

# INDISCIPLINE IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN GHANA

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## ABSTRACT

The study investigated causes and influence of indiscipline in secondary schools in Ghana. A multi-site case study from a population of students, teachers, headmasters, headmistresses, assistance heads, senior housemasters and mistresses and parents was adopted. A sample size of 56 participants, comprising 10 school prefects, 10 non prefects, 5 house staff and 15 parents were engaged in a focus group discussion. In addition, 8 headmaster/mistresses, and 8 senior housemasters/ mistresses were interviewed. The data analysis method used was thematic. The study which is in its first phase, was conducted in Southern Ghana. The study revealed three key causes of school indiscipline, namely, attitude of parents over protecting their wards even when school rules were flouted, the interpretation the media ascribed to indiscipline and the removal of corporal punishment from disciplinary actions. The study also revealed that indiscipline lowered the authorities of school leaders and teachers and led to a declined in students' academic performance. The study therefore recommended an alternative disciplinary regime which should include sanctions to be collectively agreed upon by student unions, civil society organizations, law enforcement officers, educational institutions, parents and religious bodies.

## Introduction and Study Context

Over the past decade, there has been increasing spate of indiscipline in Ghana. Standards of behaviour, attitudes, norms, and values in society have changed over the past decade, especially among the youth (Chimhenga, 2017). Thoughts, attitudes and norms of young learners are continuously evolving and changing negatively. Particularly, in senior high schools, there have been reports of students' negative behavioural issues. Indeed, the issue of students' behavioural problems remains a challenge for many parents, social workers, teachers, educationists and significant others who are concerned with the education of the youth. Indiscipline affects teaching and learning, so it cannot be ignored by well-meaning stakeholders in education. It is important that educational leaders understand the effect of such behaviours and provide policy direction for national education development (Chimhenga, 2017; Asiedu-Yirenkyi, 2019).

In classroom learning situations, some learners have lost respect for their teachers and disturbed the learning activities by making unnecessary noise and bullying fellow learners (Chimhenga, 2017). Ngwokabuenui (2015) observed that these students cultivate and demonstrate deviant behaviours and may not fulfill their potentials. As a result there is an outcry of Cameroonian educators, administrators and parents about the increasing rate of indiscipline in Cameroonian secondary schools. Some young people have resorted to delinquency and drug abuse. These changes are common in most societies, including Ghana. Such changes affect attitudes of young and old people. Chimhenga (2017) argues that the norms and values within the society are changing, and these changes affect upbringing of children. This trend of indiscipline among young people “unsettles the mind of patriotic Cameroonians since children are considered the future leaders of the country” (Ngwokabuenui, 2015, p.64)

There have been countless number of incidences in schools where students have threatened teachers, molested them, and abused them for example, there has been a case of female students in school uniforms sighted for indecent behaviours on school compound in Ghana, and even threatening teachers. Again, there was a social media report of some female students raining insults on government official of the country, (Asare-Donkoh, 2018). In another instance, Ghanaians were horrified to hear a case of indiscipline from groups of senior high school (SHS) examination candidates who stated that because the first paper they wrote, *Integrated Science*, was too difficult for them, they carried out riot, vandalism, and insulted authorities. Some of these SHS students attacked and assaulted journalists, teachers who invigilated them, heads of school, and other West African Examination Council (WAEC) officials. This is quite disturbing as a nation. It must be emphasized that these acts of indiscipline among students have become a national concern (<https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/wassce-bright-shs-students-beat-invigilator-graphic-reporter>).

The Ghana Education Service and the Ministry of Education, in conjunction with other stakeholders such as the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), and National Association of Graduate Teachers (NAGRAT) have developed rules and regulations, and measures such as institutionalizing the Guidance and Counselling Unit in SHS to curb the menace of indiscipline in SHSs in Ghana. Yet, indiscipline persists in SHSs. Predicated on the unabated occurrences of indiscipline, especially in SHSs, despite efforts at the institutional and national levels, the literature (Amoah, et al., 2015) gives indication that an in-depth inquiry to gauge the experiences of key stakeholders (school administrators, teachers, parents, students and significant others) is needed. Therefore, this study sets out to investigate the causal factors accounting for indiscipline in senior high schools. These issues provided the *raison d'être* for the study.

### ***Purpose and Objectives***

The study intended to bring the issues of student indiscipline to the fore of national discussions through disseminating the findings from this research with the aim of providing direction for a national policy on discipline in schools, a policy that will be relevant in keeping the Ghanaian social order.

The following objectives were formulated to guide the study:

- a. To Identify the causes and effects of students' indiscipline in secondary schools in Ghana:
  - a. School-based factors that cause indiscipline at the secondary schools.

