

Patricides and Step-Patricides in Ghana: Victims, Offenders, and Offense Characteristics

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Abstract There is a paucity of empirical research on patricide in Africa and many non-Western societies. To help fill this scholarly vacuum and contribute to the literature on patricide, the current article presents the results of an analysis of 18 cases of patricide and step-patricide that occurred in Ghana during 1990–2016. Given the exploratory nature of the study, no hypotheses were constructed or tested. Findings indicate that patricide is a rare crime, that sons were disproportionately more likely than daughters to kill their fathers, and that adult children were more likely than adolescent and pre-pubertal children to commit patricide. The results further show that a significant number of the patricides were triggered by offender mental illness. The predominant circumstance, however, was conflict between son and father over a myriad of issues. Three of the 18 patricides were influenced by the perpetrators' beliefs that their fathers were maleficent witches who had bewitched them. Also, patricide offenses were typically spontaneous rather than premeditated. A recommendation is provided for continued research on patricide in Ghana and other non-Western societies to shed light on an empirically-neglected but vital topic.

Keywords Patricide · Parricide · Matricide · Homicide · Ghana

Introduction

The vast majority of the research literature on patricide, defined as the killing of a father by his son or daughter, has focused on father-slayings in Western industrialized societies of Europe (Campobasso et al. 2015; Pedisic et al. 2016; Raymond et al. 2015) and North America (Cravens et al. 1985; Heide 2013, 2014; Maas et al. 1984). Concomitantly, patricide is an under-researched crime in most parts of the globe, including Africa (Gabbiani 2013; Ghajati et al. 2016; Menezes 2010). For example, to date, there has been no research on patricide offenses, victims or offenders in Ghana, West Africa, although mass media reports demonstrate that patricide offenses are not unknown in the society (see “Man Arrested for Killing Father” 2016).

The paucity of empirical research on father-killings in non-Western, non-industrialized societies may be partially attributable to limitations in crime data. Reliable crime data in most of these societies are scarce or non-existent. Another explanation for the scholarly neglect of patricide may be a lack of interest by local social scientists in a socially-tabooed topic; in Ghana and many African societies, murder of a parent is considered particularly reprehensible. Thus, many local researchers may be repulsed by the idea of studying the phenomenon. The limited scholarship may also be due to the generally low incidence of patricidal killings in these societies, a feature characteristic of most societies (Cravens et al. 1985; Heide 2013, 2014).

The goal of the present study was to provide a descriptive analysis of the nature and extent of patricidal killings that occurred in Ghana from January 1, 1990 to December 31, 2016. Issues explored include the socio-demographic characteristics of offenders and victims such as age, sex, and socioeconomic status. Other topics surveyed are temporal and spatial aspects of the crime, method of offense

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perpetration, motive, as well as criminal justice outcomes. A study of patricide in Ghana is important for numerous reasons. First, it helps fill the acknowledged void in the patricide literature by providing hitherto nonexistent information on the subject. Second, for purposes of cross-cultural theory construction, the inclusion of previously excluded geographic and cultural areas in studies of patricide fosters the formulation and testing of theories concerning the phenomenon. A thorough understanding of patricide requires that systematic studies be conducted on the subject in diverse geographical, cultural and economic regions. Third, information obtained from such research may assist in the prevention of future homicidal acts by offspring against fathers. The current study is exploratory in nature and no specific hypotheses were constructed or tested.

Review of the Literature

Patricide has been the focus of only a limited amount of research. As noted, the bulk of this research has been conducted on offenses and offenders in Western industrialized societies. Second, studies of patricide have been conducted largely within the context of parricide research (Heide 2013; Ghajati et al. 2016; Menezes 2010; Pedisic et al. 2016; Raymond et al. 2015; Sahin et al. 2016). The act of patricide exclusively has attracted comparatively fewer research (Cravens et al. 1985; Heide 2014).¹

