

Female-Perpetrated Multiple-Victim Homicides in Ghana

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Abstract: Research specifically investigating female-perpetrated multiple-victim homicide has been sparse with the result that there is limited understanding of the behavior. The goal of the present study therefore was to explore the extent and nature of female-perpetrated multiple-victim homicides that occurred in Ghana during 2010-2020 in order to better understand the phenomenon. The study employed media surveillance methodology. Information was extracted from various print and electronic media sources in Ghana. The results show that female-perpetrated multiple-victim homicide is a rare crime in the society. The study identified 6 cases over a 31-year period. Each crime was highly publicized by the mass media and was the subject of intense public interest and discussion. Each elicited widespread public condemnation, with citizens describing the crimes as actions of depraved, and antisocial malefactors, or at best, mentally disordered persons. Most of the female-perpetrated multiple-victim homicide events were maternal filicide incidents in which mothers killed their own children. Psychopathology appeared to be a factor in 3 of the 6 filicides. Suicide occurred in 2 of the 6 homicide events. Many of the crimes continue to be topical issues in Ghana today, even several years after their occurrence. Case narratives for all six cases are provided. Additional research from non-western, non-industrial societies is needed to broaden understanding of and linkages between gender and multiple-victim homicide.

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Introduction

Scholarly investigations into female homicide offending are limited. Additionally, much of the existing literature is dated (Biggers, 1978; Jensen, 2001; Mann, 1996; Wilbanks, 1983). Even more sparse is scholarship about female-perpetrated multiple-victim homicides where the offender killed two or more persons in a single homicide event (Messing & Heeren, 2004). The paucity of scholarship on this form of homicide is particularly acute for the non-

western, non-industrialized societies of Africa, Asia, South America and the South Pacific. Consequently, at present, the precise extent and character of female perpetrated multiple victim homicides in these societies are unknown.

The lack of scholarly attention to the subject of female multiple-victim homicide offending is attributable principally to the paucity of cases and the dearth of information about these crimes. Worldwide, multiple-victim homicides are extremely infrequent. In the United States for example, Levin (2014) stated that mass murder represented “approximately 1% of the thousands of incidents of homicide committed in any given year” (p.4). Levin (2014) further added that most mass murder offenders in the United States were “more often middle-aged men” (p.4). To put it more starkly, in the United States, Duwe (2004) estimated that female perpetrators accounted for only 7% of mass murders. In many non-western non-industrialized societies, multiple-victim homicides are exceedingly rare (Adinkrah, 1996, 2017). Female-perpetrated multiple-victim homicides are notably even rarer. Another plausible reason for the dearth of research on female-perpetrated multiple-victim homicide is the general insufficiency and lack of access to official crime data. In many non-Western, non-industrialized societies, crime data generally are not systematically collated and are consequently abysmally undependable. Second, for varied reasons, including political ones, the available data are often not available for widespread dissemination (LaFree, 1999).

To help remedy this limitation in the literature and contribute information about female-perpetrated multicides, the current study focused on female-perpetrated multiple-victim homicides that occurred in Ghana during 1990–2020. The issues examined include: (1) the number of victims involved in the offense; (2) the social backgrounds of offenders and victims; (3) offender-victim relationship (e.g., strangers versus non-strangers); (4) location of the homicide; (5) modus operandi and type of weapon used; (6) the planning that went into the offense; (7) motivation for committing the offense; (8) precipitating events leading to the homicides; (9) whether psychological factors played a role in the crime; (9) public reaction to the offense; and (10) criminal justice response and dispositional outcome.

In the current study, the term “multiple-victim homicide” was used to denote a homicide event in which a person killed two or more persons. The study of female-perpetrated multiple-homicide victimization in Ghana, West Africa, is useful for several reasons. First, as previously noted, studies focusing on the female homicide offender in general is scanty and or dated (Biggers, 1979; Jensen, 2001; Mann, 1996; Wilbanks, 1983). Thus, any new study will shed additional light and provide fresh insights into the nature and character of female homicide perpetrators and their crimes. Additionally, the homicide literature suggests that multiple homicide is almost exclusively the preserve of males (Duwe, 2004, 2007; Levin, 2014). Consequently, a study of female perpetrated multiple victim homicide will complement the scant extant literature about multicides in the homicide literature and help advance knowledge about lethal violence by females. Undeniably, a complete understanding of homicide as a form of human behavior will remain elusive unless scholars

supplement the existing literature with research-based information on missing topics. Only then can we uncover the true character and causes of homicide as a form of human behavior.