- b. Societal-based factors that cause indiscipline in the secondary schools.
- b. To establish the influence of school indiscipline on nation building in Ghana.
- c. To evolve alternative policy direction and measures to curb school indiscipline in SHSs in Ghana.

### **Methodology**

Qualitative research approach, utilising the multi-site case study design was employed. The population comprised of students, teachers, headmasters/mistresses and assistants, senior house masters, house masters and mistresses, and parents. The sample frame covered students, teachers, headmasters and assistants, senior house masters, house masters and mistresses and parents. The sample included 40 participants who were interviewed. In addition, 10 school prefects, 10 non-prefects, 5 house staff and 5 parents were engaged in a focus group discussion. A pilot testing was conducted at the Winneba Senior High School which was not included in the study sample. The aim of the pilot testing was to identify any ambiguities in the questions and to fine tune the items. In addition, to ensure trustworthiness of the question items, member checking was used to determine accuracy of the instruments (Creswell, 2009; Amoah et al., 2015).

The data analysis method used was thematic. To ensure anonymity, the respondents were identified with codes per the category (e.g. School head (HM), assistant head academic (AHA), assistant domestic (AHD), prefects (Prefects), non-prefects (non-Prefects, school counsellors (GCC) etc). Under the first research objective, to identify the causes of school indiscipline among SHS students in Ghana, the themes identified were school based factors which included rushed policies (e.g. abolishment of corporal punishment), students capitalising on child rights/codes of conduct thus, neglecting the responsibility factor, peer pressure, misbehaviour of new teachers due to indiscipline imbibed from their alma mater and teachers' limited knowledge of child rights/code of conduct. The themes identified under the societal-based factors included problem with media/child rights activist groups' negative parental influence.

The second research objective (to establish the effects of school indiscipline in Senior High Schools in Ghana) the themes identified included, loss of teacher authority, poor academic performance, irresponsible future leadership, increase rate of social vices, danger to national peace and development, and social/ physical attacks on teachers.

The third research objective identification of alternative measures to curb school indiscipline in Ghana, themes such as strong but regulated sanctions, sensitization through the media, media restrictions, education through the religious bodies, motivating teachers/encouraging teacher discipline, reinstatement of the Parent Association regime, and review of GES discipline codes.

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Objective One: To identify causes of school indiscipline among SHS students in Ghana.**

##### ***Theme One: School-Based Factors***

Although there are myriads of causes accounting for indiscipline in schools, especially at the SHS level, school-based factors were major theme identified. (Asiedu-Yirenkyi, 2019). Participants, who included Assistant Headmaster, House staff, school-prefects and non-school prefects, provided responses during fieldwork. Out of the school-based factors, two sub themes emerged, abolishment of corporal punishment and teacher misbehaviour

***Sub theme one: The Abolishment of Corporal Punishment in school***

In relation to the abolishment of corporal punishment in schools, an assistant head for academic affairs observed:

*I will say that in a way the abolishment of corporal punishment has not totally helped... we are used to being disciplined by the cane for many years. Taking out the cane and other corporal punishment made people do not really care especially in these days of human rights (AHA#2).*

Another assistant head for domestic activities remarked:

*In fact, with the abolishment of corporal punishment students have become untouchable as if they were kings and queens, and because of that it has promoted indiscipline to the highest level. Some of the children know that because of this child right thing, they are not to be given corporal punishment. And so, because of this, the children take the law into their own hands. They come to school late and disrespect teachers (AHD# 2).*

In addition to the interview, participants (non-prefects) were involved in a focus group. Excerpts:

- The President of Ghana says you cannot cane me, so I have the right to report if you cane me.
- One thing we need to do is to show evidence or mark of caning on the body.
- The nation itself is derailing on indiscipline especially people in authority. This is reflected in our schools.
- The removal of caning has made indiscipline very high.

In another focus group session, participants (Prefects) voiced out the following sentiments (excerpts):

- Lashing is no more, so we have indiscipline very high.
- Regarding societal factors, indiscipline is so widespread that years to come, you cannot even talk about your own children without someone or a child telling you I will arrest you.
- Indiscipline in our secondary schools is based on this domestic violence thing. Before a person becomes a mom or a woman, she thinks it is normal to beat another person.
- The children are taking advantage of the fact that we cannot cane them. They know that all we can do is to talk.

The data reveal that with the introduction and abolishment of corporal punishment in schools students are free to behave the way they deem fit regardless of the rules and regulations of the schools. Students feel that they cannot be punished because they are protected by the Child's Rights Act. This has given students the freedom to misbehave in schools and also take the law into their own hands. This state of affairs has promoted high indiscipline in secondary schools in Ghana. This finding corroborate the view of Ngwokabuenui (2015, p. 65) who observed that "students have become uncontrollable and highly disrespectful to; teachers, school administrators, parents and the society at large".

