

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF THE CULTURAL PRACTICE OF “RITES OF PASSAGE” AMONG ADOLESCENT FEMALES: THE CASE OF *DIPO* IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

Objective: *The study explored the relevance and implications of Dipo (a puberty rite of passage in Ghana) on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescent females in the Krobo culture.*

Design/Methods: *Using a qualitative research design, a total of 23 participants were recruited using a purposive sampling method for the study. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and analysed using the Attride-Stirling thematic network analysis.*

Results: *Findings indicated that the Dipo represents a cultural means of instruction aimed at encouraging chastity and marriage for adolescent females. Also, the sexual and reproductive health education aimed towards female adolescents during Dipo was found to contain over-generalised, inaccurate, and fear-inducing messages. Within the Dipo rite of passage, limited open communication about sexual health and sexual intercourse was reported. Instead, information was unidirectional and postponed to later ages for adolescent females. As a consequence, adolescent females may experience delayed development in their identities as ‘Krobo’ women, and also have limited information on safe sex practices in modern times.*

Conclusion: *The Dipo rite of passage is increasingly viewed as having diminishing relevance and potentially negative consequences for the sexual and reproductive health of adolescent females, partly due to the lack of explicit, age-appropriate sexual health education. In light of modern social changes and the growing recognition of the importance of safe sex practices, this study underscores the need to integrate explicit sexual education into traditional rites. This integration would enhance the relevance of such practices and help protect adolescent health within evolving socio-cultural contexts.*

Keywords: Dipo, Krobo culture, Adolescent females, Reproductive Health, Sexual Behaviour.

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INTRODUCTION

Puberty rites are the means through which social identities are achieved in most traditional African cultures.^{1,2} Puberty rites in Ghana, such as the “Bragoro” among the Akans, the “Tugbewowo” among the Dodome Ewes, and the “Dipo” among the Krobos, have important reproductive health implications for girls in these cultures. These puberty rites, among other purposes, admonish adolescent girls to remain virgins until the rites are performed, thereby helping to control the sexual activity among adolescent girls in traditional African cultures.^{1,3,4} In recent times, their role in deferring sexual activity among adolescent females has been called into question.⁵ Across cultures, the early onset of puberty has markedly influenced puberty rites.⁶ As such, puberty rites in modern times are seemingly becoming symbolic of cultural continuity rather than a resource for controlling sexual activity among adolescents. Puberty rites abound amongst tribes in southern Ghana. However, the *Dipo* puberty rite among the Krobo people remains the most enduring puberty rite in Ghana.

Dipo is a traditional festival celebrated annually between April and May within the Krobo culture in the Eastern region of Ghana. The cultural tradition of “puberty rites” is practiced in many African cultures and can be viewed as a means through which socio-cultural identities are realised. Annually, females of pubertal age are taken through elaborate *Dipo* rituals. The Dipo teaches about the social values and traditions of their ethnicity. These social values and traditions include respect, obedience, self-control, training in gender-specific roles, including housewifery, and sexual relations. The rites seek to preserve adolescent females’ virginity and prepare them for their role in marriage.^{1,3,4} Although it is claimed in the culture that *Dipo* girls are taught about reproductive health and sexuality¹, the contents of this education are not known.

In traditional communities where chastity of the adolescent girl is a requirement for participating in the puberty rites, rules/bylaws that exist to deter/sanction promiscuous behaviour, such as by expelling the victims from the community, are seemingly broken.³ This is because the vast differentiation in timing and sequence in which these girls are married is delayed by the prolonged years of adolescence after the rites.^{7,8} As a consequence, adolescent females in the Krobo culture could find it challenging to control their sexual behaviours to the “right” time, especially in this modern era.⁹ The practice of the rites of Dipo in recent times depicts a diminishing ritual significance and outcomes³ on health and behavior, especially the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) of adolescent females. Asubonteng-Manu⁵ linked this to the increased sexual activity and the resultant high prevalence of teenage mothers among adolescent Krobo girls in recent times. For instance, Bedzo and Manortey²⁶ reported a 43.95% rate of teenage pregnancies in their recent study in the Menya Krobo Municipality. This raises questions about the significance of the *Dipo* rites to the health and well-being of adolescent females in the culture.