Background of Study

In July 2020, nearly all the print and electronic media in Ghana published two news stories in which young mothers were apprehended by law enforcement authorities for committing multiple-victim homicides. In both incidents, the victims happened to be the biological offspring of the perpetrators. The incidents which occurred just five days apart, were totally unrelated. Notably, each case attracted significant media attention and public outrage. In the aftermath of the crimes, several vexing questions dominated discussions in the national domain. For example, were the two female-perpetrated multicides evidence of a growing trend of female homicide offending in the country or were the two crimes simply anomalous statistical coincidence? What factors motivated these women to kill their children? Was the widespread public furor and outrage attributable to the offender-victim relationships in the homicides? Or was it due to the multiple victims involved in each homicide incident? What were the situational inducements to this form of criminality? Were the crimes the actions of pathological persons, sicknesses afflicting otherwise stable individuals? Could these multiple-victim homicides have been instrumental criminal activities perpetrated for pecuniary or some other purported gain? Questions like these remained unanswered and fueled the interest to research multiple-victim homicides committed by women in Ghana and the social responses to such homicides. Consequently, the decision was made to make this topic the focus of research in efforts to find answers to some of these questions.

Female Homicide Offending in the Literature

As a research topic, female-perpetrated multiple-victim homicide has not received much research attention. The lack of scholarly attention appears to reflect the paucity of cases where a woman or girl killed multiple victims (Levin, 2014). In many societies around the globe, the occurrence of female-perpetrated multiple-victim homicide is either nonexistent or insignificant. Indeed, across the globe, female involvement in homicide as offenders is drastically lower than that of males. In the United States, for example, females account for approximately 10% of the annual volume of homicides that occur in the country even though females constitute 51% of the total national population. According to statistics compiled by the FBI, in 2019, males and females comprised 88% and 12% respectively of United States homicide offenders for whom the gender of the offender was known; males were 7.3 times more likely than females to be arrested for murder (FBI, 2020). To put it even more starkly, in the United States the estimated rate for murder offending by women in 1998 was 1.3 per 100,000 and about 1 murderer for every 77,000 women. For the same year, the estimated male rate of murder offending was 11.5 per 100,000 and about 1 murderer for every 8,700 males (Greenfeld & Snell, 2000).

The general literature on homicide indicates that women's use of lethal force is usually directed at familial targets—husbands and other intimate partners (Biggers, 1979; Browne, Williams & Dutton, 1999). Against these targets, female homicide is usually a self-defensive move to preempt physical abuse at the hands of the male intimate partner (Serran & Firestone, 2004). Women's use of lethal aggression against strangers is abysmally low. Additionally, males' frequent use of lethal means in nonfamilial dispute resolution is not a significant part of female homicide offending. Another frequent type of female homicide is child homicide. In this type of homicide, the lethal force is directed against neonates or newborns (neonaticide), infants under a year old (infanticide), and other young, prepubescent children (filicide). Other studies indicate that women's participation in felony-murders where offenders kill other persons while committing other felonies such as robbery, burglary, rape, are rare occurrences among female homicides. Also rare are female youth gang homicides which is a significant proportion of homicides in the United States (Maxson, 1999).

Much of the existing information on mass murder in the homicide literature is derived from research of the phenomenon in the United States (Duwe, 2004, 2007; Levin, 2014). Recent studies of mass murder in China and Ghana, using the same definitional criterion ("four-fatal-victim requirement") used in the United States studies were recently published in the scholarly literature (Adinkrah, 2017; Hilal *et al.*, 2014). The most consistent observation that emerges from all these studies is that mass homicide is a rare crime. Scholars report that female-perpetrated mass killing is even rarer, constituting a minuscule fraction of all mass murder events (Adinkrah, 2017; Duwe, 2007; Hilal *et al.*, 2014). In the United States, mass murders are predominantly perpetrated with a firearm; in China, the popular homicide method in mass killings is knife and other cutting instruments (Hilal *et al.*, 2014). In Ghana, where mass murder cases were significantly small, perpetrators used a variety of methods, including poisoning, vitriol attacks (vitriolage), and burning. The literature further reports that post-offense suicide is considerably more frequent among mass murderers than homicide offenders who kill single victims. In the United States for example, mass murderers were found to be, at a minimum, five times more likely to commit suicide after their crimes than ordinary homicide offenders (Duwe, 2004). Some existing research suggests that female mass murderers are less likely than their male counterparts to die by suicide following perpetration of their crimes (Gurian, 2017).