### ***Sub-theme Two; Increasing enrollment without corresponding facilities in dormitories and classrooms***

During an interview session a Guidance and Counselling Coordinator had this to say,

*Student numbers are very high and makes discipline difficult. The intake is too much as compared to the number of teachers in the school. Most of our students get frustrated with the food they are offered; girls are breaking bounds because conditions in the dormitories are terrible (GCC# 5).*

Again, a Senior House staff commented thus,

*We are over recruiting students, but our facilities remain the same over the years. Classrooms are clouded with large numbers being admitted. Our dormitories are worse. These residential facilities were built to accommodate certain number of students but now we have exceeded and overflowing. These conditions give vent to student misbehaviour such as stealing items from their friends, wanting to go and sleep at their boy friends' place, which is more comfortable, and joining gangs in town (SNH#3)*

Narratives from both the interviews and the focus group discussions signified the out-rushed abolition of corporal punishment and students capitalizing on child's right/code as the key cause of student indiscipline in Senior High Schools. The debate relating to the removal of corporal punishment or the arguments regarding its reintroduction will linger on for a long time to come. What is not in doubt, however, is that in Ghana, there is a great concern at the moment relating to what is seen as the collapse of moral values at personal, community and national levels, and this has transcended into schools. The state of school facilities relating to the classrooms and dormitories is critical to stemming student indiscipline. If conditions in the dormitories is deplorable it may promote truancy among students. Cases of students breaking bounds, running to town and others must be a matter of concern to stakeholders. It is recommended that the government of Cameroon, policy makers, education reformers, and school administrators should ensure that schools are provided with adequate facilities for teaching and learning, sports and games as well as information communication technologies and internet connectivity (Blandina and Leonce, 2021; Asiyai, 2005; & Ngwokabuenui, 2015). A second strand to the argument is what Chimhenga (2017) refers to as the battle to control the child. This battle is pitched among four actors: the child, the school, the parents and human rights groups. Each of these constituents has a different perception about how the child is to be brought under control as it relates to moral standards. Implicitly, unless there is a common understanding regarding how a child is to be groomed as a responsible citizen of society, the canker of indiscipline especially in our Senior High Schools, will continue to persist. Bear (2008) posits that schools fail to recognise that behaviour correction is not a sufficient prerequisite for developing self-discipline. Effective establishment and maintenance of safety and order in schools and other institutions do not always translate into the development of self-discipline or the avoidance of future behavioural issues. According to the author, the main methods for controlling behaviour are consistent incentives, unambiguous guidelines and expectations, and penalties for bad behaviours. This position sits well with Aguba (2009) who maintained that discipline is externally induced in individuals who do not succumb to established rules and regulations out of personal volition but out of fear of punishment or sanctions.

#### ***Sub Theme Two: Misbehaviour of teachers***

Also, generated from the field as school-based factor accounting for indiscipline in senior high schools was misbehaviour of teachers.

In a focus group discussion, participants (prefects) opined-(excerpts):

- The current teachers are so indisciplined as their students. It is the same indisciplined teachers taught that are coming back to as teachers.
- Some teachers are befriending girls, having sex everywhere and the boys are befriending the same girls.

By far, from the data misbehaviour among teachers constitutes the worst form of school-based factors accounting for indiscipline among senior high school students in Ghana. As Aguba (2019) puts it, “it is the watch man letting loose his guard”. This finds support in the argument that teachers’ lateness and absenteeism, overcrowded classrooms, uncondusive school environment, harsh school rules and regulations, poor teaching by some teachers and poor leadership of some school administrators could lead to students’ indiscipline in schools (Gambo & Muktar, 2017; & Ngwokabuenui, 2015). This suggests that teachers, including head teachers, or headmasters should promote self-discipline and set good examples by maintaining professional standards, coming to school regularly, and punctually, and well dressed, checking on students’ work, avoiding misappropriation of money and generally adopting standards of acceptable behaviours and defined social distance.

