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Title: Religion and Educational Attainment among Young People in Northern and Southern Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Background: Extant research has documented the relationship between religion and educational attainment. Nevertheless, as the resurgence in religious activities continues to grow, the role religion plays in educational attainment continues to be a critical issue, especially when historical and developmental trajectories of education have disadvantaged the northern sector of Ghana.

Objective: This study examined the relationship between religious affiliation and educational attainment in Ghana. It also examined this relationship in the educationally disadvantaged northern sector and in the advantaged southern sector to test whether educational attainment among young people is a function of religion or an artefact of regional context and other factors.

Methods: The study utilised the 2008 Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (GDHS) data, pulling together the female and male datasets. The analytical sample consists of 6,115 (weighted) young people aged 15-34 years. Frequencies, cross-tabulations and logit regression models were used to examine the relationship between religion and educational attainment—access to education and attaining higher education.

Results: Religious differences in educational attainment were evident in Ghana. Moreover, there were considerable differences in educational attainment of young people in northern and southern Ghana. Within the regional context, religious differences were only pronounced in the already disadvantaged northern setting. The logistic regression results showed that Muslims, Traditionalists/Spiritualists and young people with no religious affiliation were considerably less likely to have access to education as well as attain higher levels of education compared to their Christian counterparts in Ghana. In addition, the odds of young people in the north compared to their southern counterparts having access to education were 39 percent lower. However, the odds of young people in the north attaining higher levels of education were 2.25 times greater compared to their southern counterparts. In as much as religious affiliation makes a difference at the national level and in the north that is hardly the case in the south. Further, female disadvantage is pronounced in all comparisons as females were significantly less likely to have access to education (OR, 0.60) as well as attaining higher level of education (OR, 0.66) compared to their male counterparts in Ghana.

Conclusions: Educational attainment is associated with Christians but this advantage is attenuated when religion is examined only in the educationally advantaged southern sector. While young people in the northern setting were less likely to have access to education, they were more likely to attain higher levels of education. The plausible explanation can be the government's policy on subsidising senior secondary education in the northern sector. Female disadvantage in education is pronounced across all comparisons. These religious and regional differences suggest that educational inequalities persist and should not be ignored by policies that aim at improving the educational attainment of the disadvantaged religious groups, young people in the northern sector and especially females.