In the United States, firearm use constitutes the single largest homicide method, accounting for over 60% of nationally reported homicides. In 2019, 73.7% of reported homicides in the United States were committed with a firearm (FBI, 2020). Female use of firearms in the commission of homicides is, however, significantly lower than that of males. For example, during the period 1999-2012, 67% of homicides committed by men were accomplished with a gun; during the same period, only 39% of female-perpetrated homicides were committed with a gun. During this period, the following methods were

used by males to perpetrate homicide: gun (67%), knife (12%), beating (7.1%), other (7%), blunt object (4.5%), strangulation (0.7%), asphyxiation, (0.6%), fire (0.46%), poison (0.4%), drowning (0.4%), drowning (0.1%), explosives (0.03%) and defenestration (0.02%). The most popular homicide methods for female offenders for the same period were gun (23%), knife (23%), beating (12%), other (12%), blunt object (5.4%), asphyxiation (2.6%), poison (2.5%) and fire (1.5%) (Keating, 2015).

The scholarly literature on mass murder indicates that a large proportion of multiple-victim homicides are familicide; most occur in residential settings. Familicide also tends to be largely a masculine crime; the proportion of mass murders and familicides that are perpetrated by females is very small, relative to the proportion perpetrated by males. Concurrently, the number of female mass murderers is small (Levin, 2014). At present, given the dearth of scholarly research, several questions about female multiple homicide offenders are unknown. For example, what are the demographic characteristics of women who perpetrate multiple homicides? What are the motives and triggering factors of their homicides? How does one explain the lesser involvement of females in multiple homicides? What social structural factors make female multiple homicide offending unlikely? Questions like these have not been adequately investigated in the literature and deserve research-based answers.

In sum, female multiple homicide offenders and their crimes have not received adequate attention in the scholarly literature. Consequently, several homicide scholars have asserted that scholarship on female mass murder in non-Western societies is sorely needed (e.g., Adinkrah, 2017; Duwe, 2004; Karlsson *et al.*, 2019). The current study contributes to the scholarly literature by examining the extent and character of female-perpetrated multiple-victim homicides in Ghana, including the circumstances surrounding the offense. To understand female multiple-victim homicide offending in Ghana, it will be helpful to know about the status of women in Ghanaian society. As sociologist Robertson (1987, p.53) postulates, “the social behavior of individuals is deeply influenced by the culture and society in which they happen to live.”

The Status of Females in Ghana

Ghana is a developing country that is located along the west coast of Africa. The country's estimated population of 30 million is ethnically, linguistically, and religiously heterogeneous. According to the most recent census, 50.5% of the population was female, while 49.5% was male. In 2015, life expectancy at birth for Ghana's population was estimated to be 61 years for males and 64 years for females. The country's population is rural based with about 50% of the people residing in rural communities of less than 5,000 persons. About 60% of Ghana's workforce is employed in agriculture and fishing, and 15% in industry; the remaining 25% are employed in the service sector, particularly trading, transportation, and communication. Unemployment is a major economic and social problem. In 2007, 28.5%

of the population was estimated to be living below the established poverty line (Ghana Statistical Service, 2015).

Although gender roles in the society continue to undergo modification, there are distinct behavioral expectations for males and females. Here, as elsewhere, gender role socialization begins at birth and continues through the lifecycle. Cross-gender play in children is generally disapproved. At school, and in the wider community, gender norm deviations are negatively sanctioned; children who transgress stereotypical gendered behavior are reprimanded through sneering, teasing, and name-calling. To illustrate, among the Akan ethnic group, females who do not conform to, resist, or rebel against traditional gender expectations are called *obaabarima*, comparable to the western tomboy; males who set out to challenge or reject traditional male gender role patterns are derisively referred to as *obaafadie*, or sissy. Furthermore, boys and girls are expected to pursue academic subjects and occupations deemed appropriate for their gender. Behaviorally, males are expected to be active, assertive, daring, tough, and dominant. Females must be gentle, passive, submissive and nurturing. In interactions between the sexes, females are expected to be shy, naïve, and sexually passive; males on the other hand, are expected to be aggressive and experienced (Adinkrah & Jenkins, 2019). Aggressive behavior in females is spurned, as violent behavior in females is viewed as abnormal. Departure from stereotypical feminine behavior of passivity, subservience, and subordination is considered a departure from a female's true character (Adinkrah & Jenkins, 2019).

Although social change continues to influence family dynamics, most Ghanaian households remain patriarchal. Currently, the typical household in Ghana consists of a dominant husband as breadwinner and an economically dependent wife and children. In terms of division of labor in the domestic milieu, husbands are considered the economic providers, even where the wife maintains regular employment outside the home and even provides most of the family income. In most Ghanaian homes, the female partner is still responsible for domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, laundering and childcare, regardless of her employment status. Polygyny, or the type of marriage in which a husband can have multiple wives concurrently, is legal in Ghana and is approved by every ethnic group in the country. In 2014, 16% of currently married women and 7% of currently married men aged 15 to 49 years were living in polygynous unions. Polygynous marriages are more common in rural areas and are associated with both low income and low educational attainment (Ghana Statistical Service, 2015).