While scholarships have examined puberty rites and their implications for the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents,^{1,4,10} little evidence exists to show how adolescents’ experience of puberty rites promotes their reproductive health outcomes. The majority of these studies suggest that rites of passage hold possibilities for sexual and reproductive health benefits.^{1,4,10} Malisha, Maharaj, and Rogan¹¹ assert that although traditional rites of passage do not provide information relevant to health-seeking behaviour in this era of sexually transmitted infections, they still provide an avenue for sexual information. However, Asubonteng-Manu⁵ reported that the *Dipo* has become less effective in regulating the sexual behaviour of adolescent females in the Krobo culture.

Also, cultural scripts regarding communication about sex obviate open communication in the Krobo culture.^{12,13} Cultural scripts are techniques for communicating cultural norms, values, and practices in a manner understandable to both cultural insiders and outsiders¹⁶. Cultural scripts are tightly constrained, yet presented in a simple and flexible grammatical form that can be related to in all languages.¹⁶ Fonner *et al*,¹⁴ argue that open communication about sex protects adolescents against sexual vulnerabilities; HIV, sexually transmitted infections, and pregnancy outcomes.

Earlier, Klu *et al*¹⁵ observed that sexual and reproductive health communications are implied rather than made explicit for adolescents to understand the negative consequences associated with sex.¹⁵ Similarly, Fonner *et al*¹⁴ found that sexual communications tend to be authoritarian and unidirectional, filled with vague warnings rather than direct, open discussion. These studies suggest that there is a need to understand how positive sexual and reproductive health outcomes are achievable via traditional rites of passage. As such, this study seeks to critically assess the relevance of the *Dipo* rites to adolescent females' sexual and reproductive health in current times.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design, participant selection, and sampling:

A qualitative study approach was used in the conduct of the study. A total of twenty-three participants, made up of 10 parents (consisting of 5 fathers and 5 mothers), 10 adolescent females, and 3 traditional leaders (consisting of 2 males and a female) were recruited. Participants were purposively recruited for the study¹⁸ with the help of a community focal person. The criteria for

selecting adolescent females were their age (from 12 to 18) and completion of the *Dipo* rite. Parents were also selected based on their continuous care for adolescent *Dipo* girls. Also, traditional leaders were included because they possessed an immense understanding of the *Krobo* culture and traditions.

Study location

The study was conducted in Krobo Odumase, the administrative capital of the Lower Manya Krobo district. Lower Manya Krobo District has the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence in the country with 11.6% compared to both regional (made up of 26 districts) and national statistics of 3.7% and 1.3%, respectively.¹⁹

Data and methods:

Data were gathered from 17 face-to-face interviews and 2 focus group discussions. Four categories of interview guides were developed for the study. The adolescent females were first asked questions about their experiences during and after the *Dipo* rites, their sexuality, and their knowledge of contraceptives. Parents were also asked questions about adolescent sexuality, social interactions, and sexuality. Traditional leaders were also asked questions about the practice of the *Dipo* rites and the transitions that might have occurred over time. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) interview guides asked questions about adolescent behaviours in the community, their roles, and the general perception of modern *Dipo* girls compared to their era. Interviews were conducted at the convenience of all participants in a rented conference room with the support of a female interpreter. However, traditional leaders were interviewed in their homes in response to the requirements of traditional *Krobo* customs.

