

Navigating Marginality: Intersex Realities in Ghana and the Struggle for Equality and Inclusion

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ABSTRACT

Intersex variations encompass a range of biological conditions where an individual's sex characteristics do not align with traditional male or female categories. This study explores the lived experiences of intersex individuals in Ghana, focusing on how societal perceptions, cultural beliefs, and institutional frameworks shape their identities, relationships, and access to resources. Drawing on the theoretical framework of social constructionism, the study examines how deeply entrenched cultural norms and religious teachings construct rigid gender binaries, perpetuating stigmatization, exclusion, and systemic discrimination against intersex individuals. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 18 participants (n=18), including intersex individuals and key informants from social and health institutions. The findings reveal significant challenges, including familial and communal ostracism, inadequate and coercive healthcare practices, and the absence of explicit legal protections. Despite these barriers, the resilience and advocacy of intersex individuals emerged as a powerful counter-narrative, emphasizing agency and collective efforts to challenge societal norms. This study calls for transformative cultural and institutional reforms, advocating for inclusive education, patient-centered healthcare, and robust legal

protections. By documenting these experiences, the research contributes to the broader discourse on gender diversity and underscores the urgent need for systemic changes to ensure the rights, dignity, and inclusion of intersex individuals in Ghanaian society.

Keywords: Intersex; Ghana; Gender Diversity; Cultural Norms; Social Constructionism

INTRODUCTION

Intersex variations involve a range of conditions where an individual's biological sex characteristics do not align with typical definitions of male or female. These variations can arise from various factors, such as chromosomal, gonadal, hormonal, or anatomical differences (Causadías et al., 2023; Štrkalj & Pather, 2020). Despite being a naturally occurring phenomenon, intersex variations are often misunderstood and stigmatized due to societal norms and expectations surrounding sex and gender (Hegarty & Smith, 2022; Crocker, 2021). As a result, the traditional binary division of sex into male and female has been challenged, leading to a more nuanced understanding of sex that includes intersex individuals whose biological characteristics do not conform to the male-female model (Causadías et al., 2023; Štrkalj & Pather, 2020).

Traditional beliefs and cultural practices in Ghana, particularly among the Akan and

Ga-Adangbe cultures, have historically influenced perceptions of gender and sexuality by emphasizing procreation, lineage, and binary gender roles (Darling et al., 2019; Asravor, 2017). These cultural norms intersect with religious teachings from Christianity and Islam, further reinforcing strict gender distinctions and often leading to the stigmatization of individuals who do not conform to these norms (Adeabah et al., 2018; Kakabadse et al., 2015). As a result, the emphasis on procreation and lineage in these cultures contributes to a societal framework that offers limited space for gender diversity, perpetuating traditional gender roles and expectations (Amoah-Boampong, 2018).

In Ghanaian society, intersex individuals are commonly perceived as deviations that necessitate correction, resulting in their social marginalization and exclusion (Aidoo & Botchway, 2021; Arthur & Adom, 2019). This lack of acceptance is further intensified by the dearth of specific legal protections and recognition for intersex individuals, making them susceptible to discrimination and mistreatment (Aboagye et al., 2022; Coleman, 2023). Furthermore, the cultural focus on lineage and inheritance, traditionally transmitted through specifically females or male children, adds complexity to the acceptance of gender diversity in Ghanaian society (Arthur & Adom, 2019).

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of safeguarding the rights of intersex individuals and promoting greater inclusivity and acceptance. International human rights instruments, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), provide a foundation for advocating for the rights of intersex individuals in Ghana (Coleman, 2023; Marfo et al., 2023). The contributions of civil society organizations, including the Human Rights Advocacy Centre (HRAC), have been vital in raising awareness and advocating for legal reforms aimed at protecting the rights

of intersex individuals (Leivas et al., 2023; Markwei & Tetteh, 2021).

