Challenges of young mothers raising children in urban slums of Accra, Ghana: A qualitative study

Portia Nana Ama Brempong[iD][1]*, Kingsley Saa-Touh Mort[iD][1] and Eunice Abbey [iD][1]

Abstract

The United Nations (UN) Programme on Human Settlements and the Voluntary National Review (VNR) report of Ghana on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) indicates that as of 2020, about 8.8 million people lived in slums. Despite these alarming statistics, sparse literature exists on the challenges young mothers encounter when raising their children in such environments. The study explored challenges young mothers encounter in raising their children in Ghana's slum dwellings. A descriptive qualitative design of twenty (20) purposively selected young mothers were interviewed using a face-to-face approach. Audo recorded data was transcribed and analysed thematically. Four (4) themes emerged under this study: 1) financial challenges associated with their inability to afford early childhood care/education, 2) struggle with maintaining discipline of children, 3) reliance on self and herbal medication, and 4) turf wars among slum teenage mothers. Considering these challenges experienced by slum teenage mothers, there is the need for increased focus on improving the well-being and prospects of both young mothers and their children within urban slums.

1   University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana
Corresponding author: Department of Social Work, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana
Email: portiabrempong22@gmail.com

Introduction

In urban Ghana, 35.0% of girls between the ages of 15 to 24 years are either facing unplanned pregnancies or have contracted sexually transmitted diseases (Adedze et al., 2022; Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), 2021). It has also been estimated that approximately 14% of girls between 15 to 19 years in Ghana are already having children (Biney & Nyarko, 2017). These alarming statistics highlight concerns on how young motherhood's impact on teenage mothers, children, and society (Ngum et al., 2015).

The consequences of young motherhood and parenting includes a lack of formal educational qualification and truncation of education, social isolation, and poverty (Gyesaw & Ankomah, 2013). Some studies (e.g., Garwood et al. (2015) in developed countries such as the USA) has highlight challenges teenage mothers face. First, non-completion of education of young mothers portrays limitations, regarding life earning potentials and opportunities among the adolescent population. This they assert perpetuates the cycle of impoverishment and socio-economic vulnerability. Second, teenage motherhood places young girls in challenging circumstances, leading to various adverse outcomes, such as discontinuing their education, facing parental neglect and rejection, and having limited opportunities for their future. This situation the authors observe makes it difficult for teenage mothers to provide for themselves and their babies, especially if they are forced to leave their homes. Lastly, the authors discuss poverty as being a significant contributing factor to young parenting, thus perpetuating this cycle, and resulting in their children growing up in unfavorable conditions and environments (Garwood et al., 2015).

Studies with the Ghanaian context on teenage motherhood in slums areas revealed that child health outcomes in slum settings often exhibit poor conditions due to challenges in accessing healthcare and harsh environmental factors with children facing higher infant and child mortality rates compared to their non-slum urban and rural counterparts (e.g., Awunyo-Akaba et al., 2016; Owusu-Ansah, Tagbor & Togbe, 2016; Twintoh et al., 2021). Similarly, Corburn and Sverdlik (2019) note that life in informal settlements increases children's vulnerability, particularly their health with housing structures in slums observed to be constructed of low-quality materials and a danger to children. Moreover, poor sanitation, lack of safe drinking water, and no or insufficient toilets also contribute to negative outcomes for children (Awumbila et al., 2014; Ersnt et al., 2013). Urban services and infrastructure including access to healthcare services and educational opportunities are severely lacking in slum settlements in Sub-Saharan Africa (Braimah & Lawson, 2014).

The need for improved and sustained effort in halting and reversing the situation of slum dwellers is not only critical for ensuring and improving the health of children, but also critical towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal three of the SDGs, for example, seeks to ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages. Additionally, concerns about violence and insecurity are high among those

living in slum settlements, which is not healthy for children (Sahiledengle et al., 2018).

Increased gang activity among young people living in slums has prompted worries not only about experiencing crime but also about their adolescent and children joining such groups and engaging in criminal activities themselves and abusing drugs (Coburn & Sverdlik, 2019). Research evidence indicates that slums environments are unsuitable for parenting and for fostering the general well-being and development of children (Coley et al., 2013). The notion of ideal parenting has also been shown to be closely linked to fulfilling a child's needs, encompassing provisions such as health, food, shelter, clothing, and a conducive environment to ensure holistic well-being and growth from childhood to adulthood (Amos, 2013).