Data analysis:

Data were analysed using Thematic Networks Analysis (TNA)²⁰, which involves a three-stage process of coding, development of themes, and the construction of networks, and drawing logical connections. The TNA method was preferred for its appropriateness in systematically analysing qualitative data at various stages to explore the understanding of a phenomenon. The analysis commenced with Open Code to develop codes that were merged later to develop themes upon which networks were constructed and associations made between them. Three themes were identified, which were the rites/cultural markers to adulthood, the transition, and communication about sex. By cross-referencing with transcripts, relevant texts were assigned to each theme to the overt participants' narratives. The design of the data collection instrument, transcription of the data, and the subsequent generation of codes and themes were subjected to scrutiny and approval by the principal research supervisor and peer researchers. This helped check the credibility of the data and its analysis. Also, in order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms were used instead of their real names for the purpose of this study.

Ethics

Clearance for the study was sought from the Norwegian Social Sciences Data Services (NSD) in Norway (Reference number; 43513 / 3 / MHM) and the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection in Ghana (Reference number; DOC/ER/SP.8). Participants consented before they partook in the study. Consent and assent for participation were also sought from adults, parents, and adolescent females. Participants were duly informed of anonymity, confidentiality, and their right to renounce their participation in the study.

Results

Our findings from the analysis are organised under three main organising themes: the rites/cultural markers to adulthood, the transitions, and communication, as shown in **Figure 1 below**. These themes define and relate the meaning of the *Dipo* to the Krobo people, the changes in the rite as informed by social change and its relevance to modern sexual and reproductive health of adolescent females, and the cultural understanding of communication about sex.