Ghana is a pronatalist society. Around the country, and across ethnic groups, voluntary childlessness is mostly unknown. For most people, the primary goal of marriage is to produce children. It is assumed that the dream of every woman is to bear their own children. Several local proverbs, aphorisms, and maxims laud having children while sympathizing with those unable to. Moreover, it is considered a pitiable condition to not have the capacity to have one's own children, with such persons often being subjected to stigmatization. Among several ethnic groups in Ghana, upon death, the corpses of childless people are ritually

desecrated, with an injunction that if reincarnated, they should not be afflicted with the same pitiable condition of childlessness (Adinkrah, 2020).

In Ghana, wife abuse and other forms of male perpetrated violence against female intimate partners is ubiquitous, although the apprehension, conviction and incarceration rates of offenders remains exceedingly low. In fact, most incidents are not reported to the police as victims consider it a private domestic matter outside the jurisdiction of the official agencies (Adjei, 2018). Sexual assault by husbands upon their wives have also been reported in the relevant literature, although the true volume and rate of occurrence remain unknown (Adinkrah, 2011).

Ghanaian females' involvement in criminality is low, relative to males. In 2013, the Ghana Prison Service reported an average daily convict population of 10,886. Of this figure, 160 or 1.5% was female, while 10,726 or 98.5% was male. This was a ratio of 1 female to 67 males (Ghana Prisons Service, 2013). Police data show that female involvement in crime is confined largely to property offenses, such as larceny and public order crimes like prostitution. While some women have been convicted of killing their husbands, the number of such partner killings is comparatively low, when matched with the number of men who have killed wives and other intimate partners (Adinkrah, 2007, 2008a, 2008b). Notably, women's involvement in filicides, largely neonaticides and infanticides deriving from unwanted pregnancies, are moderately high.

In Ghana, homicide rates are significantly lower, compared with the rates found in many other jurisdictions around the globe ("Murder Rate By Country," 2021). This is the same for fatal and nonfatal suicidal behavior (Adinkrah, 2011, 2012). Given the rarity of lethal violence in Ghanaian society, homicide, suicide, and homicide-suicide events are regarded as particularly newsworthy. Women's participation in homicide as offenders is low. In 2016, there were 148 persons on the country's death row awaiting execution for murder convictions. Of these, there were 4 (2.7%) women and 144 (97.3%) men (Amnesty International, 2017). Most female homicide offenders killed their own children as neonates (neonaticide) or as young infants (infanticide). A few others who committed lethal acts of violence killed their spouses or intimate partners (Adinkrah, 2007, 2008a, 2008b). In a 2017 published study on mass murder in Ghana, Adinkrah (2017) used the term mass murder to denote the slaying of four or more persons simultaneously in a single homicide event. The author identified only 6 cases during the period 2010-2016. Of these cases, only one was perpetrated by a female offender (Adinkrah 2017).

Research Method and Data Sources

In Ghana, there is no national database on homicide, suicide, homicide-suicide, or other forms of violence. Law enforcement data on the subject are erratically collated and are generally unreliable. Therefore, for this research, a decision was made to employ media surveillance methodology. Data were extracted from all available Ghanaian print and

electronic media published during 1990 and 2020. For print data, a search was conducted of the major Ghanaian daily and weekly newspapers—*The Daily Graphic*, *The Ghanaian Times*, *The Daily Guide*, *The Weekly Spectator*, and *The Mirror*. For electronic data, the following Ghana-based internet websites were searched: *Ghananewsagency.com*, *Ghanarweb.com*, *Ghanamma.com*, and *ModernGhana.com*. Through a systematic search, six cases of female-perpetrated multiple-victim homicides were identified. Information obtained from these sources was aggregated to construct comprehensive summaries for each of the cases identified.

Several factors combine to make media surveillance methodology a particularly dependable data source in the study of homicide offenses in Ghana. First, as previously mentioned, homicide is relatively infrequent in Ghana. Given their numerical rarity, homicide cases are considered particularly newsworthy, with the major media houses in the country devoting extensive coverage to them. Considered even more newsworthy are female-perpetrated homicides and multiple-victim female-perpetrated homicides. This is due to their rarity and the common perception that they are bizarre. Many people in Ghanaian society think it is unnatural for a female to commit homicide, let alone homicide with multiple victims. Additionally, Ghanaian newspapers are also a rich source of information on crime. Journalists covering crime news routinely conduct extensive investigations into these crimes, often interviewing all available witnesses, including friends, acquaintances, neighbors, landlords, employers, and other associates of the victim and perpetrator. These efforts consistently culminate in media reports that provide substantial details of the crime.

