

# Genetic and Psycho-social Values, Perspective Among Akans on Marriage

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## Abstract

Marriage is a hot issue for debate and discussion. Apart from the excitement afforded by its romantic and aesthetic aspects, concerns before marriage are also expressed in more negative terms in terms of genetic/infectious diseases and psycho-social values. The aim of this paper is to portray the aspects of marriage among the Akans in Ghana. The paper focuses on aspects of marriage. An attempt has been made to explain some genetic and psycho-social values that may serve as barriers to contracting a marriage among Akans. The paper is with reference to numerous pieces of literature that have been published on marriages. It thus presents a historical account from a sociological viewpoint and scientific points of view.

**Keywords:** Marriage, Akans, Non- communicable and Communicable diseases and bad behaviour

## Definition of Terms

“Awareε”: It is a union between a man and woman who have agreed to be together as husband and wife through the Akan approved rites.

“Tire Nsa”: Securing the head wine, immediately this rite is performed, it means the couple have traditionally bided. The bride family takes to bottles of schnaps.

“Tire adeε”: This is an amount taken from the groom for the bride. This money is used to purchase a property so that if something happens to the bride in the future, the proceeds can be used to rescue her.

“Akontagyesi Kwan”: This is an amount given to the bride’s brothers.

## Introduction

Marriage, sometimes described as "mileage," is a term that is sometimes used. In most nations, marriage is seen as a widely accepted institution <sup>[8]</sup>. According to wikipedia.org, there are several definitions of marriage. Wedlock, matrimony, or marriage are all terms for the culturally and frequently legally recognized union of two persons who are referred to as spouses. It outlines their respective rights and responsibilities as well as those of their children and in-laws. It is seen as being cross-culturally applicable. Marriage is defined as the "condition of being linked to a person of the opposite sex as husband or wife in a voluntary and contractual relationship recognized by law or the institutions whereby persons are joined in marriage or an intimate or close union" by Merriam Webster.

Marriage is defined under the Act as a union of a man's and a woman's families, but it is also a contract between two persons - a man and a woman <sup>[1]</sup>. Marriage is therefore defined as a legal compact between a man and a woman who engage into a recognized relationship. Marriage is universal and significant for societies because of functions such as meeting the need for love and being loved, meeting both individuals' biological, social, psychological, and motivational needs, bringing new generations into the

world, gaining a place in society, feelings of safety and protection, cooperation, being confident about the future, feeling proud of each other, and healthy sexual life <sup>[23]</sup>.

A growing body of research reveals that marriage has a wide range of benefits, including improvements in individuals' economic well-being, mental and physical health, and the well-being of their children<sup>[27]</sup>. Based on the central assumption of the 'protection' theory, marriage may thus be viewed as a well-being promoter<sup>[1]</sup>. There are several reasons why individuals marry. A list of some reasons why individuals marry is provided below.

- ❖ People marry out of love
- ❖ In order to have children together
- ❖ To have sex together
- ❖ To fulfil a traditional or religious impulse
- ❖ Financial reasons
- ❖ Marriage is a productive complementarity

According to<sup>[7]</sup>, marriage is an aspect of culture that transcends all seasons and is passed down from generation to generation, and despite modernization, the Akan remains an Akan in terms of sex and marriage. Marriage is a beautiful yet serious customary event revered by Ghana's Akans. Marriage is a significant ceremony and part of Ghana's social life for the Akans. Because of the significance of marriage and the fact that it is a preserve for the mature in society <sup>[22]</sup>.