Regarding the extent or scope of patricidal murders, extant research suggests that father-slaying is a rare crime in most societies, accounting for only a tiny fraction of the total annual volume of reported homicides (Cravens et al. 1985; Heide 2013, 2014; Menezes 2010; Moscatello 2014; Muravyeva 2016; Raymond et al. 2015; Sahin et al. 2016). In France, for instance, parricide represents 2.8% of all homicide offenses in the country (Raymond et al. 2015). In the U.S. in 2016, the FBI's Uniform Crime Report listed a volume of 13,455 homicides. Of these, the victim-offender relationship was known in 7,023 cases. Of the 7,023 victims, patricides constituted 131, or 1.8%, of all homicides (FBI 2016). Heide (2014) observed that during 1976–2007, patricide constituted “less than 1% of all U.S. homicides in which the victim-offender relationship was known” (p. 1266). Indeed, the low prevalence of parricidal offenses has been cited for the limited scholarship on patricide and matricide as social phenomena (Muravyeva 2016; Raymond et al. 2015). This paucity of scholarly investigations is particularly the case in societies where parricidal murders are rare. In the U.S., patricide has been the object of relatively more

academic investigations given the comparatively greater annual volume of cases and the systematic compilation of data (Heide 2014).

The offense of patricide is considered an abominable act in most societies (“Couple Get Life for Patricide,” 2013; Heide 2013, 2014; Gabbiani 2013; Gillis 2015; Raymond et al. 2015; Menezes 2010; Soremekun 2016). To most people, it is an unspeakable horror for a child to kill a biological father. This sentiment stems from the fact that, universally, there is a cultural expectation that children engage in behavior that will bring honor and dignity to their parents and to refrain from transgressive acts that will invite disrepute, agony, or death to their mothers and fathers. Furthermore, parents are generally protectors and providers for their offspring. To take the life of a parent who has presumably performed such a role adds to the horror of the crime.

Comparing the relative vulnerabilities of biological fathers and step-fathers in patricide cases, Heide (2013) reported that in the U.S., “murders of stepfathers are more rare than those involving [biological] fathers” (p. 106). Heide (2013) also found from her analysis of U.S. data that victims of step-patricide were younger when compared with patricide victims who were killed by their biological children. The greater incidence of biological patricides in comparison with step-patricides has been observed in other societies. In a study of 18 parricide offenders undergoing psychiatric care in a forensic psychiatric hospital in Brazil, de Borba-Telles and colleagues (2017) reported a greater number of patricide cases involving biological relationships than step-relationships.

The existing literature on patricides indicates that sons are more likely than daughters to kill their fathers (Heide 2013, 2014; Menezes 2010; Moscatello 2014; Sahin et al. 2016). Past research has also found that adult children are more likely than juvenile and adolescent children to commit patricide (Heide 2013, 2014). Furthermore, step-patricide offenders were relatively younger than offenders who killed biological fathers (Heide 2013). The literature further shows that patricide offenders in Western societies were typically single, unmarried, unemployed, had limited formal education, were of lower socioeconomic status, and were living with their father-victims at the time of the homicidal act (Moscatello 2014; Sahin et al. 2016).

Homicide researchers have examined the extent or scope of double parricides among parricide cases. Available data show that the father is the sole victim in most homicide events where a father is killed (Fegadel and Heide 2015; Heide 2013, 2014; Hough and McCorkle 2017). In only a small proportion of cases are other family members, such as the mother, also targets in the crime (Campobasso et al. 2015; Maas et al. 1984).

Regarding co-offending patterns, patricide data in the U.S. show that offenders typically act alone in patricide

¹ For an excellent synthesis of existing research findings on patricide, see Heide (2013, pp. 103–122).

cases. Heide (2014) observed that for the period 1976–2007, over 80% of patricide and step-patricide victims in the U.S. were slain in single-victim, single-offender homicide events. Her analysis of U.S. patricide and step-patricide data revealed significant differences in co-offending patterns, based on the age and sex of the offender: “Juveniles were significantly more likely than adult offenders (16% vs. 7%) to use accomplices in killing fathers.” Also, “relative to their male counterparts, significantly higher percentages of juvenile (30% vs. 13%) and adult females (16% vs. 6%) used codefendants to kill fathers” (Heide 2014, pp. 1266–1267).