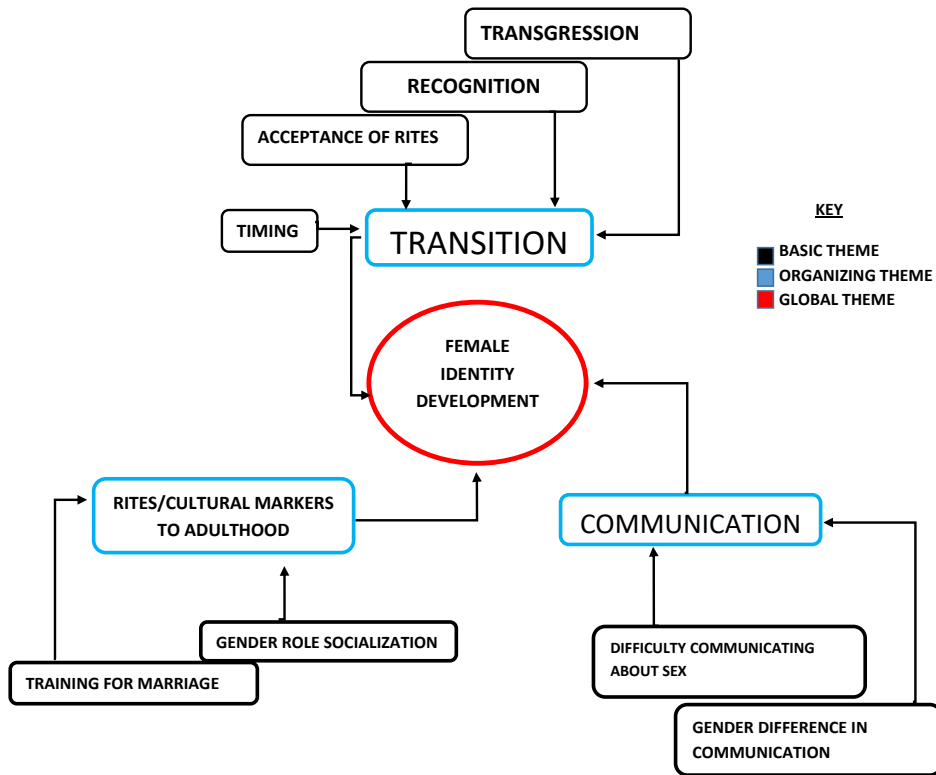


Figure 1: A Thematic Network of Findings

The Rites/Cultural Makers to Adulthood

The Dipo rites represent a cultural instruction through which adolescent females are taught the values of the Krobo tradition, being trained for marriage, and socialised into gender norms and roles. Participants reported that the completion of the rites signals the attainment of the ethnic identity of a Krobo woman, an identity that is closely linked with chastity, the ability to take up adult female roles, and the responsibilities of a wife. The Sub-Queen Mother relates that; *“The Dipo rite is our custom, and it exists to... teach them (Dipo girls)... the responsibilities of a wife, receive visitors, and serve food for their husbands. The values inculcated seek to usher them into responsible adulthood. ...it is about doing things with parents, respecting*

the elderly, and how to become good children until they grow up.” (Sub-Queen Mother)

A mother in a focus group discussion related that;

“Dipo rite is our custom, and the reason why we do it is that it makes one a real Krobo woman and makes her feel important in the community.” (P5, fgd women’s group)

Another woman added that;

“The Dipo you hear of is what is keeping us (Krobo women) respected by other people. Do you know why? We remain clean until marriage, and by the time we are married, we know how to do everything. So it is a big shame for us (Krobo women) that one will get pregnant before marriage or the Dipo rites.” (P3, fgd women’s group)

Gender role socialisation

The cultural education given to adolescent females is mainly rooted in gender role socialisation. Adolescent females are taught skills for home management, the roles of a wife, and gender norms in the culture.

A mother relates this:

When you go through the Dipo, you are taught how to sweep, how to use a ladle to fetch from the pot, and also how to grind pepper. Your grandmother teaches you how to do house chores, receive visitors, etc. (P2 fgd, female group)

Also, an adolescent female confirmed that;

"I learned how to cook, sweep, and, when you get married, how you should take care of your husband or treat your husband in the future." (Padiki, 16)

Dipo girls learn to take up adult female roles at home through responsibility uptake in roles of women. Participants indicated that mothers are responsible for the further training of girls through the assignment of these roles to Dipo girls. Participants' narratives are shown in the quotes below:

"Mothers are encouraged to reinforce the training at home after the rites to ensure the role competence of their daughters." (Sub-Queen Mother)

A mother also mentioned that;

"After the rite, you (the parents, mostly the mother) will teach her how to do her house chores and relate with people in the community. The adolescent female is talked to just as during the Dipo to be responsible and morally upright, to be able to have a successful marriage." (FGD, P5, female group).

Adolescent females found the performance of these roles to be a preparation for life outside the home. As Padiki relates,

"I cook so that my parents will also get some to eat, and also so that when I grow and get married, it will not be a problem for me. I also sweep so that I become used to it and, in case I get married, I will not be found wanting." (Padiki, 16)

Training for marriage

Marriage is regarded as an important milestone in the culture and consolidates the social status of a Krobo woman in the culture. Girls are thus taught how to become good wives. Hence, acceptance of marriage into families and its success are contingent upon the completion of the Dipo rite.

"The rite is meant to educate them for marriage, and that they are not supposed to have sex with any man before they are given out in marriage." (P4, fgd male group)

This is also corroborated by a woman who says,

"The Dipo rite is a means of being accepted into any family in the Krobo lands. A lady who has not gone through Dipo is limited in her marriage to certain families, such as the royal family, or visits the homes of the priest, queen, and king. She is considered unclean by those who have undergone the Dipo rite." (P4, fgd, female group).

Aki and Akokor also affirmed that the rites qualify them for a successful marriage in the future.

"As a Krobo girl, you have to go through the rite, and when somebody wants to marry you, he first finds out whether you went through the rite." (Akokor, 17)

"My mother always tells us that if anyone gets pregnant without going through the Dipo rites, she will not get a husband and the elders will not like her, so I went through the rite because I want to get married in the future." (Aki, 16)

Relevance of Cultural Rites of Passage (Dipo)

Participants acknowledge that the strict restrictions on early sexual experiences, such as banishment, play a central role in marriages to ensure girls are chaste before marriage. However, for adolescent females, no clear education on sexuality during the rites was reported, but warnings about pregnancy.

