physical strength and a willingness to work hard. The cost of entry is relatively cheap and there are practically no barriers to entry just like any other informal activity. Other employment options that are available to porters in the cities include petty trading, driver's assistants, shoe-shining, maids, and house-helpers. Some of these options require a small capital or a certain level of familiarity with the city, something a newly arrived migrant definitely lacks. However, it is not uncommon for porters to start exploring some of these options on part-time basis at first as they become more familiar with the city. As much as 34 per cent of the women worked as shop assistants in addition to being porters and 9 per cent worked as housemaids on weekends.

Respondents readily admitted during the focus group discussions that poverty is the underlying cause of their low levels of education. Poverty also limits their ability to learn some vocations or trades because they require financial capital and also some amount of formal education. Monk et al. (2008) reported that youth who often went into apprenticeship usually did so at the end of their junior high school education. Moreover, in the last decade, formal vocational training in Ghana requires a reasonable aggregate (pass) at the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) for enrollment. More importantly, traditional apprenticeship programs now require the student to pass the National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI) examination, which is a combination of written and practical tests. In addition, the cost of both formal vocational training and traditional apprenticeship is too high for porters and their families to afford. For example, Hashim (2007) demonstrates how the high cost of traditional apprenticeship prevents independent migrant children and their families from learning a trade.

Finally, employment in the formal sector is almost completely out of the question for porters. Though this sector is a much smaller percentage of the Ghanaian economy, less than 20 per cent, it is highly desirable and sought after. Employment in this sector requires higher educational attainment, something the average porter clearly lacks. The few that had been part of the formal sector were among those impacted by mass-layoffs exercises undertaken by the

government in the 1980s. The implementation of Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in Ghana for instance was accompanied by the retrenchment of thousands of low educated and low skilled works in governmental or parastatal organization (Konadu-Agyemang, 2000). Those respondents who had been part of the mass-layoffs claimed low levels of education contributed to their being laid off. The limited opportunities in formal employment that require little or no education are highly competitive. It is not unheard of for thousands of applicants to apply for such positions when they open up. Respondents view opportunities in the informal sector as their best source of employment.

#### 4. CULTURAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS

A number of factors have been reported as contributing to the migration of rural youth to the cities. Poverty and economic constraints are the main underlying factors in the decision to migrate to the cities (World Bank, 2008). It is argued that the lack of economic opportunities, lack of infrastructure, and the impact of structural adjustment policies (SAP) implemented in the 1980s are among the specific factors (Hashim, 2007; Oberhauser and Hanson, 2007). The implementation of SAP forced the government of Ghana to reduce public expenditure. A consequence of this was the mass-layoffs of thousands of public sector employees in Ghana. The impact of the layoffs was severe on lower-ranked employees like laborers, messengers, and watchmen among others (Aryeetey et al., 2000; Takyiwaa, 1987). A number of the study participants were affected directly or indirectly by the public sector retrenchment. About 15 per cent of the male porters had been retrenched from their public sector jobs. Thirteen per cent of the women had their traditional bread winners (husband or father) retrenched from their regular public sector jobs. As a result these women were forced to migrate to the cities to engage in portering activities to support themselves and their families. These findings are supported by Opare's (2003) study of porters in southern Ghana. As part of the implementation of SAP, subsidies on agricultural inputs such as seeds, chemicals, and tools, were removed by government (Krueger et al., 1988; Opare, 2003). The removal of agricultural subsidies made farming more expensive and less profitable. Consequently farming became less attractive to people already farming and also to those who had lost their jobs in the mass-layoffs.

In addition to the economic factors that drive migration, the study revealed certain cultural and social practices prevalent in northern Ghana that affects migration, especially of women. These cultural practices underscores women's role in society and marriage. Some of the factors have been discussed at length in the preceding paragraphs especially the gender bias in education. One of the rationales for the gender bias in education is the idea that girls grow up to be wives and wifely duties are best taught at home and not in schools.

Traditionally, it makes sense not to spend money on a girl who eventually ends up in somebody's home.

Traditional cultural practices relating marriage and partner choice also induced migration particularly among women. It was noted that some of the women participants migrated to Accra either to run away from a betrothed husband or to work and save money for their wedding. Young girls who escape from arranged and forced marriages end up in the cities working as porters. In most of the ethnic groups in northern Ghana, arranged marriage is the norm. Young girls are given out for marriage at an early age mostly without their consent or welfare. These young girls are forced to marry older men or men they do not love. Some girls have rebelled and left the community to live and work in the city. In the study, about 17 per cent of the female participants had come to Accra to escape forced marriage.