Another notable feature of patricide is that father-killing by older sons are characteristically spontaneous acts—unplanned, or lacking in premeditation, often triggered by a protracted conflict between father and son (Campobasso et al. 2015; Moscatello 2014). Conversely, patricide offenses by minors are typically premeditated, with the victim being *latent* or *predisposed* at the time of the killing (Bacon and Lansdowne 1982; Hoffman-Bustamante 1973; Rasko 1976). In criminological jargon, latent or predisposed victims are those who “are not able to defend themselves because of their general state” (Rasko 1976, p. 398). This means that father-killing by minors archetypally occurs when the victim is in a latent or predisposed state—asleep, intoxicated, incapacitated due to an illness, or distracted by some activity such as television viewing. Minors kill victims in vulnerable states simply because they wish to avert physical confrontation with the father-victim, perceiving that it is the only way that they can prevail (Campobasso et al. 2015; Heide 2013).

Concerning the modus operandi or method of offense perpetration, Campobasso et al. (2015) report that a greater percentage of patricide offenses in the United States, are committed with a firearm. Although firearms predominate in the killing of mothers, a greater percentage of matricides, compared to patricides, are committed with sharp instruments (Heide and Petee 2007). For example, in the U.S. during 1976–2007, 62.2% of single-victim, single-offender step-patricides and 59.6% of single-victim, single-offender patricides were perpetrated with a firearm (Heide 2013). Heide (2013) reported major assailant age differences in the selection of methods of offense perpetration in the U.S., noting that “Adults who killed fathers were significantly more likely than juvenile offenders to use knives (24.2% vs. 14.8%) or other weapons (21.7% vs. 5.8%)” (p. 109). In addition, “Juvenile patricide offenders were significantly more likely than their adult counterparts to use firearms (79.4% vs. 54.1%)” (p. 109). Still, in the U.S., Heide (2013) found similar modus operandi for step-patricide offenders; they overwhelmingly selected shooting with firearms, followed by stabbing with knives.

Regarding the spatial aspects of the crime, extant research indicates that patricidal offenses tend to occur in the home of the victim (Campobasso et al. 2015; Cussen and Bryant

2015; Dantas et al. 2014; Moscatello 2014). To illustrate, Cussen and Bryant (2015) observed from their study of 128 incidents of parricide in Australia that 88% of these cases occurred in the victim’s home. In their study of seven parricide offenses in Portugal, Dantas et al. (2014) found that all the killings occurred in the domestic setting, four in the home shared by the victim and the perpetrator, and the remaining three in the victim’s home.

A considerable volume of patricide literature has attempted to identify and comprehend the underlying reasons why some fathers are slain by their biological and step-children. Research shows that a significant percentage of patricide offenders suffered from some form of psychiatric illness and the patricidal act was primarily attributable to this psychopathology (Bojana et al. 2008; Cravens et al. 1985; Ghajati et al. 2016; Maas et al. 1984; Menezes 2010; Moscatello 2014; Pedisic et al. 2016). Of patricide offenders with psychopathologies, schizophrenia is the most common diagnosis (Maas et al. 1984; Menezes 2010; Moscatello 2014) followed by depression (Campobasso et al. 2015), and personality disorders occasionally associated with substance abuse or the impact of prior head injury (Menezes 2010). Cravens et al. (1985) reviewed the records of ten men charged with patricide in the U.S. and referred for psychiatric evaluation. They concluded that “prior psychoses were documented in all subjects” with “nine referred to as delusional” (p. 1089). In their study of 13 hospitalized Tunisian patricide offenders, Ghajati et al. (2016) found that most suffered from “a disorganized schizophrenia” (p. S459). Similarly, in a study of parricide offenders in Serbia, Bojana et al. (2008) found parricide to be “mostly associated with psychiatric morbidity” (p. 236); they found 60.6% of the perpetrators of parricide to manifest psychiatric symptoms, most frequently schizophrenia, personality disorders and alcohol dependence. Menezes (2010) also found substantial evidence of psychopathology among his sample of patricide offenders in Zimbabwe. Nearly 49% of the offenders had seen a traditional healer for treatment of a psychiatric malady prior to the commission of the patricidal act. Also, approximately 31% of the perpetrators of patricide were known to be afflicted with a mental ailment and had been previously hospitalized in a psychiatric facility.