Participants related that;

“It helps the adolescent female abstain from sex since she has not gone through the rite and she is afraid of becoming pregnant and banished from the community.” (P4, fgd, male group).

Lamley, a 16-year-old girl related that;

“They said we should play with boys but should not do something that would result in a pregnancy.” (Lamley, 16)

The Transitions

Here we analysed data to explore some of the transitions in the culture to understand the extent to which the *Dipo* is relevant to adolescent SRH in modern times. Participants' narratives showed that the contact of the Krobo culture with Christianity and modernity has greatly influenced levels of acceptance of the rite, recognition of adolescent females, broken normative social regulations on behaviour, and the sexual behaviors of *Dipo* girls in the community, transgression.

Acceptance of the rites

Contested understanding of the *Dipo* rite: participants stated that social change has had a significant impact on their culture. They mentioned that the contact of the Krobo culture with Christianity and modernity has greatly influenced levels of acceptance of the rite in the community. Participants' views are presented below;

“They all understood it well in the past (accepted the rites), but with the advent

of Christianity, there is now a schism (non-acceptance) about it, particularly among Christians. The majority of the Krobos understand it and they perform it.” (P1, fgd, male group)

“They see it as idol worshipping. That is why they want us to stop and become Christians.” (P4, fgd, female, group)

Timing

Traditionally, the rites were performed for girls during menarche. However, the early onset of puberty has led to participation in the rites at age twelve for adolescent females with menstruation, which is not a criterion for participation anymore. However, importance is placed on maturity for gender role socialisation. The sub-queen mother related that

“... Girls at the ages of 10 and 8 years are menstruating and are well developed beyond their age. Because of this, menstruation is no longer a major criterion for the rites. Hence, the Konor (paramount chief) has decreed that girls be taken through the rites at the age of 12 years. It is done at this age because, if the child is not matured, the training she is taken through becomes irrelevant since they are likely to forget the roles taught when they become matured. (Sub-Queen Mother).

A male participant also confirms that;

“In the olden days, girls were much older before they went through the rites. However, current social situations and the early development of girls have led to the reduction of the age of initiation to twelve.” (P4, fgd, male group).

It was also observed that this trend in the culture also dictated the timing of participating in the rite.

Recognition

In current times, adolescent females are not recognised as adults. As such, adolescent females are not married off immediately after the rites. But they are allowed to mature and acquire a means of livelihood before they marry. According to one participant

“In the olden days, because girls were matured before they went through the rites, they were considered adults, but these days, because of curiosity, stubbornness, and early maturation, we don’t allow them to grow old before they go through the rites. Because we fear they may become pregnant, they go through the rites much earlier to avoid the associated difficulties that come with pregnancy before the rite.” (P 4, fgd, female group)

The Sub-Queen Mother also mentioned that;

“The fact that one has undergone the rites does not mean she is in the position to marry or accept any proposal from a man. Dipo girls do not go into marriage immediately after going through the rites. They are encouraged to wait until they are mature before being allowed into marriage.” (Sub-Queen Mother)

The transgressions

It was observed that modern-day *Dipo* girls are less submissive to their parents’ advice to abstain from early sexual relationships. Participants expressed worry about *Dipo* girls’ sexual activity. According to them, *Dipo* girls in present times are sexually active and less compliant with the norms of *Dipo* as they used to be in the past. These early sexual activities of *Dipo* girls are now of great concern to community members and their parents, as they fear early motherhood for these adolescent females.