Despite the fact that contemporary parts of marriage decisions, particularly mate choosing, have permeated Ghanaian society <sup>[19]</sup>, the extended family continues to arbitrate the wedding process. Romantic relationships are prohibited and considered with scorn in the culture due to the strong extended family ties and values that prevail. This is because such a deep personal tie is viewed as a challenge to, and a departure from, the conventional marriage standards of accepted and planned marriages <sup>[21]</sup>. This is especially true among the matrilineal Akans, who make up the bulk of Ghanaians<sup>[1]</sup>. Marriage is referred to as 'Awaregyee' among the Akans<sup>[18]</sup>. Marriage is a significant social institution among the Akan. The phases of marriage preparation are numerous; each one is complicated and essential, and each one plays an important part in the marital institution. This review emphasis is on the investigative step before a man and a woman may be proclaimed 'husband and wife'.

## Background

The Akan people are found in Ghana and Ivory Coast. The Akan language and its dialects include Asante (Twi), Fante, and Akuapem, all of which have their own distinct written forms. All Akan tribes have similar social and political structures<sup>[13]</sup>.

The term 'Akan' refers to both the people and the language. Akan may be studied from two perspectives: (a) anthropological and (b) linguistic. The ethnographic Akan includes Ahantas, Aowins, Nzemas, and Sefwis who do not speak Akan as first Language (L1) but shares cultural similarities with the Akans. People who speak Akan as their first language(L1) are referred to as Akans[2]. Akans are the largest ethnic group in Ghana. In the 2021, Population and Housing Census, 47.5% of the Ghanaian population was Akan and about 44% of the rest speaks Akan as non-native speakers<sup>[14]</sup>

The majority of the Akan people live in southern Ghana. Nine of Ghana's 16 regions—Ahafo, Ashanti, Bono, Bono East, Central, Eastern, Oti, Western, and Western North—speak Akan as their mother tongue. The Ewe villages in the Oti Region are located between the Akan speaking groups. Agona, Akyem, Akuapem, Akwamu, Asante, Assin, Bono, Buem, Denkyira, Fante, Kwawu, Twifo, and Wassaw dialects are among the Akan dialects <sup>[2]</sup>. When we refer to "traditional" Akan, we mean those Akan who, despite the influences of western culture and other religions like Christianity and Islam, nonetheless practice the native faith that their ancestors left them<sup>[5]</sup>. The Akan ethnic groups share

cultural attributes, of notable recognition are the tracing of descent, inheritance of property, and succession to royalty which will be highlighted in the next sections.



Fig. Map of Ghana Source: [12]

It is to be stressed that Akan marriage is first and foremost a traditional marriage. The table below lists some of the rituals, symbols, and elements that are a part of the Akan marriage ceremony.

Table 1. Stages and activities carried out in Akan marriages

Stages in marriages	Activities performed
<p>1. Mate selection</p>	<p>The suitor's father locates a suitable wife for his son. Nowadays, the suitor tells the father of his interest in a certain woman and lets him know. Before telling his parents about his intentions, he has to make sure the lady would accept his proposal of marriage. If they decide to be married, this is done in private meetings, or "kasasie."</p>
<p>2. Formal request (knocking ceremony)</p>	<p>The procedure for the formation of marriage begins with (knocking). 'knocking' at the door, 'begging' for the hand of the bride, and 'securing the headwine. Although they are independent steps in the process, knocking and begging go hand in hand. Elements of the process of the formation of marriage are <i>kɔkɔkɔ</i> (knocking), <i>tirinsa</i> and <i>wo re ye obaa no ho</i></p>

	<i>adeε</i> (performing the marriage rites of the woman).
3. Interval of investigation (stage of investigation)	The woman's background is being investigated (for any undesirable circumstances like illnesses, insanity, etc.); emissaries are used for this. If it is determined that there is no issue with the woman's history, delegates are dispatched to the woman's father to request her hand in marriage to the man's son. The suitor often gives his or her permission for this to happen.
4. Bride price (Performing the Marriage Rites of the Woman)	After the <i>tirinsa</i> has been accepted, the next stage of the process is to perform the marriage rites of the woman. That is expressed as <i>wo reyeobaa no ho adeε</i> . It consists of a number of payments, the main one being the <i>tirinsa</i> and the <i>tiriadeε</i> . <i>Tirinsa</i> and the <i>tiriadeε</i> are both required for the “full legal recognition” of the marriage. The payment of the <i>tiriadeε</i> ratifies the marriage and may be considered as documentary evidence attesting to the fact that matrimonial union has duly been entered into. It conveys the sense of a symbolic transaction. One party receives a bride, while the other receives something in return, such as cash, clothing, or beverages. The marriage is legalised after the marriage ceremonies are done.