Despite the efforts made, challenges remain in addressing the intricate connection between traditional beliefs, legal frameworks, and societal perspectives towards intersex individuals in Ghana. Research and advocacy are essential for promoting greater comprehension and acceptance of intersex variations and for pushing for legal and policy changes that safeguard the rights of intersex individuals and guarantee their complete integration into Ghanaian society. This study intends to investigate the lived experiences of intersex individuals in Ghana and to comprehend how cultural customs and practices affect their identities, relationships, and access to resources. By documenting and analyzing these experiences, the study aims to contribute to the broader conversation on intersex issues, advocate for greater comprehension and acceptance of intersex variations, and promote legal and policy changes that uphold the rights of intersex individuals in Ghana.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding Intersex Variations:

Intersex variations encompass a diverse range of conditions where an individual's sex characteristics do not align with typical binary notions of male or female, manifesting in chromosomal, gonadal, hormonal, or anatomical differences (Vries et al., 2019; Rosenwohl-Mack et al., 2020; Lin-Su et al., 2015). These variations challenge strict binary understandings of sex, with conditions like Klinefelter syndrome and Turner syndrome highlighting the complexity of sex chromosomes beyond the traditional XX and XY categorizations (Monro et al., 2019). Gonadal intersex variations, such as androgen insensitivity syndrome, demonstrate discrepancies between gonads and external genitalia, illustrating the nuanced nature of sex development (Timmermans et al., 2018). Hormonal intersex variations, like congenital adrenal

hyperplasia, showcase how atypical hormone levels can lead to ambiguous genitalia, emphasizing the diversity of human biology (Indig et al., 2021). Anatomical intersex variations, including differences in external genitalia like hypospadias or clitoromegaly, further underscore the spectrum of human sex characteristics (King, 2022).

Societal perceptions heavily influence the treatment of intersex individuals, often resulting in stigma, discrimination, and medical interventions aimed at conforming their bodies to binary norms (Hiort et al., 2019). The medicalization of intersex traits has historically led to interventions, such as surgeries, aimed at "normalizing" bodies without consent, impacting the physical and psychological well-being of intersex individuals (Ragosta et al., 2023). However, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of respecting the bodily autonomy and rights of intersex individuals, with advocates calling for an end to unnecessary medical interventions and greater acceptance of bodily diversity (Griffiths, 2018). Intersex activists have emerged to assert the human rights of intersex people, advocating for greater awareness and understanding of intersex variations as a natural and normal part of human diversity (Lundberg et al., 2018).

The terminology used to describe intersex variations has evolved, with a shift towards using terms like "differences of sex development" (DSD) to move away from pathologizing language and embrace a more inclusive and affirming approach (Lucassen et al., 2021). Intersex individuals have called for a reevaluation of medical practices and a focus on patient-centred care that respects individual preferences and values (Ussher, 2024). The importance of bodily integrity, self-determination, and human rights for intersex individuals has been emphasized, highlighting the need for ethical considerations in the management of intersex conditions (Singh et al., 2023). Advocacy groups have raised concerns about the impact of normalizing surgeries

on intersex individuals' physical and mental well-being, calling for a more holistic and patient-centred approach to care (Horowitz, 2024).

Socio-Cultural Perspectives of Intersex in Ghana:

Ghanaian society, deeply entrenched in traditional beliefs and religious teachings that uphold binary notions of gender, faces significant challenges in accommodating gender diversity, particularly for intersex individuals (Badu et al., 2018; Perales & Bouma, 2018; Ampim et al., 2020). Traditional beliefs in Ghana, such as those of the Akan culture, emphasize procreation and lineage, reinforcing binary gender norms that leave little room for gender diversity (Chew et al., 2019). Similarly, traditional African religions, like those of the Ga-Adangbe people, strongly emphasize binary gender distinctions, further marginalizing individuals who do not conform to these norms (Ananga, 2021). The intersection of traditional beliefs and religious teachings, influenced by Christianity and Islam, creates a complex social environment where non-binary individuals, like intersex individuals, are often stigmatized and excluded (Osei-Tutu et al., 2020; Sofu et al., 2021).

Christianity and Islam, the predominant religions in Ghana, play a significant role in shaping societal attitudes towards gender and sexuality, often reinforcing traditional gender roles and binary notions of gender (Saalim et al., 2022; Saaka, 2024). Both religions emphasize the complementarity of men and women, with teachings that uphold strict gender roles based on interpretations of religious texts (Dennis-Antwi et al., 2018; Dotsey & Kumi, 2019). These teachings contribute to the stigmatization of individuals who do not conform to traditional gender norms, perpetuating discrimination against intersex individuals in Ghanaian society (Agormedah et al., 2022).