Based on an extensive review of the literature on parricide, Heide (1992, 2013) presented four distinct profiles of the parricide offender. The first category of offender is the son or daughter who is a direct victim of severe physical, sexual, psychological or verbal abuse at the hands of a parent, or has witnessed such abuse directed against another family member. For such parricide offenders, the parental murder constituted “an act of desperation” and “the only way out of a familial situation that they could no longer endure” (Heide 1992, p. 7). The second type of offender is the seriously psychiatrically impaired or psychotic child who has

“lost contact with reality” (Heide 1992, p. 7). The third type is the dangerously antisocial parricide offender who kills a parent to achieve a selfish goal and who often meets the diagnostic criteria of conduct disorder or antisocial personality disorder. Persons suffering from antisocial personality disorders “often appear to behave in an irrational manner,” constantly exhibiting poor judgement and “failing to learn from experience” (Heide 1992, p. 10). The fourth category of patricide offender is the “enraged parricide offender.” This type of parent killer kills “when their deep-seated rage related to parental abuse and/or neglect [is] ignited by an external event. In some of these cases, alcohol and drug intoxication fueled the rage” (Heide 2013, p. 19).

The literature on parricide indicates that motives for parricide tend to vary with the characteristics of the victim and the age of the offender. Juvenile and adolescent parent killers usually kill parents to end physical, psychological and/or sexual abuse, or in furtherance of an instrumental goal, such as acquiring their parents’ money. Adult parricide offenders, on the other hand, are typically influenced or affected by a severe mental disorder that distorts their perceptions of reality or behave in a characteristically antisocial manner (Heide 2013).

The literature on offspring who kill their fathers indicates that adult patricide offenders typically have a history of violent behavior (Cravens et al. 1985). Cravens and associates (1985) observed from their research investigations of ten patricide offenders that “nine had documented histories of violent behavior” (p. 1090). Other risk factors include abuse of alcohol or other illicit substances (Campobasso et al. 2015). Patricide research further shows that in many cases, there is a history of conflicts between the assailant and the father-victim (Moscatello 2014; Shon 2009). In a study of nineteenth century American parricides, Shon (2009) describes several parental murders where seemingly ordinary verbal altercations between adult children and their parents resulted in a lethal assault against the parent. In many instances of patricide described in the literature, the murder was often the culmination of a long-simmering conflict between parent and child (Shon 2009; Moscatello 2014). In their comparative study of patricide and matricide offenders in a Tunisian psychiatric hospital, Ghajati et al. (2016) observed that “patricide was more frequently associated with a conflictual relationship between son and father” (p. S45).

Some patricide researchers (e.g. Heide 2013; Kashani et al. 1997) have discussed preventive strategies that can be used to forestall the incidence of patricide and other youth-perpetrated acts of intrafamilial violence. For instance, Heide (2013) suggested that the potential for patricide by adolescent offenders can be reduced if the availability of guns in the home is minimized, if parental chemical dependency (alcohol and illicit drug abuse) is controlled, if severe family dysfunction such as physical, verbal, psychological

and sexual abuse of children and interspousal violence are addressed, and if children exposed to protracted family violence receive adequate psychotherapy or counseling. Some psychiatric specialists (e.g. Martins de Barros 2014) contend that patricide is preventable if adequate steps are taken to manage psychiatric illnesses. Commenting on a single Brazilian case of patricide, Martins de Barros (2014) noted: “if psychotic patients receive proper treatment, the symptoms can be controlled and undoubtedly, a significant number of those crimes could be avoided” (p. 160). Threats to kill fathers should always be taken seriously and addressed with appropriate action (Heide 2013).

As the above review of the existing literature demonstrates, studies regarding patricide offenses and offenders focus on Western industrialized countries. The present study, with its focus on Ghana, contributes to the comparative empirical literature on the subject. The next section of the article describes the research setting, providing brief information about the social, cultural and economic conditions in Ghanaian society. The purpose is to familiarize the reader with the contexts in which patricides occurred.

