



GSJ: Volume 14, Issue 2, February 2026, Online: ISSN 2320-9186  
[www.globalscientificjournal.com](http://www.globalscientificjournal.com)

FEDERAL STATE AUTONOMOUS EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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*Perspectives from Generations on Perceptions of the Transition to Adulthood in Ghana*

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**Moscow 2023**

## Abstract

Perspectives from Generations on Perceptions of the Transition to Adulthood in Ghana were examined among an adolescent (age 15), a young adult (age, 40), and an old adult (age, 79). The central concern was whether these three generations would have distinct ideas about transition to adulthood. Distinctive events were regarded in all eras as significant indicators of the transition to adulthood. The major factors influencing respondents' views on the transition to adulthood were their personal experiences and the economic condition they found themselves. The study made use of the Age-Period-Cohort analysis to explain the changes in adult transitions and form analysis.

**KEY WORDS:** Ghana, Generation, Transition to adulthood, life course, Adolescent, Young adult, Old adult, life experiences, events, first marriage, first childbearing, education, first partnership, first employment, leaving parents.

## Introduction

The concept of the life course takes into account various facets of a person's life, from conception or childbirth to death. It also includes key life events, transitions, and turning points. Life course is defined as a set of socially defined experiences and roles that the individual implements across time (Giele and Elder 1998, p. 22). According to Graff (1995), knowing one's life trajectory as a conscious endeavour was uncommon before to the nineteenth century. Prior to this, a person's life was significantly influenced by the demands of family life, particularly the illness or death of a parent or sibling (see Hareven, 1982). Although it is particular to each person, it can include a wide range of analogous experiences among cohorts in related social groupings. These experiences and roles make up the entirety of the person's actual experience rather than necessarily occurring in a certain order.

According to Hutchison (2015), ageing, relationships, life events, and social change all have an impact on a person's quality of life. Hunt (2017) also stated that a range of biological components that influence mortality and morbidity may have an influence on the life course; this seems obvious provided that all biological organisms must evolve throughout the course of their lifetime. According to Locke, a child's mind is a tabula rasa, or a blank slate, to which knowledge is gradually added. However, Rousseau viewed kids as unadulterated beings who were shaped by their upbringing and experiences. The childhood that includes infancy in Ghana gives reverence to mother's living environment as a significant impact in during the early years of childhood. At this stage in the life course the child's development could be impacted by the potential that they may have lived in a location of deprivation where, for instance, during the embryonic stage, the infant might be at risk from teratogens. It can therefore be seen that previously many children died due to certain conditions such as "kwashiorkor" as compared to today with more improved and advance food for children to aid their growth. According to Keenan and Evans (2009), a child's respiratory, developmental, or behavioural issues could be caused by poor food or inadequate motherly sustenance. At the childhood (infancy) age from (0-9), they start school from crèche to kindergarten. Childhood experiences can have long-lasting effects.

Adolescence is a particularly fascinating era of life since it marks the transition from childhood to young adulthood in Ghana. The adolescent goes through upper primary, junior high, and senior high

school during these years. They wish to be independent, yet their educators and parents constantly guide them. Currently by attending university after high school and, for some, continuing their education in graduate or professional school, many young adults postpone becoming full adulthood unlike previous years. Many of these individuals are well into their 30s by the time they complete their higher degrees, and they start work full-time about a dozen years after individuals who complete high school but do not pursue further education. At this point, many people get married and some start families. In recent times the life course of the individual during the adulthood stage do not really follow a single pattern but individuals choose what he/she wants first. This is quite different from the past because in the olden days events seems to be ordered. For example the individual after school, have to get a job, marry and have children. The adult's age (60+) group has a lot to offer our society at this time in a variety of ways. Old in this context is a relative term because older people historically lacked access to modern medicine and were more susceptible to illnesses that claimed their lives previously.