### Barriers to Accepting Marriage

#### Diseases (communicable/infectious and non-communicable diseases)

Before couples could get married in the past, clan elders would look into both families to gauge how close they were and to see whether either family had any signs of an incurable illness like leprosy, sickle cell disease, or epilepsy <sup>[17]</sup>. Elders (who are not geneticists or genetics specialists) utilised a family history to find out a person's family medical history.

The fact that marriage traditions are essentially the same across all Asante clans is trite. Marriage between members of the same clan is prohibited. For instance, an Asona man and woman cannot be married. Keep in mind that every Asante child is a member of his or her mother's clan by default. Therefore, while it is permissible to marry your mother's brother's uncle, it is not appropriate to marry your mother's sister's aunt. Marrying any kind of father's side cousin is completely unacceptable <sup>[13]</sup>. As is the case in the majority of African communities, a man may marry a lady from a different clan. Most families make an effort to learn more about one another's families before getting married. In essence, it relates to determining their level of responsibility, the existence of illnesses in the family, or to determine whether either family is barren. Both families make inquiries to make sure the future son-in-or law's daughter-in-family law's is respected. They try to identify any obstacles to a happy marriage by doing this. They carry out research to get the answers to inquiries like these: (a) Are there any contagious or inherited illnesses present in the family, such as leprosy, epilepsy, mania, aggressive conduct, or tuberculosis (TB)?

According to traditional beliefs, illnesses are said to be brought on by attacks from evil or negative spirits, and humans may contract a sickness as retribution for treating their ancestors poorly <sup>[26]</sup>.

Cultural-clinical psychology has continued to document the interaction between the experience of cultural context and the manifestation of mental disorders; the work of <sup>[10]</sup> extends this thinking to

infectious disease, with a focus on illnesses that are spread through social contact and are at least in part treated through social interventions.

Numerous studies have found that the impact of infectious illnesses on various groups and cultures is extremely susceptible to societal attitudes and practices, which interact with the biological features of these diseases in a way that either promotes or inhibits transmission. These findings support the idea that social connection play a significant role in predicting the likelihood of contracting HIV and TB as well as chronic disease and death<sup>[29]</sup>. Infectious/communicable diseases often dominate disease-related mortality in communities, hence elders generally not allow persons with such conditions to marry.

An ethnic group's members frequently have particular gene variants that have been passed down from shared ancestors. A certain genetic illness may be more prevalent in the group if one of these common genes possesses a variation (also known as a mutation) that causes disease. Sickle cell illness and other genetic disorders are examples of those that are more prevalent in specific ethnic groups<sup>[15]</sup>.

Cousin marriage, also called as consanguineous marriage (CM), is a type of interfamilial union in which two blood relatives who are second cousins or closer are married<sup>[4]</sup>. If more than one member of the family suffers from a certain ailment, the illness is said to be "running in the family"<sup>[15]</sup>.

Consanguinity increases the likelihood of having an autosomal recessive disorder, as well as non-genetic disorders, developmental delays, and infant mortality.

It would seem that there are social and economic benefits to consanguineous marriage in Ghana and other regions of West Africa for it to continue even with the seeming collapse in the Western world. Consanguinity has been linked to rare neurologic diseases in Ghana. Pre-marital procedures are only permitted after both couples are comfortable with them. Usually, the marriage is not permitted under these circumstances.