Ghana: the Research Setting

Located on the west coast of Africa, Ghana is a country of approximately 28 million people. The population is ethnically, linguistically and religiously heterogeneous. The major ethnic groups are Akan (47.5%), Mole-Dagbani (16.6%), Ewe (13.9%) and Ga-Dangme (7.4%) (Ghana Statistical Service 2012). The average life expectancy for Ghanaian males is 59.1 and 60.0 years for females. The overall adult literacy rate is estimated at 57.9% with a rate of 66.4% for males and 49.8% for females. Ghana’s population is predominantly rural, with an estimated 50% of the people living in rural communities of less than 5,000 persons. About 60% of the country’s workforce is employed in agriculture and fishing, and about 15% is employed in industry. The remaining 25% of the population is employed in the service sector, particularly trade, transportation and communication. Ghana’s gross domestic product (GDP) was estimated at US\$48.7 billion in 2013; the GDP per capita was estimated at US\$1,841 in 2013 (Ghana Statistical Service 2015). In 2015, the country’s unemployment rate was estimated at 11.9% (Ghana Statistical Service 2016). In 2013, 24.1% of the population was determined to be living below the established poverty line (Cooke et al. 2016).

In Ghana, there are stringent official restrictions on the sale, ownership and possession of firearms. For years, the strict enforcement of anti-firearm statutes by the authorities has worked to ensure that gun availability has been kept to a minimum. In recent years, however, the manufacture of small arms by local blacksmiths and the smuggling

of lethal weapons from neighboring, war-torn countries have resulted in a proliferation of gun ownership and possession (“Illegal Arms” 2016).

Religious diversity of the population is reflected in the variety of institutionalized and traditional religious faiths with which Ghanaians identify. Based on information distilled from the 2010 national census, 71.2% of the population indicated an affiliation with one of numerous Christian denominational churches, followed by adherents of Islamic faith (17.6%), and subscribers of traditional African faiths, notably ancestor veneration (5.2%). In Ghana, the influence of witchcraft accusations on intrafamilial violence has been the subject of many press and academic reports (e.g. Adinkrah 2004, 2015; “Witch Stoned to Death by Family” 2017). Indeed, belief in maleficent witchcraft and the activities of malignant witches is widespread among Ghanaians. Diabolic witches are believed to have the capacity to blight crops, destroy marriages, cause business failure, afflict physical and mental ailments, and bring about premature death. Beneficent witches are believed to employ their witchcraft power to provide succor and assistance to their beneficiaries. Among Akans, witches can only bewitch a matrilineal relative; among the patrilineal ethnic groups in the country, however, a witch is believed to have the capacity to bewitch anyone, including friends, neighbors and strangers. While witches and wizards may be of any age, the stereotype of a witch is a person who is female, elderly, poor, widowed, childless, socially marginalized, and cantankerous. Accused and assailed witches in Ghana are disproportionately older women and girls, although some men and boys have been lethally and non-lethally assaulted on suspicion of witchcraft. It is widely accepted that witches bewitch others out of rage, jealousy and hatred. There is widespread belief that the only veritable means to meliorate the impact of witchcraft or eradicate the source of bewitchment is to exterminate the putative witch (Adinkrah 2015).

In a study of child-father homicides in Ghana, it is essential to examine the nature of father-child relations in Ghanaian society and culture. Needless to say, father-child relations in Ghanaian homes are affected by ethnicity, formal education, occupation and social class. Even then, a super-ordinate-subordinate relationship generally characterizes relations between fathers and their children across Ghana. With the notable exception of the Akan ethnic group which is matrilineal, all ethnic groups in Ghana are patrilineal. This means, a sizeable segment (nearly 52%) of the Ghanaian population is patrilineal or traces ancestry through the father’s line. Similarly, property is transferred through the father’s line. Among these groups, the father’s authority and influence on the child is great. Even among the matrilineal Akan, there is no diminution of paternal influence, although the mother’s brother’s influence is particularly recognizable.

The typical Ghanaian family is patriarchal in nature, with husbands and fathers expected to make the most important decisions affecting family life and welfare. In many homes, the father is the primary economic provider, although dual-career couples are increasingly becoming common out of economic necessity. Even then, wifely contributions to domestic income may only give her some egalitarian status in the home, not a leadership role in the domestic unit. The Ghanaian child, regardless of age, is expected to show respect and deference toward parents. To call one’s parent by his or her first name or to talk back to a parent is objectionable and most parents would not countenance even the slightest acts of insubordination from their children. To disregard a parent’s edicts, commands or wishes also invites supernatural condemnation. A parent’s curse is believed to be detrimental to one’s life, welfare, and future well-being. Moreover, to physically assault a father is a malefaction of gargantuan proportions, the consequences of which include spiritual retribution and incitement of ancestral wrath (Adinkrah 2015; Sarpong 2006).