According to a male participant

“In the past, girls rarely engaged in sexual relationships, but these days, at the age of 12, some of them engage in these sexual relationships, and it is troubling as girls become pregnant before their prime.” (P3, fgd, male group)

A male participant also narrated that;

“In the olden days, children had to be about 18 or 19 before they went through the rites. Now, it is difficult for adolescent females to abstain from sex and early sexual relationships, and if you talk to them they don’t listen...” (P4, fgd, male group)

The majority of *Dipo* girls also confirmed these accounts by admitting that their peers are sexually active. Padiki, 16, related that

“Some of my colleagues do have sex with their fiancées, but some do not.” (Padiki, 16)

The Communication

We investigated whether parent-child communication about sex was evident, the nature of the communication, gender differences, and barriers to communicating about sex. Although some participants expressed good parent-child communication, the nature of sex communication between *Dipo* girls and their parents was informed by gender differences and a difficulty in communicating about sex, as shown in Figure 1 above.

Difficulty communicating about sex

Dipo girls reported difficulty in communicating private concerns to parents due to fear of parental or caregiver’s response. Some *Dipo* girls believed that asking parents or discussing issues that involved their sexual life with them could be interpreted as being promiscuous or “bad girls.” The study findings further showed that the communication between the *Dipo*

girls and their parents is characterised by fear of blame and possible reprimand. Here is what the *Dipo* girls have to say;

"There are other things that you can only share with your friends, but not your mother. My friends are my age, and I can easily discuss certain things with them, but my parents will be angry with me if I do." (Akorkor, 17).

Another *Dipo* girl indicated that

"As soon as you start talking about sex matters, they may think you are doing it. So, sometimes I talk to my sister or friends." (Padiki, 16)

Also, communication about sex between parents and *Dipo* girls from participants' accounts shows irregular, silent, and limited sex talk. *Dipo* girls expressed difficulties opening up to their parents on sexual issues because they are shy and unsure of parents response to sex talk. Dominant in participant responses is the use of 'things', which showed silence in communication about sex. They related that;

".. I don't know how I am going to discuss with my parents such a thing." (Lamley, 16)

"Maybe when I tell them, they will be angry with me. To me, it is not necessary because if I am discussing those things with them, they may think I don't have anything important to talk about." (Akorkor, 17)

Similarly, parents also find it difficult to communicate about sex with their daughters. Some discuss it less frequently, and others become silent on it. A parent related that

"As a woman, when you get into such things, you will know it for yourself." (P3, female).

Another parent also stated that;

"I do not communicate with her frequently, but I call her to advise her to abstain from

sex and any immoral behaviour so that she can complete her education, become independent and find someone to marry in the future." (P5, a mother)

Gender differences in communication

Gender differences were observed in the way mothers and fathers related to adolescent females. Fathers maintain an authoritative and instructive position in communicating with their daughters and expect high standards of behaviour. However, mothers prefer a firm approach to communicating with adolescent females. Participants related that:

"I always sit her down and discuss issues. She always tells me what she likes and dislikes, and moreover, we live happily as mother and daughter." (P5, female)

"Our communication is mainly based on instructions, do and don't do, and go or don't go." (P5, male).

From these narratives, although taboos were not mentioned as barriers, they are laced with silence or inhibitions that hinder ease in communicating about sex. As such, there appears to be a culturally informed timing for sex talk, and that it is prohibited among adolescents.

DISCUSSIONS

Our findings suggest that adolescents are expected to abstain from premarital sex.²¹ The cultural and social attachments to issues of sex are postponed to stages when adolescent females are deemed to have matured.⁹ Thus, sexual education occurs during rites of passage to educate maturing girls.²² Sex education represents a means through which adolescent females receive relevant reproductive health information to ensure positive outcomes in adolescent sexuality.¹¹ The *Dipo* rites among the Krobo people are female identity-developing