### **Sub Theme Three: Peer Influence among students**

For example, during an interview session, a participant iterated that,

*the students are going through peer pressure. They do what is said to them by their peers (GCC#3).*

Another Guidance and Counselling Coordinator observed that,

*Some of these bad students recruits others or their colleagues and trained them, and this leads to high rate of social vices among students in the school (GCC#7).*

Assistant Head Domestic noted that,

*Some students come to school and know nothing about drugs but are later influenced by their colleague to practice drugs. It is worrying (AHD# 6)*

This suggests that some students’ indiscipline behaviour may be attributed to peer-influence that emanate from the school environment. Some students are able to influence their colleagues to adopt anti-social life styles such drug abuse, crime and breaking bounds from school. This is acknowledged by Ngwokabuenui (2015) and Reid (2000) who observed that student-student relationships influence students’ indiscipline as a result of unpleasant and unsustainable environment in which students’ needs are difficult to meet.

### ***Theme Two: Societal- based Factors***

It is often said that man is a product of societal forces, meaning that the society can make or break him (Slee, 1995). Apart from societal setbacks such as bad habits, low self-esteem, lack of parental counselling and influence of broken homes, parental poverty and pampering. There are other serious societal factors such as media/child rights and conflicts with activist groups that also account for indiscipline in SHSs.

### ***Sub Theme one: Media Blame Game on Teachers***

These were commented on by participants as follows:

*The media is so fixative on the teacher, the teacher has done this; the teacher has done that. No teacher wants his name to be carried on airwaves as if he is doing something wrong. So, it is like teachers are being too careful (AHA#2).*

During the interaction sessions, a Guidance and Counselling Coordinator observed that,

*The current talk shows and phone in programs on the airwaves give room for insult, fighting in the studios, name calling for political opponents and many more are listened to by our youth, and some student results to the use of vulgar language against the very teacher who are teaching them and public officials.*

*The negative reportage in the media landscape should be minimised (SNH#1)*

The data implies that the social media play an influential role in students' indiscipline in our secondary schools. Some of the social media operators are not professionals in their reportage and therefore report incidents without cross checking the facts on the ground. In recent times, the social media has become so much focused on school administrators and teachers to the extent that the incident is blown out of proportion without proper investigation. As a result of this teachers are also being careful in how they handle students' disciplinary issues in schools. Aside that people use the airwaves to abuse and attack people during phone in which also influence the youth negatively in their training and up-bringing at school and at home. This finding corroborates with Abdulhmid and Yaduma (2007) who observed that the dynamic explosion of the mass media through the television, magazines and computer have contributed to the inculcation of deviant behaviours among students in Cameroon.

### **Sub Theme Two: Parental Influence**

In a focus group interaction, participants (house staff) observed (excerpts):

- The parents are responsible for their wards and their discipline
- Some parents instill bad habits in their children, they pamper them and those from broken homes passed on their bad experiences to their children.

Analytically, judging from the data there is increasing recognition of the role of society as regarding indiscipline in secondary schools. Here, two societal influences, the mass media and parents influence are singled out. Indeed, most indiscipline can be blamed on the mass media. For example, Curren (2014) describes the mass media (radio, television, books, magazines, newspapers, films, and all forms of pornographic contents) as fertile grounds for acts of indiscipline in schools. Curren's assertion is typical of the fact that the outcome of students' encounter with these media fuels indiscipline and even crime. While some radio and television contents stimulate the thinking of the youths in high school towards indecency, others whet their appetite for indiscipline adventures and impart knowledge of criminal techniques, violent behaviours and obscenity.

The same can be said of parents. Many parents often fail to instill discipline in their children. Students from such homes transfer this kind of indiscipline to schools. Lovett and Jordon (2019) reveal that some parents support their children even if the latter have made grievous mistakes, not realizing that by giving in to a child's will or demand makes him/her uncontrollable and a menace to society.

### **Objective Two: Influence of School Indiscipline**

The effects of indiscipline in schools take various dimensions and has repercussions on students and the society. The following effects or themes emerged from the data:

### **Theme One: Lowering of teacher authority**

The data show that teachers who are often referred to as parent surrogates in school have their authority lowered because of indiscipline in schools. Indiscipline in schools in recent times has become a headache for managers of schools and it is directly affecting schools, students and the social fibre of the communities. A participant noted that:

*...the counselling department of the GES has come out with some rules and regulations as to how students should be handled in their schools. And I think most of this was carved out of the child rights. So, I think, yes, they have a lot of relations with how you do handle the students in class. Most of the teachers don't send their students out of class. I mean, when a teacher sends students out, the effect is that the teacher is seen as negative (AHA#1)*

Another participant noted that:

*There was an emergency meeting in my office. The case was taken to the police station. The teacher concerned beat a girl but no one supported the teacher and after that case no one was able to do anything. The girl insulted the teacher in the class and the case was seen as useless, but the teacher telling the girl that its break over became a case (AHD#2)*

Yet, another participant expressed that...