Despite the fact that there is a scarcity of factual data on couples who have given birth to children with genetic disorders in Ghana. Behavioral geneticists have found that both marriage and divorce are, in part, genetically influenced. However, the number and variety of studies across disciplines and diseases that find strong correlations among marriage, relationship quality and health outcomes for children and adults are impressive and intriguing, and all point in the same direction<sup>[24]</sup>.

Disability and consanguinity have been linked in several research<sup>[20]</sup>. Salman Kirmani, a professor of pediatrics at the Aga Khan University in Karachi, claims that the likelihood of genetic diseases in children from consanguineous marriages is two times higher than the incidence of 2-3% among children from unrelated spouses. Sickle cell disease (SCD), cystic fibrosis, Down's syndrome, infantile cerebral palsy, hearing and visual impairments are common genetic illnesses that affect offspring of consanguineous marriages<sup>[28]</sup>. Before people can understand that marrying one's cousin can be harmful to their offspring, they need to first understand what genetics is, how diseases can get passed within the family and how this knowledge can empower their choices and decisions.

A study on hereditary disorders conducted in Ghana by<sup>[9]</sup> revealed that the children were the result of a consanguineous marriage. Following an excision biopsy, the paediatric ophthalmologist diagnosed a squamous cell carcinoma in situ.

In a matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, a man marries his maternal uncle's daughter (or another marryable lady from his uncle's matrilineage). In such a circumstance, an uncle may ensure that his daughter gets a respectable marriage in his nephew, and because he is also his probable matrilineal successor, the inheritance left behind would benefit his daughter indirectly as well.



Matrilateral cross-cousin marriages are also practiced by chiefs, who marry the daughters of their ancestors in order to maintain the connections between the governing lineage and the other matrilineages in the society.

Cross-cousins are perceived by many young people as being more like full siblings than potential spouses, making them unsuitable candidates for this type of union. As a result, it is now uncommon. Although they tend to be "ceremonial" in character and the partners won't truly live as a pair in their case, cross-cousin weddings are still practiced, especially among chiefs. The impression gained was that young people in cities are more likely to marry later in life and are less reliant on their parents and uncles, whereas marriages in rural tend to follow the conventional pattern more closely<sup>[13]</sup>.

A disorder may be regarded as "running in the family" if more than one member of the family has the illness. Other illnesses that appear to run in families are not caused by single gene variations. Children with hereditary illnesses are more common in communities that practice cousin marriage. The issue develops when an odd gene is present in the family and both parents have this unique gene. With such a marriage, there is a risk that their kid may acquire the illness with each pregnancy. This occurs when the child receives the uncommon gene from both parents.

While consanguineous marriages may not be tabooed though that cultural practice is becoming less popular in Akan culture. In more formal terms, they are known as consanguineous marriages, which are marriages between people who are related to each other as second cousins or closer. There are multiple degrees of consanguinity, with the first being your parent or child, the second being siblings, grandparents, and grandchildren, the third being aunts/uncles, nieces/nephews, great-grandparents, and the fourth being first cousins.

### Reasons

The Akan family's long-standing custom ensures that wealth is kept within the family. Similar socioeconomic circumstances and familial traditions will exist amongst spouses. Cousin marriages were formerly not only a frequent occurrence, but over time they also developed into a cultural norm that is no longer actively pushed or desired. From a genetics perspective, there is a clear correlation between these cousin marriages and a higher incidence of genetic problems in the kids of such marriages. The rules of probability provide the basis for it. Recombination of genes occurs as cells go through meiosis, which is the primary source of individual variances.