practices for their adolescent females towards adulthood and the assumption of adult roles. The *Dipo* rites function as an avenue to instruct the expectant gender roles of young adolescent females within the Krobo culture. As such, the Krobo people posit that the 'Female Identity Development' of their adolescent females is attained after going through the *Dipo* rites, through which they are taught matters concerning adulthood and reproductive health. The findings from this study also show that the attainment of *Dipo* girls' adult female identity is dependent on their conformity to the 'cultural makers to adulthood' among the Krobo people. Also, the nature of sex communication between *Dipo* girls and their parents and the transition of *Dipo* over time amidst modernisation and religion have a bearing on the attainment of the ideal female identity for the Krobo adolescent females. The participants' responses suggest that, the practice of *Dipo* is now equated to idol worshiping among some Krobo tribesmen, predominantly Christians. This belief reduces the acceptance and/or the active participation in *Dipo* by the female adolescents.

However, the potency of *Dipo* in providing relevant reproductive health education to maturing girls in current times is not evident in its cultural teachings. They have implied accounts of pregnancy prevention through ensuring chastity using fear-induced measures such as parental wrath/punishments. For example, adolescent females were not able to state precisely the sexual education they were given during the rites, but vague messages about avoiding play that leads to pregnancy. This affirms the findings of Fonner *et al*¹⁴ that sexual education is laced with implicit admonitions rather than open confrontation on sexual topics. The limitation of the *Dipo* rite in explicitly educating girls about sex and its related negative outcomes and positive ways of exerting control precludes adolescent females

from gaining an in-depth understanding of sex-related subjects. Rondini and Krugu²³ confirm this finding that the traditional responsibility of communicating sexual issues to future generations has broken down due to social change.

Although it is argued that traditional rites of passage do provide information on sex,¹¹ the relevance and clarity of the education to girls about sexual and reproductive health is not accounted for in the *Krobo* culture. This finding runs parallel to the argument that rites of passage are a means to ensure greater outcomes in sexual and reproductive health.^{4,10} In the *Krobo* culture, sexual and reproductive health education for adolescent females, which is critical for attaining their adult identity, is best achieved through appropriate communication about sex between adolescents and their parents.

However, the communication about sex between adolescents and their parents is limited, not regular, silent, and even when talked about, parents are not explicit in their communication. The communication between mothers and their daughters appeared more friendly and accommodating than with fathers, even though the communication is generally characterised by fear or limited confidence in the adolescents. Adolescent females feel parents are dismissive of sexual issues, and thus are unsure of parental responses to such discussions. Most adolescents are not engaged in the process enough for parents to understand their concerns about sex. In general, sexuality is regarded as a sensitive and private issue, and it is avoided as much as possible in an open conversation in most African contexts, especially with adolescent females.⁹ However, the near-silence on sex talk and openness to discussing sexual topics between parents and *Dipo* girls may be due to gaps in knowledge that the *Dipo* rite does not provide relevant education to girls on

sexual and reproductive health. The difficulty in communicating about sex could lead to inhibition of adolescents' disclosure of sexual issues and reporting of sex-related offences by girls in the community, which further may limit help-seeking.

The implied nature of reproductive health communications, rather than being explicit for adolescents to understand the dangers that come with sex¹⁵ causes diffused identity development for adolescents. Fonner *et al*¹⁴ reported that sexual communications turn out to be authoritarian and unidirectional, laced with implicit admonitions rather than open confrontation on sexual topics. Although Fonner *et al*¹⁴ argue that sexual communication holds relevance to controlling HIV infections, the situation in Krobo Odumase reflects a cultural limitation in ensuring adolescent sexual education.