Among the older women, being in a polygamous marriage provides the opportunity to travel to the cities and work as porters. Polygamy in a way enhanced mobility and it is widely practiced among some ethnic groups in northern Ghana (Beauchemin, 1999) where most of the women who participated in the study called home. Temporary movement away from home to work as porters empowered the women economically, more especially, those whose husbands were retrenched during structural adjustment. They move to the city and work as porters to make money to provide for the basic needs of their families. In a way, most of the women in the study are able to travel to Accra because of the presence of other wives in their households. These wives take turns in coming to Accra so there is always a wife in the house to take care of the husband and home. As much as 90 per cent of the females who are married are in polygamous marriages and about 10 per cent were temporarily in Accra and working as porters due to co-wives problems or conflicts in marriage.

There is another cultural practice that contributes to the migration of girls in particular to Accra; a practice very common among the Dagombas from northern Ghana. This practice allows girls to be raised by their paternal aunts. This system was traditionally meant to strengthen extended family bonding and also to give women who are not able to have children the opportunity of raising children. Aunts were supposed to love and care for their nieces as their own children (Beauchemin, 1999; ILO, 2004). However, in the face of growing economic hardships, this tradition has been greatly abused and young girls are exploited by their paternal aunties. Very often, these paternal aunties of the young girls bring the girls to Accra themselves or give them to other adults who send the girls to Accra to work as porters. In either situation, the young girls work and their monies are kept by their aunties. In circumstances where the young girls are given to chaperons, their earnings are remitted to their aunties in their villages by their chaperons. There were about 15 per cent of such young girls in study.

Finally, there is a social factor that is increasingly causing people to migrate from northern Ghana to the south. This phenomenon has no cultural, religious, or economic basis but probably an indirect economic stimulus. It is the

'everyone is leaving so I must also leave' factor which Beauchemin (1999) calls it the 'exodus factor'. It usually starts in a simple but subtle way. A few people leave the village or community to go and work in the cities. They return to the village with material goods, money, and lots of swagger from experiencing city life. A few join them on their next trip south. More and more people join in the exodus. What starts as a trickle turns into a flood. Everyone who wants to acquire a livelihood joins the bandwagon. People who did not have an excuse suddenly have a powerful reason to migrate: Schools and marriages are abandoned. In the long run, it becomes a way of life, a rite of passage of sorts to migrate to the city. While none of the study participants admitted that the 'exodus factor' was the main reason they moved to Accra, a significant portion of the focus group participants agreed that it influenced their decision to migrate to Accra.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Multiple factors influence the livelihood options of individuals and households in developing countries. In this paper the socio-economic background of porters and some cultural factors that push them to Accra has been discussed. From the results of this study the typical female porter is a young woman aged thirty years or less, and likely to be married or engaged. The characteristic male porter on the other hand is slightly older; between twenty-one and thirty-five years old, and married with children. Both male and female porters are likely to be migrants from the northern part of Ghana but with a higher probability for the females than the males. The representative porter is from a poor socio-economic background and has very little or no education. Female porters in this study, who were all from the northern regions of Ghana, had the least amount of education compared to the male porters. This situation is not unique to porters only, but a reflection of female education in northern Ghana. Technically, the typical porter migrates to the cities to seek better economic prospects for themselves and their families. While men's migration was voluntary, migration by some women were triggered by cultural and traditional conditions. When respondents were asked to rank in order of importance the primary reason they migrated to the city, 80 per cent mentioned the lack of economic opportunities at home. They see the cities as offering more options by way of job prospects than staying at home and being restricted to farming.

Though porters have more choices in the cities compared to their homelands, these choices are restricted to a handful of options in the informal sector. The lack of, or low levels of education limits opportunities for meaningful or other kinds of employment at home in the north and in the southern cities. Holmes (1999) reported that school completion is an important determinant of future earnings and the return on education to the individual and society far exceeds the initial investments. Yet recent studies in Ghana demonstrate that education

becomes beneficial only when a person is able to go beyond basic education to complete senior secondary and post secondary education (Hashim, 2007). It is therefore, argued that people from low socio-economic backgrounds make a rational choice of not investing their little resources in basic education because they will not be able to afford senior secondary education to yield those returns. The lack of education also impact porters' ability to learn a trade. Most traditional apprenticeship and/or formal vocational training programs require at least completion of basic education (Oketch, 2007; Shiohata and Pryor, 2008) because of the national examination that is involved. The porters in the study acknowledged that their prospects in terms of better jobs or learning a trade would be better with at least basic education and some amount of financial capital.