The life course in Ghana has undergone various significant changes during pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era. In the sense that marriage events were typically cohorts' major goal during that time, people's life trajectories were largely consecutive throughout the pre-colonial era. Due to children, helping parents on the land (farm), childbearing was highly common. Considering divorce was discouraged during pre-colonial periods, the rate was exceedingly low. Few of them got the chance to go to school. The course of life in Ghana, however, changed during the colonial era. Even though colonial society viewed marriage as a celebration, the number of children born per woman declined. This was because people believed that "Colonial Masters" were using them as slaves; when formal schooling was provided, more people enrolled, which led to the creation of many white-collar employment. More changes have occurred in life since the end of colonialism. Nowadays, many favour finishing their education, landing a solid job even before getting married or, in some cases, cohabiting, and delaying starting a family.

The transition to adulthood has received a lot of attention in recent academic literature due to its significant effects on adult socioeconomic factors achievement, family life, and wellness (Shanahan 2000; Settersten, Furstenberg, and Rumbaut 2005; Benson and Furstenberg 2007; Settersten and Ray 2010; Waters, et al. 2011). Transition to adulthood can be defined as a person's development into adulthood and acquiring of knowledge and positions that enable him or her to assume an independent role in society (Mitrofanova, 2019). Eliason, Mortimer & Vuolo (2015) conceptualized transition to adulthood as how people view, interprets and evaluates their experiences with the events they go through. There are variations in how different people, places, and times view the transition from childhood to adulthood (Arnett, 1994, 2000; Gilmore, 1990; Schlegel & Barry, 1991; Perry, 1970). Employment, Separation from parents, Professional education, Partnership, Childbearing and Marriage are signs of transition to adulthood (Mitrofanova, 2019). In the context of Ghana, I use three generations to represent transition to adulthood. The first generation that is adolescence from the age (10-19), the second-generation which is young adult from the age (25-40) and the third generation old adult from the age (50-79).

The 1992 constitution of the republic of Ghana defines an adult as any individual who is eighteen years of age and above. Age is a determinant of transition to adulthood in Ghana because this is the important factor in which individuals are able to make personal decision concerning issues that are relevant to them. Some of these personal decision they make concerning their personal self are; Not smoking in public, avoid joining bad companies (gang), dressing decently in public among others, let's

not forget that such decisions is not collective but its differs from one individual to the other. Among adolescence in Ghana transition to adulthood can be viewed in the natural (biological) makeup of the individual, individuals within this cohort give much preference to body changes i.e. growing beard, enlargement of the breast and growing of pubic hair. Body changes has been seen as transition to adulthood because it constitutes the physical part of becoming an adult, which makes adolescent feel as adults. In the case of young adults in Ghana, transition to adulthood has goes a step above age, other markers that is emerging in the Ghanaian society is cohabitation among both males and females.

Ghana like many other African countries primary focus of the transition to adulthood in the majority of traditional communities was marriage (Schlegel & Barry, 1991). With old adults in Ghana, getting married as an individual not only grants a couple the right to choose whether to have children, but it also serves as a milestone for becoming adulthood. Character qualities that must be cultivated in order for a person to become an adult are highlighted by the significance of marriage (Arnett, 1998). For example, in certain Ghanaian societies, elaborate initiation rites are utilised to mark the transition from childhood to adulthood. In the view of Sarpong (1977) while girls are made to concentrate on their roles as mothers and how to conduct themselves as wives, boys are made to focus on their bravery and their ability to provide for the family during their initiation ceremonies. These trend is failing the test of time because according to some individuals especially young adults, they already see themselves as an adult even before they get married and eventually have children through cohabitation. This confirms the works of (Bumpass & Sweet 1989, Bumpass et al 1991) on the fact that Cohabitation, which emerged in the 1980s, delays family formation activities further. More attention is given to getting a good paid job and renting apartment to move away from parent. Largely, individuals do not give much preference to the sequence of how these events should follow. This is because they had the view that, people have choices on what they want to achieve first in life. Some people may prefer to get married before getting a job or having an education, whiles others may want to achieve one or two of these events in life, for instance having a child and getting a job. In reference to these events also, individuals' significant transition to adulthood are based on their own life experiences. Transition to adulthood in Ghana are manifested in the signs of employment, Separation from parents, Professional education, Partnership, Childbearing and Marriage. This transition varies from individuals to individuals based on what they want to achieve first. Based on in-depth interviews with a sample of three respondents from Ghana who were from three distinct generations and ranged in age from 15 to 79 years: the first generation (ages 10 to 19); the second generation (ages 25 to 40); and the third generation (aged, 58-79), the study explores generational perspectives on Ghana's conceptions of the transition to adulthood.