Studies conducted on slum dwellers have mostly focused on the childcare practices of teenage mothers, parenting typologies and adolescents' academic and behavioural outcomes and the health of women living in informal settlements and parenting styles and psychological well-being of adolescents (Addo, 2020; Fink, et al., 2012; Twintoh et al., 2021). There are, however, few studies within Ghana that explored the challenges young mothers encounter in raising their children in the slum environment. It has also been noted that parenting in urban slums do have some cultural, socio-demographic, and ethnic variations (Kejerfors, 2007; Meth, 2013) Thus, understanding how the unique vulnerabilities posed by slum environments influence maternal parenting remains limited in Ghana. The main purpose of this study is to explore the challenges young mothers encounter in raising their children in the slums of Accra.

Theoretical perspective

The study is rooted in the ecological influences on parenting and child development theory by Jack (2000). Ecological influences on parenting and child development refer to the various factors and systems in a child's environment that shape their growth, behavior, and overall development. This framework emphasizes that a child's development is influenced by multiple interacting systems such as the social ecology of families (family), individual and community level on social support and parenting (community). The concept further underscores that people living in poverty-stricken communities often experience some stresses such as inadequate health facilities and low income which may affect how they live (Belsky,1984). Hence, this theory helped the researchers to identify multiple factors at different levels affecting young mothers, potentially hindering their child-raising practices in the slum. For instance, the young mother's income (which is external to the child) could impact her ability to educate her child through school. At the community level, crime and violence in these areas contribute to cautious parenting (Jack, 2000) as it becomes a challenge for young mothers to raise their children in such community (Adams et al., 2022). Thus, this theoretical framework enabled the researchers to examine the challenges young mothers encounter in raising their children in slum settings at different levels.

Methods

Research design

The population of this study comprised young female mothers dwelling in two slums of Accra, aged 15 to 35 years. A descriptive qualitative research design was utilised while face-to-face interviews were used to collect data. A qualitative research design was considered suitable given the fact that it provides an in-depth understanding of what people experience and the meanings they ascribe to the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2021).

Research setting

The study was conducted in Greater Accra, the capital city of Ghana. Accra has a population of 5,455,692 (GSS, 2021). The Ghana Statistical Service (2021) mentions that one of the reasons there is rapid urbanisation of Accra and Kumasi due to rural-urban migration. Slum dwellers have been noted to face socioeconomic, environmental, and housing problems because of urbanisation and migration to the region (Awumbila et al., 2014). Most migrants resort to slums since they provide migrants with affordable and cheap housing (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2022). The study sites are Old Fadama and African Eleven. Old Fadama, also popularly known as Sodom and Gomorrah, is the largest slum settlement in Ghana, located in the capital city of Accra. It occupies 146 hectares of land between the Odaw River and Korle-Gonno (Weeks et al., 2013). The place was initially used as a settlement for migrants from Konkomba and Nanumba after the war in 1994 and now houses many people due to the affordable housing it provides. In 2009, the population was estimated to be around 79,684 with a population density of 2424.18 people per hectare (Weeks et al., 2013). Most of the people who live in Old Fadama are petty traders, scrap dealers, and head porters, who are mostly migrants from the northern part of Ghana. It is characterized by filth, poor drainage, and sewage systems, pockets of violence and crime, floods, and fire outbreaks due to unplanned building structures and the nature of building materials used (Awumbila et al., 2014).

African Eleven, also known as Kiosk Estate or Orlando Yard, is also a slum located within the enclave of Spintex and situated in Tema West Metropolis. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2021), the Tema Metropolis is made up of 292,773 people. The slum was named after a football team that was formally dominant in the area but is now defunct. There are a little over 1,000 residents of African Eleven, with most of them in the formal sector, specifically factory workers in and around Spintex. African Eleven is also known as the "kiosk estate" or "Orlando Yard" [named after the caretaker of the slum] (Emmanuel Quartey, personal communication, January 2, 2021).