The societal framework in Ghana views intersex individuals as anomalies that need

correction, leading to their social ostracism and exclusion due to the lack of legal recognition and protections for this marginalized group (Aidoo & Botchway, 2021; Boachie et al., 2021). The cultural emphasis on lineage and inheritance, tied to binary gender norms, further complicates the acceptance of gender diversity in Ghana, as family lines and property are traditionally passed down through male descendants (Arthur & Adom, 2019). This cultural and religious landscape creates a challenging environment for individuals who do not fit neatly into binary gender categories, perpetuating discrimination and marginalization (Akrong, 2023).

The complex interplay between traditional beliefs, religious teachings, and societal norms in Ghana underscores the need for greater awareness, education, and legal protections to promote inclusivity and acceptance of gender diversity, particularly for intersex individuals (Taley & Adusei, 2020). Addressing the deeply rooted binary notions of gender in Ghanaian culture requires a multifaceted approach that involves challenging traditional beliefs, reinterpreting religious teachings, and advocating for the rights of marginalized gender minorities (Mensah & Azila-Gbetteor, 2018). By fostering dialogue, promoting education, and enacting inclusive policies, Ghana can work towards creating a more accepting and equitable society for all individuals, regardless of their gender identity or expression (Anfaara et al., 2020).

Intersex Stigma and Discrimination in Ghana:

Intersex individuals face significant social stigma and discrimination, often exacerbated by a lack of awareness and understanding of intersex variations within society Zeeman & Aranda (2020). This stigma can lead to ostracization, mental health issues, and limited access to social support systems, profoundly impacting the quality of life of intersex individuals (Esteban et al., 2023). From a young age, intersex individuals may experience secrecy

and shame as families and medical professionals attempt to conceal their intersex traits, contributing to feelings of isolation and self-stigma (Dickens, 2018). The perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and discrimination is fueled by the lack of accurate information and awareness about intersex variations (Zeeman et al., 2018).

Cultural norms that emphasize binary gender roles further perpetuate social stigma against intersex individuals, leading to their marginalization and exclusion from social and community activities (Ussher, 2024). This exclusion can have profound effects on the social and emotional well-being of intersex individuals, limiting their opportunities for social integration and support. In societies like Ghana, binary gender expectations significantly contribute to the marginalization of intersex individuals, who often face ostracism and barriers to community participation (Murray et al., 2015). Such cultural pressures can lead to a lifetime of social isolation and reduced participation in community activities, which are vital for mental and emotional well-being.

Intersex individuals also encounter discrimination in various aspects of life, including education, employment, and healthcare (Wilson & Cariola, 2019). In educational settings, intersex students may face bullying and harassment, resulting in lower academic performance and increased dropout rates (Kim, 2023). The hostile school environment can discourage intersex students from pursuing further education, thereby limiting their future job prospects and economic stability. This educational disadvantage is compounded by workplace discrimination, where biases and misconceptions about intersex individuals can hinder career advancement and economic stability (Moallem et al., 2022). Job discrimination can manifest in various forms, including unfair hiring practices, lack of promotions, and a hostile work environment, all of which contribute to job dissatisfaction and economic insecurity.

Healthcare settings present unique challenges for intersex individuals. Some medical professionals lack knowledge or sensitivity regarding intersex variations, leading to inadequate care and exacerbating health issues (Llayton & Caldas, 2020). Non-consensual surgeries and treatments aimed at “normalizing” intersex bodies can cause long-term physical and psychological harm (Jiang & Chia, 2022). These medical interventions, often performed in infancy or childhood without the individual’s consent, can lead to chronic pain, loss of sexual function, and psychological trauma. The medicalization of intersex bodies and the emphasis on conforming to binary gender norms neglect the holistic health and well-being of intersex individuals, further stigmatizing their natural variations (Kraus, 2015).

The social stigma and discrimination faced by intersex individuals have significant implications for their mental health. Studies have shown that intersex individuals are at a higher risk of developing mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD due to societal pressures and medical interventions (Chabbouh et al., 2022). The lack of social support and understanding can worsen these mental health challenges, leading to feelings of isolation and hopelessness (Shihabuddin, 2023). Growing up in a stigmatizing environment can result in long-term emotional distress and a diminished quality of life for intersex individuals (Sharma et al., 2023). The cumulative effects of social exclusion, discrimination, and inadequate healthcare contribute to a pervasive sense of alienation and mental health struggles among intersex individuals.