*That is a very serious issue, if it continues. If I got your question right. It is very, very dangerous. Because now, if you go to our schools, it's not like before... students, hit a teacher. Because when a student hits a teacher, and the teacher retaliates or responds to what the student did, we might not look at it (GCC#1)*

The data seem to suggest that the GES' rules and regulations regarding how schools and teachers should handle students seem to have been carved out from the Child Rights document. Perhaps, this is in line with Article 28(2) which states that because of this, students are not punished by teachers in schools. Teachers who tried to correct students in class became victims and did not get even the support of the school. This situation has given students the courage to insult their teachers even in class. Conversely, data did not provide information regarding the measure the teacher used to correct the student in this case. However, Amoah, Owusu-Mensah, Laryea and Gyamera (2015, p.8) are of the opinion that teachers should employ "convenient and suitable disciplinary measures to ensure effective classroom management, and that giving support, it would build an effective teacher-student relationship".

### **Theme Two: Poor academic performance**

Participants were of the view that indiscipline on the part of students affects academic performance and therefore attribute poor academic performance of students in recent times can be attributed to their indiscipline behaviours in schools. This observation was made from these responses as follows:

In relation to this, a participant said that...

*So, what I mean is that indiscipline, let me take one aspect of indiscipline. Like students come to school late, and leaving school before time, you have to do eight hours in the school and you do three hours, or probably you don't come at all, at the end of the day, you are losing contact hours, you virtually learn nothing. So, if you don't come to school regularly, it is going to affect your performance (AHA#2)*

Another participant also had this to say.



*Students are to stay in class, but since they are not staying in class they are not performing. They are not learning. Previously, students knew that if you are not in class for two days... A disciplined learner will organize his own life very well he knows the importance of being in class for every subject. Not selective subjects so it will improve their academic... it gives teachers room to get excuses, if teachers don't go to class, they will tell you because the students are not coming. ...it is affecting how teachers even respond to their core duty as teachers so it will affect them academically (AHD#2)*

The responses seem to be unanimous that student indiscipline influence students' performance generally. Students who don't find time for their classes but choose to use class hours for other things end up reaping what they sow in the end. The data suggest that student indiscipline behaviours also affect teachers' attitude to work. Chimhenga (2017) observed that some learners have lost respect for their teachers, and this can disturb the learning activities by students making unnecessary noise and bullying fellow learners. This present finding agrees with the assertion that indiscipline in schools greatly affects the quality of teaching and learning, uncovered or unfinished school curriculum (Mariene, 2012; Munyasya, 2008; Onyango, 2008; Kabiru, 2007). As a result, some teachers use students' refusal to come to class and other misbehaviours as excuse to stay away from teaching, and at the end of the day the students suffer.

Amoah et al. (2015, p.10) argue that "discipline is necessary for effective management, especially if the goals of the schools are to be accomplished. To prevent and resolve students' discipline problems and ensure efficient functioning of schools, there must be reasonable disciplinary policies and procedures".

### **Theme Three: Irresponsible leadership in the future**

Our society and schools are expected to train our youth to be disciplined and to become responsible leaders in various communities and the nation. Failure on the part of these stakeholders to do so can have serious consequences on national development as a result of irresponsible people leading the nation. On the issue of irresponsible leadership, the following reactions emerged from the data: A participant made this observation:

*That is what I'm talking about. If they don't change, if we are not able to do anything to mould them, to correct them, and they go out they will go to universities and continue the same way. They will go to their workplaces with the same problem. (GCC#3)*

Another participant commented:

*It would be very serious threat. Because you see any society anywhere you find yourself, is governed by rules and regulations. And if you don't want to operate within the confines of rules and regulations, then I wonder how you can fit in any society. And so if you have certain people who are not law-abiding, they will not have a good future. ... They will beat people around. They will steal and do things they want. And I don't think there will be peace in such an environment. ... (AHA#6)*

The data seem to suggest that the current trend of indiscipline is not good because if students are allowed to continue to be lawless and ungovernable in schools and in societies, they will end up becoming liabilities to the nation. Therefore, steps must be taken to ensure that students are shaped in a way to become responsible in their actions. The situation calls a concerted effort of all stakeholders such as parents, teachers, non-governmental organisations, educational authorities, corporate bodies, past students and government to make conscious effort in finding a lasting solution to indiscipline in schools (Ngwokabuenui, 2015).