Situating the study within the Greater Accra Region was convenient because it afforded the researchers easy access to participants since most of them are migrants from rural areas to the cities and are domiciled and work in the region. The study sites are appropriate for this study because studies done on parenting in Old Fadama do not exist,

with little to no research done in African Eleven on parenting amongst young mothers. Furthermore, Greater Accra is the most urbanized region in Ghana with prominent slums, according to the Ghana Statistical Service (2021).

Participant and participant selection

Twenty (20) participants were purposively selected based on a certain criterion with 10 from each study site. Purposive sampling pays attention to the qualities participants possess and their knowledge and experience regarding the study (Etikan, 2016). Thus, the criteria that guided the selection of young mothers from the study sites included participants' experiences and knowledge relevant to the research topic. Young mothers between 15 and 35 years old with a child(ren) and living in Old Fadama and African Eleven were considered for the study. Research participants who did not possess the characteristics were not included in the study because they did not possess the qualities and experiences the researchers were looking for.

The researchers conducted a reconnaissance study in November 2020 to familiarize themselves with the two study sites, Old Fadama and African Eleven. Subsequently, in the early parts of May 2021, the researchers held informational meetings with the authorities of the selected study sites to brief them on the aim of the study and to explain the purpose of the study and the data collection procedure. Introductory letters and a copy of the IRB clearance that was obtained from the Ethics Committee on Humanities of the University of Ghana were handed over to the key stakeholders and yard authorities. The authorities, satisfying themselves with the nature and purpose of the research, made announcements in the yard from time to time.

Researchers utilised the criteria and identified participants who showed interest in the study. The objectives of the study were clearly explained to the participants, and they were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and the use of pseudonyms in data presentation and that the information they provided would be used strictly for academic purposes only. Researchers then sought the permission of research participants involvement by making them sign a written informed consent before face-to-face interviews were conducted. Participants who did not take part in the study cited reasons including the fact that researchers generally use the information obtained from them for purposes other than what is often explained to them and lack of time due to commitments to their work and families.

Procedures

Data was collected using interviews to obtain the viewpoint of the participants and gain an appreciation of their personal experiences (Jamshed, 2014), while direct observations were also used to observe the nature and characteristics of the slum areas. Observation tactics adopted by the researchers offered the opportunity to witness some of the issues being narrated by the participants at firsthand. Field notes were used as part of data

collection. Open-ended interview questions were designed and developed to conduct interviews with the aid of a semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide was developed based on the literature reviewed. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with participants in their natural locations. Participants were briefed about the purpose of the study. The express permission of interviewees was sought before recordings were conducted while participants were assured of their confidentiality.

Ethical considerations

Consistent with National Association of Social Workers (NASW) guidelines on ethical considerations in conducting research, this study adhered to all the laid down principles and procedures. The researcher ensured that all ethical procedures in social work research were adhered to in this study. The following ethical principles were taken into consideration: confidentiality, informed consent, voluntary participation, and plagiarism. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Committee for Humanities, University of Ghana with (Protocol number: ECH 121/20-21). The participants signed the consent form before participating in the study. To ensure anonymity, the names used in presenting the data are all pseudonyms and all other identifiers have been removed.

Data analysis

The data management software, NVivo 12 Pro, was used to manage and code the data from interviews and the generation of themes and quotes. All twenty (20) transcripts from the Word document was imported into the NVivo 12 Pro software. Notes were then created for parents and children based on the interview questions for all transcripts. The data was analysed using Smith and Osborn's (2008) four steps of the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA). This was done by first reading the transcripts and listening to the audio recordings several times to become familiar with the interviews that were conducted. Notes about experiences and observations were made by reading, and rereading the transcripts, to clarify the meaning of the transcripts. In the second phase, notes and transcripts were organized according to emerging themes. In the third stage, emerging themes were recognized, and master themes, were developed into sub themes. Lastly, the study's findings were narrated by picking each theme and discussing it with direct quotes. Researchers obtained participant validation by summarising to participants what they said to make sure it reflected the identified themes.

Findings

Four (4) themes emerged in this study. These are related to issues including the inability to afford early childhood care/education, the struggle of young mothers in maintaining discipline of children, self and herbal medication, and turf wars as highlighted below.