## Methodology

Walliman (2021) described research methods as “the techniques used to do research” (Walliman, 2021 p.1). To achieve the best possible results, a lot of time should be spent collecting the data (Kabir, 2016). Suitable data collection methods help plan good research (Olsen, 2012). A qualitative methodology was selected for this study in order to obtain good and high-quality data about respondents' perceptions on the transition to adulthood in Ghana. Shank (2002) defines qualitative research as "a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning" (Shank 2002, p. 3). To collect data about this three-generation cohort, the most suitable method would be qualitative interviews. I assume that this method will allow for a more in-depth exploration of the generational dynamics as well as the individual experiences of each generation.

The sampling technique used for this study was the purposive sample. According to Bryman (2008), these techniques is effective in identifying specific interviewees for a particular study. Respondents were captured based on their socio-demographic characteristics. The family under study thus constituted three different generations (Respondent number one, Respondent number two and

Respondent number three). It is quite surprising that two generations (R#1 and R#2) were born after independence, and respondent number one was born before independence in Ghana. The first respondent (R#1), who is referred to as an "adolescent" in Ghana, was born on October 1, 2007 and is a male. He grew up in a town known as "Kasoa" a suburb of the Central Region of Ghana, where he is currently getting his basic education. Respondent number 2, the father of respondent number 1, is a male of 40 years of age. He had the advantage of living with his parents from an early age while growing up in Ghana's capital. He became a father at a young age. He transitioned from childhood to adulthood at a very young age. Respondent number 3, who happens to be the father of respondent number 2 (an old adult), grew up in a place called "Agona Swedru" in the central region for some time before finally relocating to Accra, the capital of Ghana, in search for greener pastures. His bio indicates that he came from a household that was financially secure. His mother was a trader, and his father worked in civil servant.

Table1: socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

Respondent (R)	R#1	R#2	R#3
Gender	M	M	M
Date of birth (DOB)	01.10.2007	20.12.1982	25.07.1943
Age	15yrs	40yrs	79yrs
Marital Status	-	Married	Married
Date and Age of finishing school (Basic)	-	1999 17yrs	-
Date and Age of finishing education of the highest level	-	2004 22yrs	-
Economic Status	-	Lecturer	Retired Artisan
Date and Age of the first employment (at least for 3 months)	-	2004 22yrs	1961 18yrs
Date and Age of first leaving parental home at least for 3 months	-	2004 22yrs	1967 24yrs
Date of the first partnership (living together at least for 3 months)	-	2005 23yrs	1968 25yrs
Date of the first marriage	-	2006 24yrs	1972 29yrs
Date of the first childbirth	-	2005 23yrs	1969 26yrs
Number of Children	-	3	8

The interview method of collecting data involves the presentation of oral-verbal stimuli and replies in terms of oral-verbal responses. This method can be used through personal interviews and, if possible, through telephone interviews (Buriro et al., 2017). To bridge the gap between the researcher and the respondent in terms of data due to different geographical location, the researcher made use of technology and hence data from respondents were collected through an online face-to-face semi-structured interview and through the telephone via WhatsApp. The researcher accessed participants through scheduled appointments, which were favourable for the respondents for the study. The researcher began each interview with an opening paragraph that was aim at ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and explaining the purpose of the study, example:

*Respectfully, my name is Francis Arkoh Amisah from Ghana and a first year master student reading Comparative Social Research at National Research University, Higher School of Economics. I am conducting interviews as part of a research study on the Perceptions of the transition to Adulthood in Ghana. The interview takes around 15-20 minutes and is very formal. As a social researcher, my work is to try as much as possible to capture your views and perceptions as our respondent. Your responses to the questions of our research will be kept confidential for academic purposes only. With your permission, it would be tape-recorded. If at any time during the interview, you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or interview itself, please feel free to let me know. In order to prevent personal identities from being exposed throughout the analysis and writing up of findings, each interview will be given a numerical code. There is no payment for taking part in this study. Furthermore, your participation will be a valuable addition to our research and findings could lead to greater public understanding on the topic. Please, would you be willing to participate?*

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in Fante and English, which were the languages best understood and freely spoken by the participants. The semi-structured interview are preferable because the interview's adaptable format enables the researcher to ask follow-up questions or offer encouragement if the subject seems interested in what they are saying or wants more information. With this technique, the researcher is free to explore the to follow a fresh line of inquiry or to ask the interviewee to expound on something they just said. Informants have the freedom to voice their opinions in their own words when participating in semi-structured interviews. The main aim was to build understanding, gain trust from participants, and allow them to freely take part in the discussion. The interview was done by asking the three generations questions about their age, gender, date of birth, marital status, economic status, date and age of finishing school (basic), date and age of finishing education of the highest level, date and age of the first employment (at least for 3 months), date and age of first leaving parental home at least for 3 months, date of the first partnership (living together at least for 3 months), date of the first marriage, date of the first childbirth, and number of children. Pseudonyms was assigned to each interview to enable researchers identify respondents and ensure anonymity. All interviews was translated and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. To add, the researcher added all the information into a table so that the researcher could easily compare and contrast the different generations. To uncover some hidden secrets about the three generations, their biographies were read to them so that they could respond appropriately.

## Limitations

In the course of the discussion, certain glitches were encountered. One of the biggest problems the researcher encountered while collecting information from the respondents was getting them to open up and talk about certain experiences. Respondent number three, who happens to be of the older generation to be precise was reluctant to talk about certain aspects of his past, and the researcher had to be patient and understanding in order to get him to open up. Additionally, some events were very difficult for different generations to recall, especially dates in the past. The researcher had to be creative in finding ways to jog their memories and get them to remember as much as possible. The researcher also found that some of the questions asked were delicate, such as asking about the number of children, the older generation found this question uncomfortable and quite unfortunate because he had lost many of his children during a certain period. To manage this, the researcher made sure to be respectful and understanding of the answers received. The researcher also made sure to create a safe and comfortable environment for the interviewees to share their stories. The researcher had some refusals to answer certain questions, which were managed by simply moving on to the next question or by offering to revisit the question later. The researcher does not think the listed events represented in the table above fully represent the transition to adulthood, as there are many other factors that play a role in this transition rather than only those events listed above. During the interviews, I had some insights into what should be added, such as travel experiences and other life events. Nevertheless, the researcher decided not to add anything because respondents could not provide more details.

## Results

### *Perceptions on Transition to Adulthood in Ghana*

Findings of the study were centered on perceptions of transition to adulthood in Ghana with respect to personal transition, age transitions, biological transitions and role transition. In the views of all the respondents (R#1, R#2 and R#3) who were interviewed all generations, view an individual as transitioning into an adult when He or she is responsible, offers knowledgeable guidance, is financially independent. Moreover, respondent #1 which is adolescence was unique in terms of the perceptions and did not actually consider marriage as an indicator to the transition to adulthood. Adolescence perceives that the community or society does not exert as much control over individuals, and as a result, individuals have diverse life goals to achieve differently over the course of their lifetime. These perceptions of the young adolescence correlates with the work of Arnett (1994, 2000) Gilmore (1990), Schlegel & Barry (1991), Perry (1970) who concluded that there are variations in how different people, places, and times view the transition from childhood to adulthood. What defines a person an adult depends on the individual, and not necessarily events such as marriage and having a child. Additionally, respondents had a general perception of transition to adulthood based on age. When asked who is considered to be an adult? Respondents' first view discussed were age consideration. In the views of the (R#2) young adult,