The fear that adolescent females attach to sex talk may compel them to confide in and seek counselling on sexual issues with peers. This is gradually shifting the parental role in sexual communication to peers and others outside the family.²⁴ Although peer involvement in sex talk may be linked to empathy and willingness to listen,²⁴ this study asserts that these inhibitions to discuss with parents are due to fear of being misjudged and labelled as spoiled or engaging in sexual activity. As such, friends do serve as a haven for such discussions.²⁵

Transitions in the culture have immensely influenced the sexuality of *Dipo* girls. The timing of initiation in modern times has influenced the recognition of *Dipo* girls, postponed marriage, and the social control of sexual behaviour among the Krobo people. Hitherto, matured girls were taken through the rites, thus providing a short duration between the completion of *Dipo* and marriage. This facilitated the control of sexual expression among initiates, the

development of their female identities, and upheld the cultural ideal of purity. Also, it facilitated the recognition of initiates as women and strengthened social control of behaviour. However, years extended after *Dipo* may be influenced by the early onset of puberty and age of initiation, indicating a lack of a definite identity and age of sexual expression. Thus, adolescent females' fear of cultural sanctions on early sexual experience is broken (sanctions are not regarded anymore) after the rite.

Cultural sanctions that regulate behaviour are now seemingly prerequisites for *Dipo*. However, post-*Dipo* sanctions are non-existent and limit the social control of *Dipo* girls in modern times. These may influence pre-marital sexual relationships and adolescent motherhood. A possible explanation for this current trend may stem from the lingering age-old perception of adolescent females by tribal men as matured for marriage after the rites and having assumed adult roles. Also, exposure to media influence due to modernisation is a likely factor that may have accounted for the observed sexual activity among girls.³

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The foundation of morality in the culture, *Dipo*, is gradually losing its relevance in engendering positive sexual and reproductive health outcomes among adolescent females in the Krobo community. Traditional education of the adolescent female for marriage and taking up female adult roles as required in the Krobo culture has been challenged. Failure of the culture to keep sexual activity in check after the rites is likely the cause of sexual activity among *Dipo* girls. The above suggests that the relevance of the *Dipo* culture amidst modern trends of development is fast diminishing; in that,

the ideal aim of purity before marriage is gradually becoming unachievable, thereby breaking the confidence of the locals and the public in the *Dipo*.

Thus, puberty rites in tribal groups could benefit from collaborations with health professionals to structure communications about sex and adapt them into the rites for greater adolescent SRH. Traditional leaders may also consider instituting annual *Dipo* awareness events in the *Krobo* communities to revitalise, strengthen, and correct misconceptions about *Dipo* to keep its relevance. Amid the rapidisation of civilisation and religion, further studies are necessary to explore effective ways of maintaining the values and relevance of *Dipo* rites. Culturally acceptable alternatives may also be explored to enhance the acceptability of the *Dipo* rites in this modern era.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The secrecy around the rites of *Dipo* and the taboo nature of the topic under discussion may have prevented the authors from having an open exploration of issues with the study participants, for example, the Queen mothers.

Additionally, all the authors in this study were males. This has a potential negative impact on the quality and truthfulness of the data received from the all-female participants. This is because the issue of sexuality is treated as a sensitive matter and rarely discussed (especially with the opposite sex) in many Ghanaian tribes, including the *Krobo* tribe. This effect was mitigated by relying on female community focal persons to identify study participants and build rapport with them to pave the way for effective interaction. Yet, the data interpretation was also done by male authors of advanced age. These have the tendency to introduce

bias in the data analysis, as authors may misinterpret or overlook the participants' ideas or responses. There was therefore an open discussion about the emerging codes, themes, and the interpretation of major texts among the authors. It was hoped that this would ensure the reliance on the varied and wider perspectives and insights of the entire research team to minimise bias.

Future studies may include the *Krobo* traditional leaders and especially females as researchers, as this could pave the way for a deeper exploration of issues contributing to the declining relevance of the *Dipo* rites. This could reveal relevant information for initiating measures to revitalise the role of *Dipo* in promoting the sexual and reproductive health of adolescent females in the *Krobo* culture.

CONCLUSION

The *Dipo* rite of passage is currently suggested to have diminishing relevance and possible negative consequences for the sexual and reproductive health of adolescent females. This could be attributed to social change and greater acknowledgement of the importance of safe sex practices in modern times.

Declaration of Interest

All authors in this study declare no competing interests.

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