Results

Extent and Victim Count

The data show that female-perpetrated multiple-victim homicides are exceedingly rare in Ghana. The study identified only six cases for the study period, 1990-2020. In terms of victim count per homicide event, 1 offender killed 5 victims, while each of the remaining 5 assailants killed two victims per homicide event. Thus, the six homicide events produced a total of 15 homicide victims. Accounting for the two assailants who committed suicide as part of the crime, there were a total of 17 lives lost.

Public Reaction to Homicide Events

Each of the cases profiled in this study attracted immense media attention and negative public reaction. Nearly every print and electronic mass media in the country carried a story about each of the homicides and provided regular updates concerning investigations into the crime. These reports were supplemented, from time to time, by mass media commentaries. Meanwhile, members of the public used letters to the editors' columns and

website commentaries to express their sentiments about the crimes. Public reaction to each of the killings was one of shock, dismay, and bewilderment. Many people found the crimes extremely unusual. Some media reports portrayed the assailants in negative lights, some describing the assailants as wicked, and mentally deranged. For instance, a newspaper story on one case bore the title: “Wicked’ Mother Kills 2 Kids in Tema New Town.” Another media story on the same case titled it “Deranged Accountant Kills Daughters.”

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Offenders and Victims

The assailants ranged in age from 28 to 54-years-old, with an average age of 38.6 years. The victims ranged in age from 1-month-old to 55-years-old. Most of the victims were children aged 1 month to 11 years old. The exceptions were two adults aged 55-years and 34-years-old, respectively. These two were a man and his paramour who were killed by the man’s wife who was angered over the pair’s romantic relationship. The assailants and their victims were also of low socioeconomic background. Only one of the assailants had completed college.

Marital Status

The data show that 5 out of the 6 offenders were married but separated or divorced from their husbands at the time of the homicide event. One of the women was still married at the time of the homicide event. In two of the cases involving divorce, the marital rupture came about because of the assailant’s psychopathology.

Victim–Offender Relationships

In the literature on homicide, the term filicide refers to the killing of a child by its parent, regardless of the age of the child. The majority (5 out of 6 or 83.3%) of the multicides were maternal filicide cases in which a mother killed two or more of her own offspring simultaneously. In the only non-filicide case, the perpetrator killed her husband and his mistress.

Spatial Aspects

The study also examined the spatial aspects of each crime, such as where the crimes occurred, for example urban versus rural location, as well as the specific crime scene, for example domestic or public place. The data show that 4 (67%) of the cases occurred in the shared home of the perpetrator and victims; 1 occurred in the victims’ home where the assailant, the estranged wife, was temporarily visiting.

Method of Homicide

In half (50%) of the cases (3 out of 6), the perpetrator used poisoning as a homicide method. In one poisoning case, the assailant fed all 5 of her children with food laced with

liquid bleach. In another case of poisoning, the assailant used rodenticide, specifically a rat poison. In the third poisoning case the assailant put the poison into a beverage and forced the children to drink the concoction. In 2 (33.3%) of the cases, the assailant used arson or burning. In the remaining case, the assailant's modus operandi was undetermined. In this case, one of the children was found dead on a bed in the bedroom and the other child had been buried by the perpetrator about 4 miles away from the perpetrator's home.

Evidence of Psychopathology

Psychopathology appeared to have played a substantial role in these female-perpetrated multicides. Half (3 out of 6 or 50%) of the assailants were considered to be mentally ill at the time of the crime. They were accordingly referred to psychiatric hospitals for evaluation and treatment. This was the situation in Cases 3, 4, and 5.

Motivation

One of the assailants in the cases studied was motivated by revenge. She sought vengeance on her husband because he had established a new romantic relationship with another woman and had been spending his nights with the mistress. The case also featured substantial indicators of premeditation. The assailant purchased a padlock during the afternoon of the day of the murder so she could lock up the victim's door from the outside at night. She also brought petrol and a box of matches to the crime scene. Substantial planning must also have gone into the purchase of the petrol as petrol is not readily sold to laypersons in Ghana.

Post-Homicide Suicide and Suicide Method

In two (33.3%) out of the six cases, the perpetrator killed herself following the homicide. In one of these post-homicide suicides, the assailant consumed some of the same poisoned food she had fed the children she killed. In the other case, the assailant remained in the same house that she had doused with petrol and set ablaze. While her husband and son perished in the fire, she was rescued with severe burns and was admitted to a local hospital. While there, she refused treatment, stating that she wanted to die with the victims. She eventually succumbed to her injuries and died.