Legal and Institutional Gaps in Protecting Intersex Rights in Ghana:

The Ghanaian Constitution of 1992 serves as a foundational document that upholds fundamental human rights for all citizens, emphasizing equality and freedom from discrimination. Article 17 of the Constitution specifically enshrines the right

to equality, stating that “all persons shall be equal before the law” and prohibits discrimination based on various grounds such as gender, race, religion, and social status (Aboagye et al., 2022; Coleman, 2023). While the Constitution provides a broad framework for safeguarding human rights, including those of intersex individuals, it does not explicitly mention intersex people, potentially leading to challenges in fully accessing their rights under the Constitution. This lack of explicit recognition may leave intersex individuals vulnerable to discrimination in critical areas like healthcare, education, and employment (Coleman, 2023).

Despite these challenges, Ghana has made strides in promoting equality and non-discrimination by ratifying international human rights treaties like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (Marfo et al., 2023). These treaties affirm the rights of all individuals, irrespective of their sex or gender identity, aligning with Ghana’s commitment to upholding human rights principles (Coleman, 2023; Marfo et al., 2023). Additionally, Ghana has established institutions like the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) to investigate human rights violations, including cases of discrimination, and the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development plays a role in advocating for marginalized communities, including intersex individuals, through social welfare programs and community initiatives (Aboagye et al., 2022; Markwei & Tetteh, 2021).

Civil society organizations, such as the Human Rights Advocacy Centre (HRAC), are pivotal in advocating for the rights of marginalized groups, including intersex individuals, by raising awareness, fostering understanding, and pushing for legal protections (Leivas et al., 2023). These organizations play a crucial role in amplifying the voices of intersex individuals and advocating for their rights within the

legal framework of Ghana. However, to further protect the rights of intersex individuals, Ghana needs to implement specific legislation that explicitly recognizes and safeguards the rights of intersex people. By enacting such laws and enhancing awareness and understanding of intersex issues in society, Ghana can reinforce its commitment to equality and non-discrimination for all citizens, including intersex individuals (Adomako-Kwakye & Mensah, 2022; Coleman, 2023).

Theoretical Framework:

This study was anchored in the theoretical framework of social constructionism, which posits that individuals' understanding of the world is shaped by social interactions and cultural contexts (Irwin, 2011; Segre, 2016). Social constructionism emphasizes the role of language, symbols, and shared meanings in shaping people's perceptions and experiences. In the context of intersex realities in Ghana, social constructionism provided a lens through which to examine how societal norms, cultural beliefs, and religious teachings influenced the construction of gender and sexuality, particularly regarding intersex individuals. Within the framework of social constructionism, gender is viewed as a social construct that is created and maintained through social interactions and cultural practices (Zifonun, 2012). In Ghanaian society, traditional beliefs and cultural norms play a significant role in defining gender roles and expectations, often marginalizing individuals who do not conform to binary gender norms. The intersection of traditional beliefs, religious teachings, and societal norms constructs a narrow understanding of gender that excludes intersex individuals, viewing them as deviations from the norm that require correction.

By adopting a social constructionist perspective, this study explored how intersex individuals in Ghana navigate and negotiate their identities within the context of societal norms and cultural expectations.

By examining the lived experiences of intersex individuals, the study aimed to highlight how societal constructions of gender impact their sense of self, relationships, and access to resources. Additionally, the study sheds light on the role of religious teachings, and cultural practices in shaping perceptions of intersex variations in Ghanaian society.

Through the lens of social constructionism, this study aimed to challenge normative understandings of gender and sexuality in Ghana, advocating for greater inclusivity and acceptance of gender diversity, particularly for intersex individuals. By documenting and analyzing the experiences of intersex individuals, the study aimed to contribute to a broader discourse on gender and sexuality, advocating for legal and policy reforms that protect the rights of intersex individuals and ensure their full inclusion in Ghanaian society.