In a focus group discussion, the participants (House Staff #3) also made the following observations (excerpts):

- But the thing is that those in authority today come from the citizens. So, when we look at the students that we have now, they are the ones that are going to end up in those positions someday.
- If currently we are not able to imbibe in them the importance of being disciplined, then it means that some years to come those people that will be in authority that are supposed to manage our nation will be indisciplined.
- If we look at those in authority now, who we assume were actually disciplined and looking at how this country is being run and the way things are going, I don't even want to begin to imagine how things would be like if we put these current students in those positions.
- The absence of discipline is going to affect the country greatly.
- Maybe some 20, 30 years from now, but the scary part is that I don't think we are even going to last five years before we start seeing the adverse impact of this indiscipline among our students on the country.

The information gathered from the focus group discussion indicate dire consequences for the nation if this kind of indiscipline is not curbed. Presumably, it is the same indiscipline students we have today who are going to be our leaders tomorrow if nothing is done to check the trend. The data is suggesting some measures are taken now to forestall a situation where leadership in the country would be taken over by indisciplined youth in the future. It is in this respect that Ngwokabuenui (2015) is urging parent, school and religious bodies that are charged with moral training of children to ensure that sound moral education is given to children, our future leaders. In this respect, it is expected school discipline should be guided by the underlying principle concerning school discipline. That is school authorities should administer discipline in a manner consistent with the child's dignity and in accordance with applicable international laws on the Rights of the Child. The convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 28(2) stipulates that state parties shall take all appropriate measure to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present convention.

***Theme Four: Increase rate of social vices***

There is no denying the fact that most often it is indisciplined students who end up being sacked from schools and join other drop-out youth on the streets. This group of youth are very desperate and try to find other ways of surviving for comfortable lives. On this issue, a few participants expressed their views as follows:

A guidance and counselling coordinator made this observation:

*So, if you are so indisciplined, you don't come to school early, you come to school at 10 o'clock. By 2, you are gone. They are going to do soccer betting. They do chacha. What is the name? Gambling. They gamble and because they want these girls, some of them steal. They go as far as stealing money to go and gamble, get money, and then go buy expensive things to wear. So, the girls will see that, yeah, they are also, you know. ... They go and gamble. They get money. They buy drugs. Weed, they smoke. ... Because you are on drugs. They beat teachers. If you joke, they will beat you (GCC# 8).*

Another participant commented that:

*... like I said not quite long ago, because they are indisciplined. They don't come to class. You know sometimes they even come to school or better still they will leave their houses in their school uniform that they are coming to school, but they don't end in classroom.*

*Sometimes they get to school but not in the classroom, they will sit in canisters. They will be smoking; they will be selling drugs and even in the classroom. When their friends are in the class, they go to the dormitory, they break in and then they steal. ... (AHD#5).*

Yet, another participant said that:

*...So, the child leaves the home, alright, especially the distance, the child leaves the home, right but doesn't get to the school, they are busy doing internet fraud or something some way, by 3pm or 4pm, he comes home, and you think your child went to school. ... (AHA#7).*

The data reveal that some of the students go to school as late as 10 a.m. instead of 7.30 a.m. and by 2 p.m. they are gone to engage in soccer betting and other gambling games to get money to buy expensive clothes and other things to attract girls. Again, some students end up stealing to buy drugs and when they do they go as far as beating their teachers in school. The data also indicate that some of these indiscipline students don't go to school when they leave home but go to their hide-outs to smoke and do drugs, even in their uniforms. At the end of the day these drugs influence them to break bounds to the dormitories and break into their friends' boxes, stealing their items. Others also engage in internet fraud at night and as a result sleep in class. Some of them don't go to school at all. This phenomenon of indiscipline has brought about increased rate of social vices such as stealing, theft, robbery and ritual murders, in our communities (Gambo & Muktar, 2017; Chimenga, 2017 & Danso, 2010)

### **Objective Three: Alternative measures to curb school indiscipline in Senior High Schools in Ghana**

Regarding objective three (3) seven themes emerged as follows:

#### **Theme One: Regulated Sanctions**

The following were the opinions of the interviewees.

*I think we should come out with stronger sanctions. The school should be given more powers to discipline students (AHA#4)*

An assistant head (academic) of a school suggested that heads of Senior High Schools (SHS) in Ghana should be given powers/authority to discipline erring/deviant students. He suggested the use of strokes of canes, weeding, suspension or outright dismissal of the student in the light of the gravity of the offence. According to this assistant head, the use of some level of force would effectively deal with the growing indiscipline in our second cycle schools in Ghana. However, contrary to this suggestion, Ngwokabuenui (2015) suggests that teachers should correct students' mistakes with love rather than label them negatively and in cases of serious misconducts, parents of students should be invited to the school by the administrators for mutual discussion.