Public Acts of Vigilantism Against Offenders

In Ghana, threats of vigilante actions and actual acts of vigilantism directed against violent offenders is commonplace (Adinkrah, 2011). Although law enforcement authorities have frequently issued warnings that vigilantism will not be countenanced and offenders will be prosecuted, acts of vigilantism have not abated. Perusing Ghanaian mass media, one

recognizes that acts of vigilantism have periodically eventuated in the deaths of innocent individuals and criminal suspects alike (Adinkrah, 2011). The offender in Case 2 killed her two children because of purported financial hardships. She was nearly lynched when members of the public attempted to take the law into their hands to punish her. Likewise, in Case 3, public outrage about the perpetrator's crime caused community members to attempt to lynch her.

Case Summaries

Because of the significantly low number of homicide events identified, each of the homicide events has been described to reflect the demographic characteristics of the offenders and victims, modus operandi, spatial and temporal aspects, and the presence or absence of post-homicidal suicide.

Case 1: This case contained several elements of premeditation and extensive planning. It was an expressive homicide which the perpetrator committed out of anger, jealousy, and frustration. According to the case reports, the 54-year-old offender caused the burning death of her 55-year-old husband and his 34-year-old paramour by trapping them in a fire-engulfed apartment. The offender had three children with the husband victim. At the time of the crime, the assailant's husband was involved in a sexual relationship with a woman outside their marriage and had been spending some nights with her. The assailant had on numerous occasions picked quarrels with the husband and this new lover about their extramarital relationship, but the victims' relationship persisted. The assailant then plotted to teach them a lesson. On the night of the murders, the perpetrator had knowledge that the husband was spending the night at his mistress' home. Earlier in the day, she had purchased a red padlock which she intended to use to enable the crime. On the night of the murder, upon sensing that the couple had retired to bed, the offender went to their apartment and used the padlock to lock the door from the outside. She then poured previously purchased petrol through a window of the apartment and lit a match. The couple was trapped inside the house and engulfed in the flames, eventually sustaining fatal injuries. The victims' screams for assistance caused neighbors to come and break down the door to the apartment. The two were rushed to the nearest hospital for treatment but they succumbed to their injuries ("Woman in Court for Allegedly Burning Husband, Girlfriend to Death," 2018).

Case 2: In this case, a 28-year-old woman killed her two children, a boy, and a girl, through poisoning. The children were aged 2-years and 8-months-old, respectively. The assailant told police that the father of the children did not support the children financially and she found it virtually impossible to do so on her own. Following the murders, neighbors recollected that they had heard the mother make numerous threats to kill the children, but they had dismissed those warnings as empty threats. On the day of the murders, the assailant mixed previously purchased rodenticide with food and served it to her children.

When they died, she laid them on a bed, locked the door to the house, and went to visit her own mother who lived several meters away. When neighbors, who had not seen the children, inquired about the children's whereabouts, the perpetrator admitted to the crime and led them to see the children's deceased bodies. The killings evoked strong feelings of disgust and horror. Neighbors who saw the deceased bodies of the children raised an alarm, which resulted in the formation of a mob. The mob gathered near the scene of the murders with intentions of lynching the filicidal mother; however, she was rescued by a team of law enforcement officers whose timely arrival and intervention averted the vigilante lynching. Meanwhile, around the country, the crime engendered strong negative reactions. Judging by readers' comments left at various internet news media portals that reported the story, many people considered the crime utterly loathsome. Many more decried the filicidal mother's callous attitude, accusing her of being immoral or depraved. Still, many called for her quick conviction in court and the imposition of draconian sanctions upon her, even execution. Some backed her commitment to a mental asylum for life. It is remarkable that one newspaper story on this case bore the title: "'Wicked' Mother Kills 2 Kids in Tema New Town." ("Mother Allegedly Poisons Two Children," 2020; "Wicked Mother Kills 2 Kinds in Tema New Town," 2020).

Case 3: In this case, a 35-year-old woman was apprehended by police for killing her two children, aged 2-years-old and 1-month-old, respectively. According to case reports, the assailant's husband returned home from work to find the corpse of the couple's one-month-old infant on a bed in their bedroom. He suspected that his wife had already killed their 2-year-old toddler. So, he went to the local police station to lodge a complaint against the wife. The assailant eventually led police to the body of the couple's 2-year-old child which was found partially interred in a secluded location some four miles from the assailant's home. Upon interrogating the assailant, the police concluded that she was mentally disordered. The assailant and her husband had been married for ten years and had borne three children. The couple's first son aged 6-years-old was at the time of the murder living several miles away with his maternal grandmother, likely sparing him the same fate as his younger siblings. Both the filicidal mother and her husband worked as peasant farmers ("Woman, 35, Kills Two Sons," 2020).