Inability to afford childhood care or education

Many young mothers in both study sites expressed their inability to afford early childhood care and education for their children. For those attempting to enroll their children in daycare centers or schools located in neighboring communities, the financial burden posed by fees and essential toiletry costs essential for children's hygiene presents significant obstacles. This challenge was particularly pronounced among mothers with children aged 0 to 5 years, falling within the early childhood bracket. Similarly, for mothers with children of primary school age, the financial strain extended to cover a range of educational expenses, including stationery costs, levies, and other associated fees, ultimately obstructing their ability to secure quality education for their children. Consequently, young mothers found themselves unable to enroll their children in schools or daycare centers, as illustrated in the following statement:

> I struggle to send my child to the daycare center. This is because I do not have money to pay for the fees they charge. You see madam [referring to one of the researchers], it is not only the school fees that are the problem, but the school also requires that I bring along toiletries and baby wipes for the child which are very expensive to buy. Another issue is that parents are asked to bring along some small chops and snacks for children aside from the feeding fee paid to the school. Currently, I do not have any meaningful work that I am doing which gives me income. These are the reasons why I am unable to enroll my child in the daycare center; I carry him wherever I go (Fatima, 21 years, Old Fadama).

> I have two children, both of primary school age. One is in primary three and the other is in primary four. Even though government schools don't require school fees, there are still other expenses like stationery and other fees that keep coming up. When my children go to school without the necessary books and fees paid, they are embarrassed by their teachers and classmates. Their friends also make fun of their school uniforms, so my children don't feel comfortable going to school. (Adwoa, 32 years, African Eleven).

These narratives underscore the profound impact of financial limitations on young mothers' ability to secure early childhood education and schools for their children. The intricate web of costs associated with these services, ranging from formal fees to hidden expenses, significantly hinders access for children in these slum communities. As a result, young mothers are forced to make difficult decisions and sacrifices, which can potentially impact their children's well-being and prospects. These accounts illuminate the pressing need for targeted interventions and policy measures to address the socio-economic barriers faced by young mothers in providing essential educational and childcare opportunities for their children.

Struggle of young mothers in maintaining discipline of children

Many of the mothers, particularly those with adolescent children, emphasized their fears for their children's safety and security in the community. Many mothers raising teenagers voiced concern over the potential for negative peer influences to derail their children from the lives they hoped for. Thus, tools for exerting positive values varied amongst the young mothers of the two study sites. Corporal punishment such as beating and advising were used by some mothers at Old Fadama while young mothers at Old Fadama resorted to advising their children. For instance, Nuella, 25 years old at Old Fadama narrates her ordeal:

> In this neighbourhood, many children join their friends in doing things that aren't good. The children here often behave badly. My own son is known for being troublesome and people even call him "the bad one." Sometimes, he goes missing for two or three days. He leaves in the morning and doesn't come back until three days later. If you ask him something, he acts rudely and walks away. He's not respectful, and it's because of the friends he hangs out with. At first, he wasn't like this, but I think his friends have made him act this way. When he doesn't come home, I punish him by beating him. I do this to make sure he learns to behave, or else something bad might happen.

> I worry about my children growing up in this place. Especially at night, as you can see [pointing to one of the researchers], this area gets noisy. There are young girls and boys flirting around, but I have nowhere to take my children. I'm not happy raising my children here. I don't want them to learn the bad behaviours that some of the girls here show. That's why I try my best to talk to my children and warn them to be careful (Rose, 34 years old, African Eleven).

From the insights provided by these narratives, a concerning pattern emerges within this neighbourhood, where the influence of peers and the prevailing environment can significantly impact the behavior and attitudes of young children. The accounts reveal that many children in the community tend to engage in negative activities and exhibit problematic conduct. The description of the narrator's own son as "the bad one" underscores the pervasive nature of such behaviours, which have earned him a reputation. His frequent absences from home, lasting for several days, indicate a lack of parental supervision and the potential for exposure to risky situations. The association with friends who exhibit disrespectful behaviour appears to have a profound influence on his conduct, leading him to adopt similar attitudes. The mother's admission of using physical punishment to enforce discipline reflects the severity of the challenges she faces in guiding her son's behavior. Furthermore, the expressed worries of another participant about raising her children within the same environment reflect a shared concern among parents. The presence of noise and the observable interactions between young individuals engaging in flirtatious behavior at night highlight the complex social dynamics that

surround the upbringing of children in this neighborhood. These narratives underscore the multifaceted struggles parents face in navigating the delicate balance between their aspirations for their children's well-being and the challenges posed by the environment and peer influences.