Closely related to the above opinion is the issue of stakeholders' engagement on the canker of students' indiscipline in SHS. The assistant head (academic) also opined that stakeholders of secondary education in Ghana should come together and dialogue to proffer alternative solutions that would effectively address the problem of indiscipline in schools. He suggested dialogue between, and among various interest groups such as the following:

- *Parent Associations (PA)*
- *Students Unions*
- *Media*
- *Civil society groups*
- *Law enforcement agencies*

These interest groups could brainstorm in a round table discussion or at an educational conference to suggest the way forward in addressing the social problem of students' indiscipline. This was what he said.

*Let's engage stakeholders. Let's sit with stakeholders and come out with the rights, let's stakeholders bring in their inputs (AHA#3).*

One of the assistant head (academic) was of the view that the issue of students' indiscipline is deep seated and that it needs the collective engagement of interest groups to effectively resolve the issue.

### ***Theme Two: Sensitization through the media***

Here, again an assistant head suggested media engagements to address the problem of school indiscipline through television debate/discussions etc. This was what he said

*I think they can help us a lot. This time, the media. Let's say virtually everything is done through the media. If the television and the radio and other social media help in talking about indiscipline in the schools, they raise some of these indiscipline issues, some of them can even invite experts to discuss some of these issues and come up with ways by which these problems can be solved.*

From the data, the participant was of the view that the media today has become a powerful tool/channel in shaping societal thinking or actions including the school. The data revealed that the media has rich store of knowledge in influencing social issues and therefore if we rope in the media in this direction it can help to resolve students' indiscipline in our schools. Excerpts from the focus group are as follows:

- I think the GES can use our musicians or actors to portray to students the dangers of drug and substance abuse.
- Substance abuse has become common among our students. They take all kinds of substances that are detrimental to their health (non-prefect #4)

In a focus group interaction on the role of the media in fighting indiscipline in Ghanaian schools, non-prefects asserted that the Ghana Education Service (GES) can campaign on the television and radio on how indiscipline affects the students and the nation as a whole. For example, the GES can use musicians or actors in a role play to fight students' indiscipline in schools.

### ***Theme Three: Media Restrictions***

Although the media plays significant role in fighting students' indiscipline in schools, nevertheless, they sometimes engage in sensational or speculative reporting on the issue of school indiscipline. She remarked:

*Yeah, the media sometimes blow issues out of proportion. So, I would say that even though they are communicating things happening in certain places for us to have a view or knowledge of, but they should also find time to get to the bottom of certain issues before they report (AHA#5)*

The understanding here is that the media should be circumspect in their report of students' indiscipline in schools. They often blow issues out of proportion. The assistant head (academic) asserts that their role in students' indiscipline should rather be restricted.

### ***Theme Four: Education through Religious Bodies***

In curbing the social canker of students' indiscipline in second cycle educational institutions, religious bodies have a tremendous role to play. A participant observed:

*a lot of people belong to some religions, one way or the other. So, I think that in the church and in the mosque, they can also do some education". Religious groups in various*

*communities can also assist in the struggles against indiscipline by using their religious avenues in this direction (AHA#5)*

Rationally, the church/mosque is a powerful platform to be used to preach against school indiscipline. Inarguably, many of the students and other school personnel attend church services or go to the mosque regularly for worship. Such social gatherings can be used effectively to address the canker of indiscipline in schools. This position is corroborated by Ngwokabuenui (2015) when he argued that parents, the school and religious bodies that are charged with moral training of children should ensure that sound moral education is given to children.

During a focus group interaction, a house staff #8 suggested that students in their various denominational groups can also be used to preach against indiscipline.

- I think religious leaders who often lead students in worship sessions can seize the opportunity to preach against students' indiscipline in schools.
- Organise students in their denominational groups and educate them on disciplinary issues and how indiscipline will affect their future
- Religious leaders should organise and educate community members to help the school to achieve its aims
- Pastors and Imams should preach and emphasise discipline because the students will listen to them

The data indicate that religious bodies and community members have a stake in the overall development of the child. As stated by Amoah et al. (2015), to help children, develop healthy lives that show respect for human dignity, the modern notion of discipline suggests that all those who have the obligation should create creative ways to punish children.

#### **Theme Five: motivating teachers/encouraging teacher discipline**

There is a teacher factor in students' indiscipline in schools. In an interview, this is what school counselors said:

*Teachers should discipline themselves. They should also stay away from the students. They should not have any social activities with female students. The moment they do that, the boys also rebel (GCC#3)*

*Parents should be responsible for their wards so that the children will not fall prey to teachers' antics (GCC#8)*

In instances, where some teachers are indulging in amorous or sexual relationships with female students, it can lead to male students' rebellion and other social unrest in the school. As a result, Ngwokabuenui (2015) is of the view that school administrators, teachers, parents must set good examples for students to emulate. Blandina and Leonce (2021) share this opinion when they argued that school authorities should be good models for their students.