MATERIALS & METHODS

The study employed a qualitative methodological approach to explore the subjective experiences of individuals with intersex characteristics in Ghana. Qualitative methods are particularly effective in understanding complex and nuanced experiences, providing detailed insights into participants' lives (Tomaszewski & Gonzalez, 2020). Accessing the intersex population in Ghana posed challenges, leading the researchers to adopt snowball and purposive sampling techniques. Recruitment began with initial participants identified through collaborations with community organizations, health institutions, and legal entities working with intersex individuals. These participants referred others willing to share their experiences, broadening the participant pool and ensuring diversity. Key informants were purposively selected from institutions such as the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development (DSWCD), and various Health Directorates. These

informants, chosen for their expertise and experience, provided critical insights into the social and legal dimensions of intersex issues in Ghana, enriching the study's understanding of these challenges.

The study included 18 participants (n=18), comprising 12 intersex individuals and 6 key informants. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted in private, comfortable settings to encourage openness. The interviews followed a protocol to cover key topics while allowing natural dialogue. Each interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes, depending on participants' willingness to share, and data collection spanned 3 months to ensure depth. Interviews were recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze, and report patterns in the data, enabling a comprehensive exploration of participants' narratives (Byrne, 2021). The analysis was conducted manually, with the research team engaging in iterative discussions to refine themes and interpretations, enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Reflexivity was maintained, with researchers bracketing personal beliefs to minimize bias. Member checking and peer debriefing further validated the results.

The study faced limitations. The rarity of intersex conditions, with an incidence rate of 1:1500–2000 births (Kamoun et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2022) limited the sample size. Despite these challenges, the few who participated in the research provided valuable insights.

RESULT

The thematic analysis of the interviews with intersex individuals and key informants revealed five key themes: societal perceptions and cultural beliefs, experiences of stigma and discrimination, challenges in accessing healthcare and social services, legal and institutional gaps, and resilience and advocacy. These themes highlight the complex interplay of societal, cultural, legal,

and personal factors that shape the experiences of intersex individuals in Ghana.

Societal Perceptions and Cultural Beliefs:

Participants described how societal perceptions and cultural beliefs influenced their experiences of gender and sexuality. Many participants noted the pressure to conform to binary gender norms and the lack of acceptance for non-binary identities. One participant stated, *"In our culture, there is no space for people like us. We are seen as strange and abnormal."* Another participant shared, *"My family and community expected me to be either male or female. There was no understanding of my intersex condition."*

Key informants also highlighted the impact of cultural beliefs on intersex individuals, noting that traditional beliefs often stigmatize intersex variations and view them as abnormalities that need correction. A key informant stated, *"There is a strong belief in our culture that gender is binary, so intersex individuals are often seen as not fitting into this binary framework."*

Experiences of Stigma and Discrimination:

Participants shared experiences of stigma and discrimination in various aspects of their lives. Many described being ostracized by family members and communities, leading to feelings of isolation and shame. One participant expressed, *"I was rejected by my family because they did not understand my intersex condition. I felt like I had no one to turn to."* Another participant shared, *"I faced discrimination at school and in the community. People would laugh at me and call me names."*

Key informants also acknowledged the prevalence of stigma and discrimination against intersex individuals. They highlighted the need for greater awareness and education to combat these harmful attitudes. A key informant stated, *"There is a lack of understanding and acceptance of intersex variations in our society, which leads to stigma and discrimination. We need*

to educate people to change these attitudes.”

Challenges in Accessing Healthcare and Social Services:

Participants reported difficulties in accessing healthcare and social services that were sensitive to their intersex identities. Many described negative experiences with healthcare providers who lacked knowledge about intersex variations and pressured them to undergo unnecessary medical interventions. One participant stated, “I have had doctors tell me that I need surgery to ‘fix’ my body, even though I did not want it.” Another participant shared, “Finding healthcare providers who understand my intersex condition and respect my choices has been a challenge.”

Key informants also noted the challenges faced by intersex individuals in accessing healthcare and social services. They emphasized the need for healthcare providers to receive training on intersex issues and for social services to be more inclusive of intersex individuals. A key informant stated, “There is a lack of awareness and sensitivity among healthcare providers regarding intersex variations. We need to improve training and education in this area.”