Justification for Current Study

Our review of the existing literature on patricide showed that a major limitation of the literature is a lack of cultural and geographical diversity in the areas where patricide research has so far been conducted. To date, patricide research has focused almost exclusively on western industrialized societies, with the result that very little is currently known about the subject in non-Western, non-industrialized societies. The significance of culture in shaping human behavior is well known and makes it imperative that lethal violence researchers study patricide in varied geographical and cultural settings in order to fully understand patricide as a social phenomenon. To address this gap in the literature, the current study focused on patricide and step-patricide offenses in Ghana, a non-Western society in West Africa. The primary objective was to answer the following questions: (1) what was the extent or scope of patricide in Ghana? (2) what were the sociodemographic characteristics or attributes of patricide victims and offenders? (3) what was the nature of the relationships between patricide offenders and victims? (e.g. step or biological); (4) what methods or weapons were used to perpetrate patricide and step-patricides? (5) what were the physical locations of the crimes? (6) under what circumstances did the offense occur? (7) what was the motivation of the assailant? (8) what was the response of the public and criminal justice officials to the crimes? (10) based on the findings, what can be done to prevent patricides in Ghana?

Research Methods and Data Sources

The data for this research were extracted from reports of patricide that appeared in Ghana's print and electronic media. These included such print newspapers as the *Daily Graphic*, *Ghanaian Times*, *Daily Guide*, *Weekly Spectator* and *The Mirror*. In addition, internet-based Ghanaian news websites and electronic newspapers were consulted, including Ghanaweb.com, Ghanamma.com, Ghanatoday.com, Ghanakasa.com and Ghananewsagency.com. For the print media, a systematic search was conducted of newspaper archives at the library of the Ministry of Information in Accra. For internet website searches, pertinent keywords were used to identify information pertaining to the search. In all, 18 patricide and step-patricide cases were identified. Case information pertaining to each of the identified patricide offenses was photocopied, read and systematically analyzed. The data were then sorted into offender and victim characteristics (e.g. age, sex, occupation), spatial and temporal aspects, method of offense perpetration and the police-assigned motive for the crime.

Newspaper surveillance is an established research method in the study of homicide given the dearth or absence of homicide data sets in some countries or jurisdictions (Heide and Boots 2007; Shon 2009). The use of newspaper surveillance as a source for homicide and other crime data is particularly crucial in non-Western, developing countries such as Ghana where police records on certain crimes or aspects of criminal activities are insufficient, unsatisfactorily recorded, or simply absent. Moreover, in countries such as Ghana, tensions or strains in police-civilian relations have produced conditions whereby witnesses to criminal activities are frequently more inclined to share information with journalists and professional crime reporters than with law enforcement personnel. This author's personal experience of working with police-collated data and media-reported data on crime in Ghana reveals that media-based information on crime events is often richer and more comprehensive than law enforcement records. Given the rarity of parricidal acts, patricide and step-patricide cases are regarded as particularly newsworthy, with all major media outlets in the country giving extensive coverage to the crime. Journalists and other crime reporters from various media agencies typically conduct extensive investigations into the crime, often interviewing relatives, friends, acquaintances, neighbors, and other associates of the decedents and offenders, as well as law enforcement personnel and such medical and public health practitioners as forensic pathologists and psychiatrists. These efforts ultimately culminate in media reports that provide significant details about the crime.

The protocols governing data collection for this research were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the author's university. In Ghana, media reports on crime

Table 1 Summary characteristics of patricides and step-patricides in Ghana, 1990–2016

(n = 18)	#	%
Victim's relationship to assailant		
Biological father	16	88.9
Step-father	2	11.1
Assailant's sex		
Male	17	94.4
Female	1	5.6
Victim's age in years		
31–40	3	16.7
41–50	1	5.6
51–60	3	16.7
61–70	4	22.2
71–80	3	16.7
Unknown	4	22.2
Assailant's age in years		
6–14	1	5.6
11–15	1	5.6
16–20	4	22.2
21–25	4	22.2
26–30	6	33.3
31–35	2	11.1
Spatial aspects/location of patricide		
Victim's home	16	88.9
Remote location	2	11.1

almost invariably include the personal and demographic details of the perpetrators, victims, surviving relatives, as well as the city, town or village where the incident occurred. In reviewing case reports for this study, it was found that perpetrators and victims' names, age, employment status, marital status, etc. were all published as part of the crime story. For the current study, a decision was made to exclude from analysis the names and other detailed identifiers, despite their availability.