#### **Theme Six: Returning to the Parent/Teacher Association (PTA) Regime.**

A school counselor interviewed lamented on the withdrawal of the teacher's role in the former Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) and called for the return of the good old PTA in the schools. This was what the school counsellor #7 said "*teachers have a big role to play in the discipline of students in schools (GCC#7)*

*So certain people, they need to be prayed for. Others also they need to be counseled. Others need to be given punishment (GCC#5)*

An assistant head corroborated what the school counsellor #7 said. He stressed on the paramount importance of the school counselling services in helping to address student's indiscipline. He also suggested the reinstatement of the PTA to help fight indiscipline in schools.

In the former days parents and teachers worked together to ensure effective students learning and discipline. Today, it is no more the case. Teachers' role in the PTA has been taken away. It is now Parents Association (PA). This has greatly affected discipline in the schools. Teachers have almost been rendered powerless in the discipline of students. Therefore, to ensure discipline in schools, it is proper that school administrators, teachers and parents take measures to reduce indiscipline in schools through increased supervision (Blandina and Leonce 2021 & Ngwokabuenui, 2015).

#### **Theme Seven: Review of the discipline codes by GES**

In a focus group discussion, Participants (House staff 8) suggested the need to revise the existing GES code of conduct for both teachers and students because it has outlived its usefulness in effectively addressing student's indiscipline in the schools. This is necessary because it has become one-sided. In a focus group discussion, participants shared these views. Below are the excerpts:

- It has become obsolete and so psychologically, some teachers weep.
- The code of conduct does not work
- GES should spell out discipline issues properly

From the data, it seems that for the school to be managed effectively and achieve its objectives, discipline is required. To avoid and address student misbehaviour and to guarantee the smooth operation of classes and institutions, appropriate disciplinary measures must be implemented. This position is supported by Blandina and Leonce (2021) school rules should be in line with education policy and teachers and students must appreciate the code of conduct as a standard that must guide their overall life in the school environment. The social distance between the students and teachers should be reduced. School administrators should devise means of involving students in formulating rules and policies that affect them.

#### **Conclusions and Implications**

School discipline is essential for effective and efficient result-oriented teaching, learning as well as effective school administration. It is one of the bedrocks of schools' success in examinations. It is a shared responsibility among all the stakeholders of the school', namely, teachers, students, parents, civil society groups and the polity. The paper has considered the state of student indiscipline in senior high schools in Ghana and has reported the perspective of participants relative to the causes and effects, the danger it poses to nation building, and policy directions and measures needed to curb it. The results of the study demonstrated three cardinal factors accounting for student indiscipline, namely, the attitude of parents, the media and the removal of corporal punishment by the state (Ghana Education Service). This implies the need for renewed dialogue among these stakeholders regarding the task of maintaining discipline in schools, especially as it pertains to alternative means of inculcating the culture, values and morals of the Ghanaian society into students.

From the findings, it was also obvious that indiscipline in senior high schools lowered the authorities of teachers and brought about the decline in students' academic performance. These two effects of student indiscipline are so grave that one cannot guarantee the Ghanaian nation the expected growth and development of such indiscipline adolescents transitioning into adulthood.

This implies that parents, the school and other stakeholders must not toy with the future of their children and by extension the nation.

This brings to the fore alternatives disciplinary rules and policy directions needed to curb the canker of indiscipline in SHSs. Regarding this, the results pointed towards regulated sanction to be collectively instituted by students' unions, civil society organisations, law enforcement agencies, educational institutions, parents and religious bodies. This holistic or multidisciplinary approach to countering indiscipline is justified given the fact that the causes of indiscipline are drawn from multiple sources.

### **Recommendations**

It is imperative to ensure that good behaviours and moral values are established, inculcated and maintained to promote healthy school environment for effective teaching and learning. Hence, based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Teachers and school authorities should involve students in setting school rules and regulations to promote student ownership of such arrangements to encourage students to assume responsibility for their behaviours.
2. School authorities, teachers and parents must show good examples that are worth emulating by students.
3. Concerted efforts of stakeholders such as parents, teachers, non-government organisations, educational authorities and past students should be initiated through national conference under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Institute for Educational Research and Innovation Studies, UEW to find a lasting solution to these creeping social canker.
4. Parents, religious bodies, and the media as agents of socialisation and moral trainers of children should ensure that sound moral education is given to children.

Alternative disciplinary measures such as cooperation as compared to punitive and harsh disciplinary measures should be enforced by educators to inspire hope and friendliness among children and teachers to promote positive behaviour.

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