Legal and Institutional Gaps:

Participants and key informants highlighted the lack of legal recognition and protections for intersex individuals in Ghana. Many expressed concerns about the absence of specific laws and policies that address the rights and needs of intersex people. One participant stated, “There are no laws in Ghana that protect intersex individuals from discrimination. We are invisible in the eyes of the law.” Another participant shared, “I have faced discrimination in employment because of my intersex condition, but there are no legal avenues for recourse.”

Key informants emphasized the importance of enacting legislation that explicitly recognizes and protects the rights of intersex individuals. They also called for greater

collaboration between government institutions and civil society organizations to address the legal and institutional gaps. A key informant stated, “Ghana needs to enact laws that explicitly protect the rights of intersex individuals and ensure their full inclusion in society. We also need to work together to raise awareness and advocate for policy reforms.”

Resilience and Advocacy:

Despite the challenges they faced, many participants expressed resilience and a strong sense of advocacy for their rights. They shared stories of empowerment and self-acceptance, highlighting the importance of community support and self-advocacy. One participant stated, “I have learned to embrace my intersex identity and advocate for my rights. I want others to know that they are not alone.” Another participant shared, “I have found strength in connecting with other intersex individuals and sharing our experiences. Together, we can create change.”

Key informants also acknowledged the resilience of intersex individuals and the importance of their advocacy efforts. They emphasized the need for greater support and recognition of intersex rights in Ghana. A key informant stated, “Intersex individuals are strong and resilient. We need to support their advocacy efforts and work together to create a more inclusive society for all.”

DISCUSSION

This section offers an extensive examination of the experiences of individuals with intersex traits in Ghana, which are greatly influenced by societal perceptions, cultural beliefs, and legal frameworks. It provides a thorough comprehension of the challenges they encounter and the coping mechanisms they utilize. The study’s results are contextualized within the broader scope of existing literature and the social constructionism theory, emphasizing the unique insights derived from participants’ narratives and key informant perspectives.

A recurring theme in the study is the significant impact of entrenched societal norms and cultural beliefs on the lives of intersex individuals. Within a social constructionist lens, gender in Ghana is socially constructed through traditional practices, communal interactions, and religious teachings that prioritize binary roles (Zifonun, 2012). Participants described immense pressure to conform to these established norms, reflecting the dominance of cultural narratives among the Akan and Ga-Adangbe communities that emphasize procreation and lineage (Darling et al., 2019; Chew et al., 2019). This cultural framework, which views gender strictly as male or female, constructs intersex individuals as deviations requiring correction (Aidoo & Botchway, 2021). Similarly, Christianity and Islam—dominant religions in Ghana—reinforce this binary understanding by promoting complementary roles of men and women derived from religious texts (Saalim et al., 2022). Through a social constructionist perspective, these cultural and religious ideologies collectively shape a societal environment where intersex individuals are stigmatized as "strange and abnormal" (Arthur & Adom, 2019; Osei-Tutu et al., 2020). These narratives construct intersex individuals not as natural variations but as challenges to societal norms.

Stigmatization, as revealed in the study, is an outcome of the social processes through which intersex individuals are excluded from the normative categories of gender. Social constructionism highlights how exclusionary practices, such as labeling and ostracism, emerge from shared cultural meanings that marginalize non-conforming identities. Participants recounted experiences of rejection and marginalization within their families and communities, reflecting societal frameworks that prioritize secrecy and shame to conceal intersex variations (Zeeman et al., 2018; Esteban et al., 2023). The isolation reported by participants, often resulting from misunderstandings of their identities,

mirrors the way cultural norms reinforce binary gender constructs and treat deviations as sources of familial disgrace (Murray et al., 2015). Within schools, the derogatory labeling and harassment faced by intersex individuals serve as social mechanisms that maintain binary gender norms and limit educational opportunities for marginalized groups (Kim, 2023). Social constructionism thus reveals how societal meanings attached to intersex identities perpetuate stigma and exclusion, impacting individuals' access to education and community belonging.