Self and herbal medication

A significant proportion of young mothers within the study sites found themselves compelled to turn to self-medication and alternative herbal remedies due to the ill-treatment they receive from service providers and the overbearing procedures they usually encounter when they visit health centers. This stark reality drove these mothers to seek out their own solutions when it came to managing their health and that of their children. Notably, a distinct pattern emerged between the two slum areas, shedding light on the diverse strategies employed by young mothers to address health concerns. In Old Fadama, young mothers resorted to traditional herbal medicines as a response to the lack of conventional healthcare options. These mothers turned to locally available herbs and remedies to alleviate illnesses and discomfort.

> I rely on herbal medicine whenever either myself or my child becomes sick. We use a specific herbal remedy known as "musoloo." (It is a herb popular amongst the Dagombas). This natural remedy is particularly effective for all illnesses. What I do is gather some bitter leaves and combine them with the musoloo herb. Then, I boil this mixture in a traditional clay pot. Throughout the day, I give my child this herbal concoction three times. To ensure the right amount, I measure it using a teaspoon (Adiza, 29 years, Old Fadama).

On the other hand, in the African Eleven community, a distinct approach was noted among young mothers. Confronted with comparable health difficulties, this group chose to seek assistance from local chemical shops whenever health concerns emerged. These chemical shops provided non-prescription medicines to young mothers who expressed concerns about illnesses affecting their children or themselves. As a result, these medications were obtained without formal prescriptions. The quote below is evidence of this:

> When my child or I get sick, I usually go to the chemical shop. It's convenient because they have all kinds of medicine there. I just tell the person working there what's wrong, and he gives me medication to treat the sickness. The chemical shop is just behind that little store around the corner (Salomey, 22 years, African Eleven).

The narratives presented by the young mothers in the study reflect a poignant reality of the challenges they encounter while seeking healthcare services in the slum communities. Their experiences highlight the deep-seated issues of ill-treatment and cumbersome procedures faced when attempting to access formal healthcare facilities. The adverse

encounters with service providers and the overwhelming bureaucracy within health centers have driven these mothers to explore alternative avenues for addressing their health needs. The juxtaposition of the narratives from Old Fadama and African Eleven underscores the diversity of the healthcare-seeking behaviours adopted by young mothers in the two slum sites.

Turf wars amongst young mothers in slums

Turf wars frequently arose among young mothers in the two slum areas, sparked by the behavior of their children. In this context, turf wars refer to conflicts, disputes, and misunderstandings that emerge among young mothers because of their children's actions. Many of the young mothers interviewed in this study stated that their children often trespassed to other neighbours' houses to cause trouble which often brought them problems and thus eventually led to quarrels and misunderstandings between them and their neighbours. These tensions are intensified by elements like rumors, gossip, and misconceptions, exacerbating rivalries and cleavages among young mothers, often initiated by the behavior of their children. This was particularly the case amongst young mothers in African Eleven. The following is an example in this regard:

> Now, things are very expensive, so everyone is managing their resources, so I tell my children not to go to our neighbours to eat from their kitchen. This boy here [referring to her son] is fond of doing that. But he doesn't listen. When he goes there, he creates trouble for me as the other neighbours call me irresponsible. She often insults me by calling me names but of course, I retaliate. This has brought some enmity between me and the neighbour (Akos, 30, African Eleven).

Amidst the prevailing squalor in the Old Fadama community, a concerted effort emerged among some young mothers within the enclave of the slum to address the issue of filth. To tackle this challenge, young mothers established a rotational cleaning roster, where each member takes turns cleaning the surroundings. However, a specific individual within the group consistently declined to participate in this shared responsibility. Thus, often creating quarrels and misunderstandings among them. For instance, in the words of Lariba, a 32-year-old:

> This place is already engulfed in filth so those of us within this enclave of the slum have drawn some roster for each member to clean the surroundings. We all take turns to this but there is one lady who most often refuses to take her turn. She's always giving excuses. We called for a meeting to address this, and she did not show up. I confronted her on why she doesn't take up her turn to clean and she rained insults on me. Can you imagine! This leads to constant quarrels among us.