*“To my understanding, the 1992 constitution of Ghana has clearly provided the ground rules for who constitutes an adult. Adults are defined as individuals aged 18 and up. As a result, in Ghana, an individual can vote if he or she is 18 years of age or older, and advertisements for alcoholic beverages restrict consumption by those under the age of 18 (R#2).”*

Respondents #3 who happens to be the father of respondent #2 also had the similar view when asked the question; do you consider yourself as an adult? His response was,

*"It will be unfair and a disrespect for someone to tell me that I am not an adult; celebrated my 79th birthday this year, and I have ground children, so I am an adult (R#2)".*

Nevertheless, age was not the only significant factor in determining transition to adulthood. In accordance with the constitution of Ghana, a person who has reached the age of 18 is considered an adult (1992 Constitution of Ghana). Conversely, respondents believe that the ability to make essential choices in everyday lives, be responsible and the choices of friends are more symbolic of adulthood.

Regarding biological transition to adulthood, the adolescent (R#1) gave body changes high priority. Body changes were viewed as a rite of passage into maturity because they represent the physical aspect of maturation, which makes adolescents feel like adults. This may explain why this transition was more significant for adolescents than for young and adults. For the respondents..

*"I started seeing myself as an adult when I started growing pubic hair. During our class discussion in school, my teacher told me that if you are young and you start growing hair at your pubic places, then you are no longer an adolescent but an adult. To add to this, I was also developing a deep voice. All of this was part of the features of an adult manifesting on me (#3)".*

In the perspectives of the old adult (R#3) biological transition during adolescence was also a crucial transition to adulthood just as the adolescents. These was the memories he shared, *"When I was young, I was told that the development of deep voice, growing of pubic hair and growing of beard signified maturation (R#3)".* However, as a person develops, these physical characteristics become less symptomatic of the transition to adulthood. The respondent desired living away from his parents and obtaining financial independence as indicators that made him feel more mature. Even though all respondents who were interviewed viewed events such as marriage, having children, getting a job, living away from parents, completing an education as transition to adulthood, obtaining an education and getting married were the minimum requirements of transition to adulthood for all the respondents. In the perception of the old adult (R#3),

*"I already saw myself as an adult even before I got married, for me much preference I gave much preference to getting a job, living away from my parents and eventually having a child even before I got married(R#3)".*

In general, respondents were unable to indicate a clear preference for the order in which these occurrences ought to take place. This is due to their belief that individuals can choose what they want to accomplish in life first. While some people may want to accomplish one or two of these life milestones, such as having a child and getting a job, others may desire to marry before obtaining a job or completing their education. Respondents' important transition to adulthood was based on their life experiences with regard to these events as well. Example of this instance can be shown when a young adult who has had a child and began accepting responsibilities at a very early age became an adult irrespective of not official marrying. Finally In terms of the perception of what constitutes an adult because of the political and economic situation, adolescents and young adults observed as many changes as on what constitutes an adult today and what did so in the past. In the viewpoint of the young adult *"from 2020 till now things have been very difficult. Everybody in this country is a witness, what most people now think about is getting food to eat and survive, most of my friends now prefer*