Healthcare experiences also demonstrate how social constructs of gender manifest within institutional settings. The study revealed that many participants were coerced into medical procedures aimed at "normalizing" their bodies, reflecting a medicalized approach to intersex identities rooted in binary gender expectations (Griffiths, 2018; Jiang & Chia, 2022). Social constructionism provides a lens to understand how healthcare providers, influenced by dominant cultural narratives, interpret intersex variations as abnormalities to be "fixed." Participants' accounts of inadequate and insensitive care underscore how these cultural constructions translate into harmful medical practices, where non-consensual surgeries prioritize societal conformity over individual autonomy (Ragosta et al., 2023). The systemic neglect within healthcare systems, as highlighted by the study, reflects the persistence of socially constructed meanings that marginalize intersex bodies. Scholars have emphasized the need for patient-centered healthcare approaches that challenge these norms and respect the diverse identities of intersex individuals (Ussher, 2024; Horowitz, 2024). Legal and institutional frameworks further reinforce the socially constructed marginalization of intersex individuals. The absence of explicit legal protections in Ghana reflects the societal invisibility of intersex identities, as laws and policies remain anchored in binary definitions of gender (Coleman, 2023; Aboagye et al.,

2022). While international human rights treaties such as the ICCPR and CRC advocate for inclusivity, the lack of local implementation demonstrates how social constructions of gender at the national level obstruct systemic change (Marfo et al., 2023). Participants' inability to access legal recourse for discrimination in employment or healthcare reveals the pervasive influence of binary gender constructs within institutional systems. Social constructionism highlights how these frameworks perpetuate exclusion by maintaining the narrative that intersex individuals fall outside societal norms, necessitating targeted legal reforms to challenge these entrenched ideologies (Adomako-Kwakye & Mensah, 2022).

Amid these challenges, the study also highlights the resilience and advocacy of intersex individuals, demonstrating their ability to navigate and contest societal constructions of gender. Social constructionism emphasizes the role of agency in reshaping social meanings, and participants' stories of empowerment and self-acceptance illustrate their efforts to challenge stigma and redefine their identities. Through solidarity and advocacy, intersex individuals actively resist the exclusionary narratives imposed upon them, contributing to broader movements that emphasize bodily autonomy, human rights, and inclusivity (Lundberg et al., 2018). Participants' efforts to raise awareness and foster dialogue reflect the transformative potential of collective action in disrupting socially constructed binaries and promoting acceptance of gender diversity (Griffiths, 2018; Singh et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study provides critical insights into the lived experiences of intersex individuals in Ghana, revealing the profound influence of societal perceptions, cultural beliefs, and institutional frameworks on their identities, relationships, and access to resources. Anchored in the theory of social constructionism, the research highlights how deeply entrenched cultural and

religious ideologies construct rigid gender binaries that marginalize intersex individuals, treating them as deviations from societal norms. These constructed narratives manifest in systemic stigmatization, exclusion, and discrimination, affecting intersex individuals' access to healthcare, education, legal protections, and social inclusion.

The findings emphasize the significant challenges intersex individuals face, including ostracism within their families and communities, inadequate and coercive healthcare practices, and the absence of explicit legal protections. These barriers, rooted in socially constructed understandings of gender and sexuality, perpetuate a cycle of marginalization and invisibility. However, the study also underscores the resilience and advocacy of intersex individuals, who, through their agency and collective efforts, actively contest exclusionary narratives and push for societal change. Their advocacy efforts highlight the importance of solidarity, awareness-raising, and community engagement in challenging entrenched social norms and promoting greater acceptance of gender diversity.

This research calls for a multifaceted approach to address the systemic barriers faced by intersex individuals in Ghana. Transforming cultural and religious ideologies requires targeted education and dialogue to challenge normative gender constructs. Healthcare systems must prioritize ethical, patient-centered practices that respect the autonomy and identities of intersex individuals. Legislative reforms are essential to provide explicit legal recognition and protection, ensuring that intersex individuals are safeguarded against discrimination and can fully participate in society.

By documenting and analyzing the experiences of intersex individuals, this study contributes to a broader discourse on gender and sexuality, advocating for a more inclusive and equitable society. It underscores the urgent need for systemic

change to dismantle the socially constructed barriers that marginalize intersex individuals and to create a society that values diversity, upholds human rights, and ensures equality for all. Through continued research, advocacy, and policy reforms, Ghana can take significant steps toward fostering a more inclusive and just society that fully embraces the rights and dignity of intersex individuals.

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