In addition, genetic differences that distinguish one person from another are also brought about through mutational events and independent assortments. Since all humans share around 99% of their genomes with other people, these variants only make up a very tiny fraction of human diversity. The variance between us is caused by the equivalent of one percent. The prevalence of cousin marriages can be attributed to two factors. First, it offers monetary security by guaranteeing that assets like as property or money remain within a family. For parents who like to see their children married to dependable partners rather than strangers, it provides personal security. Many publications, including, share this opinion<sup>[3]</sup>. Numerous aspects of society, including institutional structure and attitudes like trust, individualism, and nepotism, can be influenced by the predominance of consanguineous marriage and the resulting family networks<sup>[3]</sup>. It is believed that although the genetic drawback of these unions is negligible in comparison to the cultural and socioeconomic benefits that such cousin marriages appear to deliver for families, especially in the Akan cultures.

## Psycho-Social Barriers to Contracting Marriages

(d) Is the woman lazy?

According to<sup>[25]</sup>, marriage frequently provides economical, psychological, social, and benefits. African Studies research explains that, Akan men are expected to financially support their wives, while Akan women are expected to contribute to the relationship by having children and taking care of the home. However, in order for a woman to be regarded as a good wife, a young woman must be hardworking (Odeyofoo), respectful (Obu nipa), obedient (Otekasa), and sexually faithful (ote ne ho ase). Although beauty (ahoofe) is taken into account, it is by no means the deciding criteria.

(c) Is the family violent or record bad behavior

Marriage and divorce are both genetically impacted to some extent, according to behavioral geneticists. According to<sup>[16]</sup>, families do not accept or allow such marriages in those who have also demonstrated rises in a number of diseases such affective disorders, drug addiction (alcohol), and gambling. interpreting traditional rituals like marriage through a cultural perspective. There is genetic underpinning to all of these undesirable habits<sup>[16]</sup>.

(e) Can the man look after a wife?

Hard work and communalism

The Akans value hard work greatly. it is believed that. Success is achieved through hard work. As a result, Akan youths are taught to work hard. Indeed, the Akan have a work ethic that is shared by all Africans. Secondly it is also believed that cultural meanings may be observed in the real world as widely shared practices that develop from and support these meanings. <sup>[6]</sup>Correctly states, "it often occurs that a man is so hard-working that his mother, sister, and occasionally even his father become dependent upon him for their means of livelihood." According to<sup>[11]</sup>, communalism is "the doctrine that the group (that is, the society) constitutes the focus of the activities of the individual members of the society." <sup>[11]</sup> further reiterates that communalism lays "emphasis on the activity and success of the wider society rather than, though not necessarily at the expense of, or to the detriment of, the individual"<sup>[5]</sup>.

## Conclusion

The main factor causing these many genetic problems is not marriage. But they are to blame for the higher chance of getting these diseases. And if those dangers can be reduced, it will also be possible to handle the countless cases of fetal death and babies born with malformations. Marriage's total impact on health is still not fully understood. Additional genetic and psychosocial studies may be able to better define the scope of marriage's health consequences. Discussions regarding the function and goals of public policy in promoting marriage can benefit from more knowledge about how marriage impacts health, and it may even give the term "healthy marriage" a new meaning. Scientific culture can assist us in taking the necessary steps toward a goal that finally conveys the message about the need of limiting the development of genetic illnesses (diabetes, cancer, blood disorders, mental disorders, heart diseases, asthma, gastrointestinal disorders, hypertension, hearing deficit). Despite the fact that Akan people culture has established systems to detect and restrict the recurrence of genetic disorders and communicable diseases, which are more likely to arise in such groups as a result of consanguineous marriages. Genetics services might be beneficial to anybody who has an inherited condition or is concerned about such issues. In our conclusion, there are theoretical and practical implications of this view on infectious and genetic disorders for cultural psychology and related fields, as well as the practical consequences of this approach on scientific communication and public health interventions.

## Recommendation

The effects of marriage on health may be the subject of further research. the health of various ethnic and socioeconomic groups as well as the health of future generations. The importance of genetics in marriage should be a core component of our tertiary education curriculum to better prepare future couples. Genetic counseling services should be developed in teaching hospitals, as stressed by <sup>[9]</sup>, at the very least so that people who wish to get married may make informed judgments in the present conditions.

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