Case 4: In this case, a 45-year-old mother killed her two daughters aged 6-years-old and 8-years-old, respectively. The assailant was a university graduate and was employed as an accountant at the time of the murders. Regarding homicide method, she used poison which she put in a beverage. According to a family spokesperson, the assailant developed a psychopathological condition following the birth of her second daughter. Other reports indicated that she suffered from schizophrenia. The perpetrator was previously admitted to a psychiatric hospital and later discharged when her condition improved. She was, however, supposed to take a variety of drugs to regulate or stabilize her mental condition. The assailant's older sister who lived in the same household, assisted in ensuring that the assailant took her medicine according to the physician's instructions. Some media reports

indicated that the perpetrator's husband divorced her due to her psychiatric illness. The husband also sought physical custody of their children, but the courts declined the request on the grounds that the children were too young at the time. Many people in the assailant's neighborhood testified that she was a hardworking mother who doted on her two children. She routinely walked them to school, the public library, and to church on Sundays. She also went on walks with the kids and occasionally took them swimming in the ocean near their house. Unfortunately, a leading news portal in the country used the word "deranged" to describe her in a headline to a story about the incident. The case attracted 77 readers' comments from one of the Ghanaian news portals. While some were condemnatory, many sympathized with the assailant, arguing that that the filicidal behavior was the result of a psychological problem; therefore, she needed medical, psychological, or psychiatric services, not a judicial penalty. Some blamed the husband for leaving a sick wife; many blamed the judge who denied child custody to the husband, stating that the woman was mentally unfit to take care of the children and should have been divested of the children by the court ("Chartered Accountant Who Killed Children," 2015; "Deranged Accountant Kills 2 Daughters," 2015).

Case 5: This was a multiple-victim maternal filicide-suicide case in which a 33-year-old mother with a history of psychiatric disorders and recurrent suicidal episodes, caused the deaths all five of her young children through poisoning. The perpetrator left a suicide note in which she professed her love for her divorced husband and her disappointment with life. She then committed suicide by ingesting some of the poisoned concoction she fed the children. The victims comprised two girls and three boys aged 11, 9, 6, 4, and 1 years old.

The filicidal mother and the father of the deceased children had previously lived in a cohabiting relationship. The assailant reportedly developed mental illness during the relationship. There were numerous instances of hospitalization for depression and schizophrenia. The couple also quarreled frequently over the physical maintenance of the home and the children, as the husband accused the assailant of neglect of her responsibilities as a mother of young children. Discord between the couple contributed to the collapse of the relationship as the assailant regularly called police to complain of battery by the husband. The father eventually obtained full custody of the children and at the time of the murders, was living with a girlfriend and the children.

The assailant apparently felt disillusioned by the turn of events and repeatedly picked quarrels with the man's girlfriend, accusing her of maltreating her children. In the three years following the relationship termination and loss of custody of the children, the assailant had been hospitalized on three separate occasions at various psychiatric hospitals. A day prior to the slayings, the assailant had arrived at the home of the children for a visit with them. She brought cupcakes and fruit juices for them. At about 5:00 p.m., the father left the children in the care of the assailant to go and see off some visiting guests. Upon his return, he discovered that the assailant had left the home with the children. A few hours later, he received a telephone call from the assailant's sister informing him that

the assailant had returned to her home with the children. The father was not concerned and allowed the mother to keep the children for a while. Witnesses confirmed seeing the children and their mother coming and going from her apartment for two consecutive days. On the third day, the assailant called the father to come and collect the children. When he arrived, he found the apartment locked. The assailant was missing from the house. He peered through the window and saw the children lying on a bed in the room. He broke into the apartment and found that all the children were deceased. Each child had been given a lethal dose of a liquid bleach, locally known as parazone. The chemical had been mixed with bread and then fed to the children. The assailant had placed each child on the bed after poisoning them. Pictures of the crime scene taken by photojournalists and published alongside updates of the story showed that the children's nude bodies had been neatly arranged, side-by-side, in order of chronological age, on a bed in the assailant's bedroom.

A day following the discovery of the bodies, the filicidal mother was found in a semi-conscious state in an abandoned vehicle in a private automobile workshop. Police investigators also found a purse lying beside her that contained an unfilled prescription for a pharmacy. She was also clutching a small pocket notebook that she used as a diary. The diary chronicled some of her disappointments. The suicide note read: "I was born in [year]... I am alone in this world, God why, God why ... I don't have a mother or father, who am I ? ... [name of assailant] with three boys and two girls ... My people deserted me ... God give me hope ... forgive me and my children [names of the children]. What a painful world. God have mercy on me and my children ... Why, [name of father of children] my husband ... [name of father of children], I do love you and will never forget you."