Results

The study identified 18 cases of patricide through a systematic analysis of Ghanaian print and electronic media over a 27-year period from 1990 to 2016 (see Table 1 for a summary of the results). This comes to less than one patricide case per year, a miniscule proportion of all homicide cases in the country. Official crime figures show that the annual volume of homicides recorded by the Ghana Police Service during 1990–2009 ranged from 275 in 1990 to 401 in 2002 (Ghana Police Service 2010).

The current study examined the nature of the relationship between victims and offenders. As shown in Table 1, 16

(88.9%) of the 18 cases involved the killing of a father by his biological child while two cases (11.1%) comprised the killing of a step-father by a step-child. There was a single case (5.6%) of double parricide, that is, a homicide event where the perpetrator killed both parents.

Single-Victim Homicides vs. Multicides

Multicide refers to a homicide event with multiple victims, i.e., two or more victims. The term familicide is used in the lethal violence literature to describe a homicide event in which multiple family members are killed by another family member (see Malmquist 1980; Fegadel and Heide 2017; Wilson et al. 1995). Sixteen (88.9%) of the 18 cases were single-victim homicides with the father as the sole victim. Concomitantly, there were 2 (11.1%) multiple-victim parricides. In both cases, the assailant killed the father and other family members. In the first case, the assailant killed his father and three other members of his extended family. He then killed himself with the same firearm used in the multiple homicides. In the second mass killing, the offender went to his parents' apartment armed with two machetes that he used to kill his father, mother, a niece, a nephew, his parents' landlord, and the landlord's son.

Single Offender or Multiple Offenders?

Except for a single case where the assailant acted with an accomplice, all patricide offenses analyzed in this study were perpetrated by a lone offender. In this particular case, a teenage daughter plotted with her co-offending boyfriend to murder her father due to the latter's objections over the pair's amorous relationship. The boyfriend supplied the lethal dose of poison which the girl later put in her unsuspecting father's food.

Public Reaction to Patricide

Patricide offenses are highly publicized cases in Ghana; each of the cases profiled in this study received vast coverage in the local print and web-based media. In addition, each case was the focus of media attention on radio and television news. Each time a patricide offense was reported in the media, there was public shock and consternation in response. In anonymous comments expressed through various media, the patricide offender was regarded as insane or a morally reprehensible individual who needed to be incapacitated through death or long term-incarceration for the good and safety of society. Two comments in response to two separate cases are presented for illustrative purposes. These comments are typical in tone of the comments found on the Ghanaweb.com website. The first case in which a 14-year-old girl fatally poisoned her father over the father's

objection over her relationship with her boyfriend, generated 78 comments, including the following:

OMG!!! Evil deed! Unbelievable! Disgusting kids; this crime made my stomach turn; This world is changing; What kind of society is this? Where are we heading to? This is sad; Killing your dad for love? Ghanaian youths are becoming monsters! God have mercy on us! This is wicked; they will both pay for this; 40 years imprisonment for the boy and 20 years for the girl. Please reintroduce the death penalty [to deal with such crimes]. It is not normal for a daughter to kill her father; she will die a miserable death; let her face the full rigors of the law; this girl is finished on this earth, the father's soul will be haunting her throughout; she will never get a husband to marry; henceforth she will be behaving madly ("Girl, 14, Poisons Father" 2011).

In response to a psychiatrically impaired man who killed his father, two commentators independently attributed the incidence of a patricidal homicide in Ghanaian society as indicative of the end times:

Too bad! This is so disheartening. A wicked and crazy world! This life was lost for nothing. What can we say about the world?—Crisis! My God, cure such madness before they come close to me or my family. May we never give birth to this kind of man [the perpetrator]. I think the devil personally possessed him. This man has spiritual problems.
What a crazy world! So sad indeed! This is indeed bunkum, nefarious and absolutely dastardly! How can he [kill his father]? These are all signs of the end time. Beloved, repent for the glory of God is near.