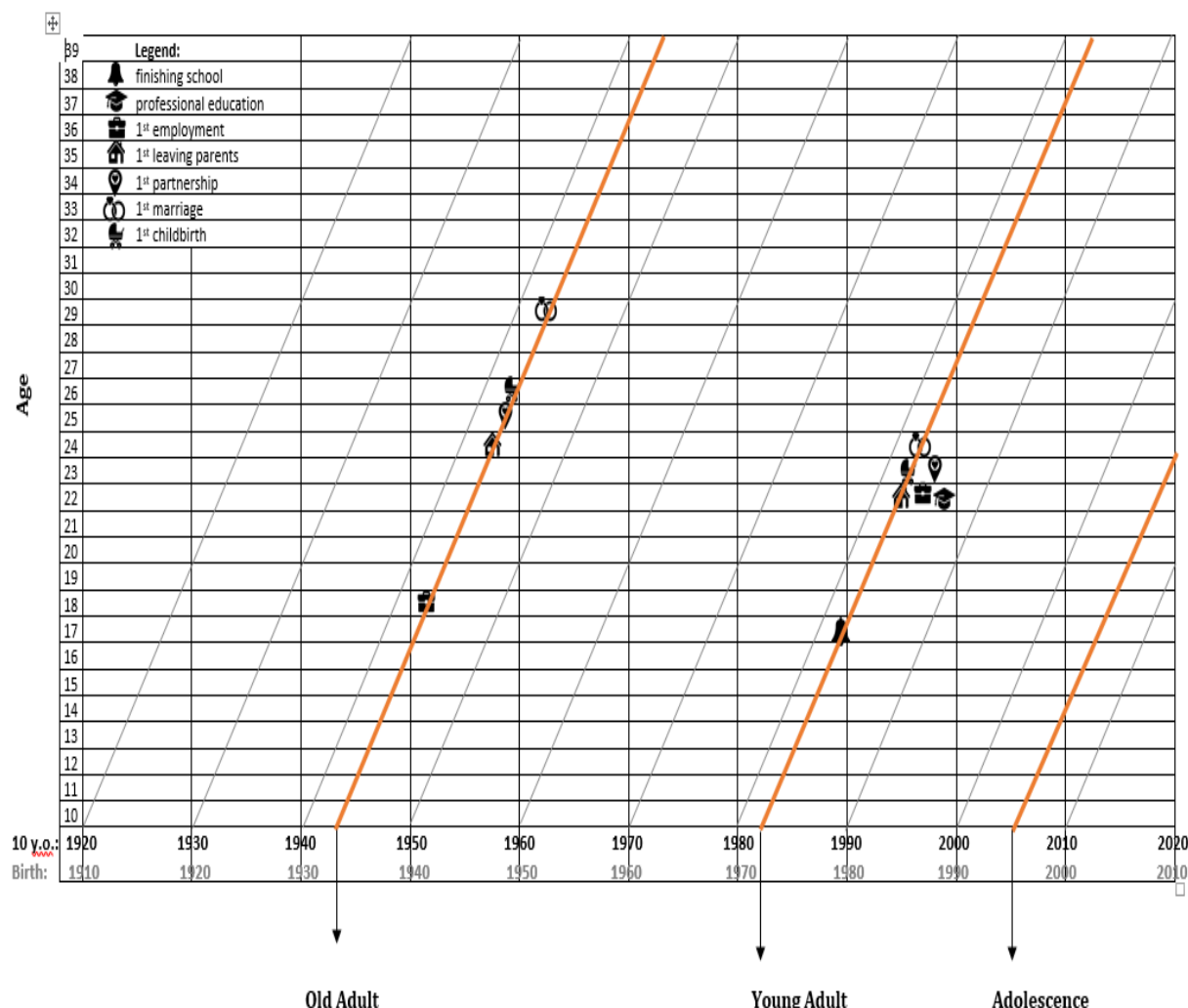
*cohabitation to marriage because they don't have money to marry, for me I was just lucky to have been married otherwise I would have been single by now (R#2)".*

### **Age-Period-Cohort (APC) Analysis**

Largely, the Age, Period, and Cohort (APC) analysis is the fundamental demographic analysis for comprehending time, as it allows for the explanation of "social, historical, and environmental factors" that influence individuals and groups (Debiasi, 2018 p.1). The researcher will use the APC analysis to explain how perspectives from generations on perceptions of the transition to adulthood in Ghana. The age at which each respondent experiences significant life events influences their perception of the transition to adulthood. According to Mitrofanova (2019), "the Lexis grid allowed us to visualise all the historical contexts". On the Lexis grid calendar, the X-axis represents the historical background in which each generation grew up. On the other hand, the Y-axis represents the respondents' ages, beginning at 10 years old and ending at 39 years old (see figure one below). The Orange diagonal axis on the Lexis grid displays pertinent information regarding each generation. The black Colour icons on the graph depict the respondents' life events. From different experiences at different ages, old adult started making events to adulthood at the age of 18. This can be explained that, at age 18, respondents already could be considered as an adult when he had his first employment and thus, experienced adulthood at an early age. Likewise, young adult who graduated from highest level of education left his parental home and had his first job at the age of 22 before experiencing any other events. These life events the young adults experience at the age of 22 has shaped the individuals views on becoming an adult. Although the adolescent age 15 has not experienced other transition to adulthood such as marriage, childbirth among others, making vital decisions concerning his personal life such as the kind of friends to go out with, which place to visit and which not to, was a more important marker to transition to adulthood. These transitions appeared more important as transitions to adulthood at those young ages than they appeared from the perspective of the old adult.