Education can improve the human capital of an individual and the human resources of a nation. Schneider (2003) reported that investment in education even at the basic education level can significantly improve economies and foster self reliant communities in developing countries. When asked to rank the primary reason why they have no education or did not further their education, an overwhelming majority of respondents mentioned economic situation at home. This is a sad statistic on several levels, especially when basic education is free in Ghana. Additionally, senior high school education has been free for the three northern regions since independence in 1957. Yet these three regions continue to remain economically peripheral and their education in terms of enrollment and graduation rates lags behind the rest of the country.

From the above, it is obvious that with free universal basic education in Ghana, it is up to each individual family to take advantage. This conclusion, however, misses the underlying determinants of school enrollment in Ghana, and in most subsistence farming communities. In poor communities, enrolling a child in school costs more than the tuition, school supplies, cost of feeding, and other things needed to keep a child in school. There are real opportunity costs (defined as the cost of the next best alternate use of an asset or resource) to parents when they enroll their children in school. The opportunity cost to parents include lost wages, lost farm labor, free childcare, and deferred bride price (in the case of girls), among others (ILO, 2004; Schneider, 2003). Additionally, when parents are faced with the real problem of providing for their families, something like education and its associated expenses is seen as a luxury especially for girls. When this is coupled with little or no education of the parents, the chances of enrolling children in school are very slim.

It is the responsibility of governments to help provide education for their nationals and this must go beyond free basic and secondary education. The underlying economic and cultural factors that impact enrollment should be addressed. The recent introduction of School Feeding Programs (SFP) in Ghana is one way of mitigating school dropout and low enrollment of girls in particular. The program started as a pilot for selected schools in 2006 and following its initial success went nationwide in 2008. School feeding has the ability to incentivize parents to keep their children in school. The program

provides needed nourishment in the form of free meals and supplies for the home when participants maintain a level of attendance. Programs like SFP that tend to lower the opportunity cost to parents in sending their children to school are crucial in boosting school enrollment in general and girls in particular. Innovative school calendars where students attend school during the non-farming seasons and help parents on farms during farming seasons should be explored. Free basic education should be extended to include free textbooks, school uniforms, and meals (as is done in SFP). Such programs coupled with education of the parents on the need to keep children in school can go a long way in boosting enrollment and in keeping children in school. Additionally, national scale educational policies that seeks to improve the infrastructure and amenities of school, working conditions and salary of teachers particularly, in northern Ghana has to be undertaken. The Ghana Education Service (GES) has consistently found it difficult to retain enough qualified teachers in northern Ghana because of abject poverty and the lack of infrastructure and amenities in the region. This coupled with low remunerations of teachers in the country and no added incentives for teachers who accept posting to the north affect the educational standards of the region. When some of these issues are addressed, it will help solve the problem of low education of “Kayayei” at the source and help potential porters towards full and meaningful employment in society or enable them to learn a trade.

It is observable that when individuals have little or no education, and no skills necessary to earn a living, they rely on their human labor, which is an asset to earn a living (Chambers, 1989; Rakodi and Llyod, 2002). In the absence of financial capital, individuals will trade on their human capital (ability to labor). Porters rely on their physical strength to earn a living. Prostitutes rely on a different kind of asset to earn a living. It is not surprising that some female porters gravitate towards prostitution when they realize they have other tradable assets (Tawiah, 2007; Yeboah, 2008). The tendency to engage in prostitution is also prevalent in other forms of child labor and also among street children (ILO, 2004).

Finally, national strategic policies that seek to address the empowerment of girls and women should be addressed. Such national policies will eradicate cultural practices that are not beneficial to girls and women in general and northern women in particular. As mentioned earlier, the free compulsory education and the school feeding program, backed by legal sanctions on parents is an effective way of ensuring that both girls and boys stay in school and build on their human capacity. In relation to porters, there is the need to offer non-formal job and skill training programs to provide them with skills. Training in agriculture, small scale trading, or handicrafts supplemented with small loans or grants will help wean porters from the dangerous job of portering. When porters have viable options, they are more likely to stay at home and avoid the hardship of migrating to and living in the cities under inhuman conditions



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*An Examination of the Cultural and Socio-Economic Profiles*

**About the authors:** Dr. *Muriel Yeboah* an Assistant Professor of Geography at Virginia Union University. Her teaching and research interests include gender, development and urbanization issues. Dr. Yeboah completed her PhD in May 2008.

Dr. *Kwame Appiah-Yeboah* is a senior statistician at The Martin Agency. His research interests include rural development, migration and brain drain. Dr. Appiah-Yeboah completed his PhD in May 2004.