Medical information reported by the media showed that the assailant was suicidal and had made three previous attempts to kill herself. On one occasion, following a mental crisis, she reportedly lay in the middle of a road adjacent to her home with one of her children, signaling a car to run over them. It was reported that the assailant had had three encounters with psychiatric doctors in the one year prior to the murders. She presented at the psychiatric hospital on August 5 and was discharged on August 24. She was admitted to the hospital again on August 27 but absconded from the hospital on September 2. She presented again at the hospital on October 11 and was discharged on October 12. She was slated to report a month later for psychiatric review but did not maintain the appointment. The psychiatrist's report noted that during her final visit to the hospital, she repeatedly mentioned the name of her former husband, also expressing a desire to be reunited with him and her children. She also mentioned the name of a co-tenant whom she accused of not paying electricity bills or performing household tasks ("Killer-Mother Poisoned Five Children," 2010).

Case 6: Case 6 involved a woman who was reportedly experiencing protracted marital quarrels with her husband. She eventually separated from her husband, leaving their 7-year-old son with him.

Several weeks later, she returned to the matrimonial home under the guise of paying a visit to her son. Unbeknownst to the husband and son, her luggage contained a gallon of petrol and a box of matches. After the husband and son went to sleep that night, she woke up in the middle of the night, doused the apartment with petrol, and set the place alight. Both husband and son perished in the fire. The assailant survived the burns and was rushed to the local hospital for treatment. While on admission at the hospital, she refused food, water, and medical treatment, claiming she wanted to die with her family. She died a few days later from her injuries (Adinkrah, 2015).

Discussion and Conclusion

The foregoing essay has examined multiple-victim homicide incidents perpetrated by females in Ghana. A few of the findings need additional discussion or commentary. First, the data showed that female-perpetrated multiple-victim homicide is extremely rare in Ghanaian society. Additionally, when such crimes occur, it is likely to be a multiple-victim maternal filicide. Second, there was no firearm use in the perpetration of any of the presented multiple-victim homicides. Instead, the assailants opted to use poisoning and burning as their modus operandi. This finding is consistent with findings in the literature on western industrialized societies where it has been noted that female filicide offenders are more likely to use non-shooting methods in the perpetration of the offense; they are more apt to use strangulation, smothering, suffocation, drowning and poisoning (Rouget-Maillart *et al.*, 2005).

Another notable finding from this research was the high percentage of cases in which the assailant suffered psychopathology at the time of the offense. The literature on filicide has documented depression, variously described as postpartum depression, postnatal depression, and postnatal blues, as a major contributory factor to maternal filicides (Flynn, Shaw & Abel, 2013; Spinelli, 2004). In two of the cases profiled in this article (Case 4 and Case 5), the assailants were reported to have suffered postnatal psychoses shortly after the birth of their second children. Furthermore, the analysis has demonstrated that female offenders in Ghana who commit lethal aggression against their offspring face a particularly hostile public. Many of the women profiled in this article were labeled as deranged and wicked (see e.g., “Wicked Mother Kills 2 Kids,” 2020). It is expected that the surviving perpetrators will face abusive and discriminatory treatment in their natal communities when they return home. When medically cleared and released into the community, they will likely encounter a hostile public and consequently experience social adjustment problems.

The limited number of cases examined in the current study precludes generalization of the results beyond the current findings. However, the results suggest a few strategies necessary for preventing and reducing multiple-victim homicides by women. First, given the impact of psychopathology on female multicides and filicides, proper attention must be given by the Ghanaian authorities to women’s prenatal and postnatal psychological

health. In Ghana, at present, there is a shortage of psychological and psychiatric services in the country for patients needing care. According to the World Health Organization, in 2017, Ghana faced a mental health treatment gap of 98%. That is, only 2% of mentally disordered patients were receiving the psychiatric care they required. In 2019, the country reportedly had 18 psychiatrists serving over 28 million people (“Glimmers of Hope,” 2019). A major problem is the accessibility of the limited existing services. Currently, most of the major mental health facilities are located in Accra and a few metropolitan areas around it. One consequence is that there is a dearth of mental health services for rural residents. Continued inattention to the mental health of rural residents, including women suffering from postpartum depression and postnatal psychoses will mean more filicides at the hands of women suffering from undiagnosed and untreated psychopathological conditions. The Ghanaian public also needs to be educated about post-natal depression and postpartum psychosis. Combatting the pervasive ignorance surrounding this issue that is currently present in Ghana will help avert potential vigilante acts against women who neglect or abuse their children because of their condition.

One limitation of the present study was the inability to analyze law enforcement data on the homicides. In Ghana, despite some recent improvements in police data collection the pattern of missing information has persisted, and the available data have several missing pieces of information. For many violent crimes, including homicide, the available data are meager and of limited use. When police data improve, researchers can combine law enforcement data with media-generated data. Future criminological research on female homicides should endeavor to make greater use of law enforcement data. Moreover, additional research on multicides by females, particularly investigations about the topic in other non-Western societies, will assist in the advancement of knowledge about female multicides, and female homicides in general.

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