Discussion

The paper set out to explore the challenges young mothers encounter in raising their children in slums in Accra, Ghana. The findings show that young mothers are unable to afford early childhood education and school for their children, struggle to maintain the discipline of their children, often self-medicated and usually experience turf wars with their neighbours.

The difficulty of young mothers to pay for early childhood care and their children's education is identified as one of their major challenges. Education is essential for cultivating knowledge and skills, advancing understanding of societal challenges, and nurturing personal and social growth (Shetty & Hans, 2015). The Ghanaian government in 2005 introduced the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) policy, aiming to provide quality education for all school-age children in Ghana and improve literacy rates (Darkwa & Acquah, 2022; Ekundayo, 2018). To reinforce this policy both financially and administratively, the Capitation Grant Scheme was subsequently implemented, removing fees and complementing schools for potential revenue loss (Ekundayo, 2018). The findings of this study indicated that young mothers faced financial constraints that hindered their ability to afford expenses associated with early childhood education and schooling for their children. Consequently, their children were unable to access formal education. Although the abolition of school fees should logically encourage greater enrolment, hidden and indirect fees such as toiletries, and stationery expenses among others present more substantial barriers for mothers, impeding their children's school enrolment and attendance. Thus, according to research by Lal (2015) and Shetty and Hans (2015), families' access to early childhood education is disproportionately impacted by their financial situation, which has a detrimental impact on educational outcomes in impoverished areas. Situating this in the social ecology of the ecological influences on parenting and child development (Jack, 2000) if young mothers have limited resources and economic constraints, they may not be able to afford the educational needs of their children thus resulting in their children remaining home without formal education. Unfortunately, the findings of the study draw attention to the possible growth in illiteracy rates and its long-term social, economic, and political repercussions. The repercussions of children not receiving formal education are multifaceted and impactful. Beyond the immediate individual implications, this situation has far-reaching effects on society and the nation as it perpetuates a cycle of limited opportunities, hindering children's access to higher education and career advancement.

Additionally, the difficulty of maintaining discipline among children has emerged as a central concern, especially within the context of negative peer influences and the surrounding environment. In academic literature, this topic has received a lot of attention. Addae and Tang (2021) emphasize the increased stress and difficulties young mothers have in providing for their children in such settings, particularly because of harmful peer pressure and the complicated dynamics of their neighbourhoods. These results are in

line with the narratives that were revealed in this study, where young mothers expressed concerns about their children giving in to harmful peer pressure. The variety of strategies these mothers adopted, from corporal punishment such as beating their children and advising them, reflects the wide range of parenting obstacles they navigate. Young mothers in African Eleven preferred talking to children out of negative behaviours, while young mothers in Old Fadama seemed more inclined towards beating their children. The reason for this could be that, according to Awumbila et al. (2014), there exists a great deal of tension and criminal activity in Old Fadama. Hence, young mothers in Old Fadama preferred to use stricter measures to deter their children from engaging in unruly behaviour and to prevent them from being negatively influenced by their peers. This finding is in consonance with Van Djik (2020), who states that harsh parenting was utilized to deter children from being involved in gangs in risky neighbourhoods. In contrast to Sarwar's (2016) findings that mothers were incompetent and irresponsible because they failed to instil good behaviours in their children, this study discovered that young mothers attempted to exert some control over their children's behaviour. Moreover, research by Amoah et al. (2020) revealed that parents who are 18 to 29 years old are more likely to use physical punishment than parents who are older. This finding raises the possibility that the youth and the propensity to use corporal punishment techniques are related. This tendency could be explained by a lack of wisdom and experience, together with external economic pressures. This discovery deepens our understanding of parental behaviour in relation to child discipline.