Moreover, the period each generation found itself also contributed to their views to the transition to adulthood. In the traditional period where transition of adulthood followed a particular sequence, laid down by the society, family and religion. People had to live in that sequence and so have a different perspective of what constitute adulthood. From the Lexis grid result, old adult got job at the age of 18 before he had left his parental home, and then first partnership, childbirth and then eventually marrying. However, for the young adult and adolescent, the events they have experience so far do not fully depict such sequence. This is because they lived in a modern period where preference is not given to the order of events, and the person to a large extent control which events comes first. This period has affected the general view of young people on transition to adulthood, thus, young people had perception that is more distinctive on transition to adulthood than old adult, who grew up in a less unique time. Nonetheless, it must be noted that both the old adult and young adult all had children before getting married, which is a typical pattern in Ghana both in the traditional and modern societies.

Figure. One Visualization of transition to adulthood of three different generations in Ghana



**Conclusion**

The paper has looked at Perceptions of the transition to adulthood in Ghana. Three respondents of age 15, 40 and 79 years representing three different generation who all happens to male from the same family were studied. The findings showed that all three generations under discussion held the perception that becoming an adult occurs as one ages, but this view was not regarded as the only key step in the transition to adulthood. Accepting responsibility for one's actions, deciding to make important decisions, and achieving financial independence were thought to be significant markers of the personal transition to adulthood. The respondent share the same viewpoint with the work of Arnett (2000) who postulates that people see becoming adults as an individual process that involves accepting responsibility, making independent choices, and achieving financial independence. However, as a necessary component of the transition from childhood to adulthood, young adult and old adult regard biological transitions to be less significant than the adolescent does. Role transitions like marriage and schooling were rated as the least preferred ways to enter adulthood in all three groups. The identity of the younger age represents an different transition to adulthood. Younger

generations' expectations are shaped by their perceptions of the occasions that signify the passage from childhood to adulthood. New generations have altered the perceptions of older generations, which has caused social and cultural change in Ghanaian society. Instead of society, family, and religion controlling the onset of these events, the person in society now controls events. The study's findings also provides enough support and evidence to the work of Eliason, Mortimer, and Vuolo's (2015) theory on the transition to adulthood as it relates to how people perceive, understand, and assess the events they go through. Respondents to this research who did not see obtaining an education as a transitional event to becoming an adult did not see it as such. Most respondents saw adulthood-marking events as ones they could connect to through their own experiences or the environment they were in which they grew up.



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## Appendix: Interview Guide

### A. Sociodemographic Characteristics

- 1) Kindly tell me about yourself
  - i. Gender?
  - ii. How old are you? date of birth
  - iii. What is your place of birth? place of living?
  - iv. Are you married? Age of first marriage?  
If divorce, age of divorce
  - v. What is your highest level of education?  
At what age did you attain this level education?
  - vi. Do you have children? How many children?  
At what age did you have your first child?
  - vii. Are you working? age of first job?
  - viii. What is your economic status?

### B. Perceptions of transition to adulthood

- 2) Are you an adult? Why do you consider yourself as an adult? Why do you not consider yourself as an adult?
- 3) Who is an adult? Or what makes one an adult?
- 4) When growing up, what did you know constitute an adult?
- 5) Has the political and economic circumstances shaped your perspective of what constitute an adult? How?
- 6) Do you think you have achieved any? so that makes you an adult?
- 7) Do you think the transition of adult has changed? How?