The reoccurring theme of slum populations' reliance on self-medication and alternative treatments is supported by several research. According to Cobbold and Morgan (2022), self-medication is the most popular method of disease management, with one in two Ghanaians engaging in this act. The rarity of accessible and affordable healthcare options drives people to explore alternative possibilities (Tesfamariam et al., 2019), often turning to traditional herbal remedies and informal healthcare providers. This trend closely parallels the experiences of the young mothers in this study, who used self-medication because of barriers obstructing their access to formal healthcare services. The finding is consistent with the research of Nkrumah and Gbagbo (2019), who found that the lack of proper healthcare infrastructure and unfavourable provider attitudes were driving factors for self-medication. While prudent self-medication may successfully manage a variety of health concerns, illogical self-medication may result in overuse and subsequent health consequences (Cobbold & Morgan, 2022). Additionally, Mekonnen et al. (2018) pointed out that important problems with self-medication include misdiagnosis, resource waste, greater pathogen adaptability, drug resistance, and negative health impacts such as extreme responses and protracted pain. Young mothers' lack of access to proper healthcare can lead to inadequate treatment of childhood illnesses and delayed interventions.

Furthermore, a lens through which to analyze the complex social dynamics and constrained living situations widespread in slum communities is the disagreements and

misunderstandings among young mothers, sparked by the acts of their children. An investigation of the fundamental aspects of this important issue has been sparked by the enormous academic attention it has received. In research done by Oppong et al. (2020), a keen observation was made about the interaction between small living quarters and the complex social web seen in slum settings, which led to a noticeable spike in tensions and turf wars among inhabitants. These conflicts, which are usually brought on by children's behaviour, highlight the enormous difficulties that come with maintaining peaceful cooperation in confined spaces. The lack of resources and the tight quarters serve as catalysts, heightening these tensions, which are then exacerbated by misunderstandings, the quick spread of rumours, and the tendency of gossip. Surprisingly, these results are consistent with recent research that reveals the genesis of wars resulting from territorial disputes between different groups (Magaloni et al., 2020; Oppong, 2016). This parallel story is consistent with the young mothers' reported descriptions of territorial battles in the present study.

Implications of the study

In addressing the difficulties experienced by young women raising their children in slum neighbourhoods, the study's findings have significant implications for social work practitioners, to empower these women and enhance the well-being of both mothers and their children, it is essential to consider the following implications: Social workers may support awareness campaigns and efforts that educate young mothers about the disadvantages of self-medication by working with healthcare professionals, local authorities, and NGOs. To promote equal access to formal medical treatment, efforts might also be focused on improving healthcare infrastructure and provider attitudes. Social workers could lead conflict resolution workshops and community-building activities due to the frequency of turf wars and disputes among young mothers. Social workers may reduce tensions and advance peaceful coexistence by fostering environments that encourage open communication and resolving misunderstandings. Additionally, these initiatives may result in the development of community networks and support systems, encouraging a feeling of solidarity among young mothers dealing with similar difficulties.

Limitations of the study

Data loss may occur during data transcription, which could be attributed to the difficulties in obtaining the exact English language equivalent for Twi phrases. However, the researchers tried as much as possible to find similar words for the terms to minimize losses. Again, another limitation of this research is that the findings are based on the perspectives and experiences of young mothers from specific slum communities. The themes and issues identified might not be fully generalizable to other contexts or populations, as the challenges faced by young mothers can vary significantly based on cultural, geographical, and socioeconomic factors.

Conclusion

This study explored the multifaceted challenges faced by young mothers in slums in Accra, Ghana. Our findings showed that socio-economic constraints heavily impact young mothers and their children, affecting access to education, healthcare, and the challenge of instilling discipline amid challenging circumstances in slum communities. Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires a strategy incorporating legislative changes, community involvement, and assistance programmes that recognize and address these issues. These issues go beyond isolated instances, underscoring the need for systemic reform. To connect young mothers and families with relevant resources, programmes, or organizations that can contribute to their well-being, social workers can play a critical role. By taking these steps, progress can be made towards fostering an environment where young mothers are better able to care for their children's well-being and prospects, despite the challenges of slum existence.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Portia Nana Ama Brempong https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3460-0859
Kingsley Saa-Touh Mort https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6325-5279
Eunice Abbey https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1748-4454

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