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Victims and Offenders

Sons were overwhelmingly more likely than daughters to kill their fathers. In only one (5.6%) of the 18 cases did a daughter kill her father, and here with a male accomplice. Patricide victims ranged in age from 35 to 80-years-old with a mean age of 58.9 years ($SD=14.75$) and a median age of 61.0 years. Patricide offenders ranged in age from 11 to 35-years-old with a mean age of 19.7 years ($SD=7.18$) and a median age of 23 years. Three patricide offenders were under the age of 18 years.

Spatial and Temporal Aspects

This study explored the geographical and physical settings where patricide cases occurred. The data show that a substantial proportion (15 out of 18 or 83.3%) of patricides occurred in rural communities—villages and small towns.

Table 2 Method of offense perpetration ($n=18$)

Method	#	%
Slash/hack with machete	5	27.8
Stab with a knife	4	22.2
Hit with a stick	3	16.7
Shoot with a gun	2	11.1
Hit with pick axe	1	5.6
Hit with a Pestle	1	5.6
Poisoning	1	5.6
Beat with personal weapon	1	5.6

Sixteen (88.9%) out of the 18 patricidal acts occurred at the victim's home, usually a residence shared with the assailant. Specific venues of the crime included the victim's bedroom, living room and bathroom. Two (11.1%) other patricides occurred outside the victim's home; in these two cases, the victims were killed by their assailants along a bush path leading to or from their homes.

Modus Operandi

Analysis of data shows that a variety of methods were used in the perpetration of patricide and step-patricides. As shown in Table 2, the dominant form of killing was hacking, cutting, or stabbing with a cutting or piercing instrument such as a machete or knife (9 cases or 50%). This was followed by hitting with an object such as a stick, pestle², or pickaxe (5 cases or 27.8%). Other methods used to perpetrate patricide were shooting with a gun (2 cases or 11.1%), poisoning (1 case or 5.6%) and beating with personal weapons (hands, feet and other parts of the body) (1 case or 5.6%).

Premeditated or Spontaneous Crimes

Seventeen (94.4%) out of the 18 patricides appeared to be spontaneous or impulsive acts of violence perpetrated against the victim. Characteristically, a heated argument that occurred between father and son escalated into a deadly physical attack. Only one case had the clear ingredients of premeditation or deliberate and methodical planning. In this case, a 14-year-old daughter conspired with her boyfriend to murder her father. The daughter obtained a lethal dose of a poisonous concoction supplied by the boyfriend, then laced her unsuspecting father's food with the mixture. The father died a few hours after consuming the poisoned food.

² A pestle is a long, heavy wooden object (about 5–7 feet long and 20–30 pounds heavy) used to pound grains and other food in Ghanaian households.

Motivation and Circumstances

The current study examined the contexts and motivations for committing patricide. Four primary motivations emerged from the analysis: (1) mental illness, (2) witchcraft accusation, (3) family conflicts and disputes and (4) miscellaneous motives.³ In one case, the offender's motive overlapped two categories. In this case a psychotic individual with a history of making repetitive death threats against his step-father accused the latter of using his diabolic witchcraft to stymie his progress in life; the altercation culminated in the step-father's murder.

Mental Illness

The data show that in six (33.3%) of the cases, the mental health problems of the offender factored into the crime. In the first case, a psychotic man with a history of making recurrent death threats against his step-father eventually killed him while the victim was in his bathroom taking a bath. In the second case, a multicide, a man described in the media reports as "a psychiatric patient" had been discharged from a psychiatric hospital just a day prior to the crime; he perpetrated a quadruple homicide in which he killed his father and three other members of his extended family. Earlier in the day of the killing spree, members of the local community heard him shouting "I will kill, I will kill" but ignored the threats as the assailant was well-known as a mentally ill person who confined himself to pursuing his professional hunting business. On the day of the homicides, he approached his father, who was dressed for going to a funeral, and shot him dead. He then went around the small rural community shooting at anyone whom he encountered.

In a third case where mental illness was a factor in the patricidal killing, the assailant killed his mother, a nephew, a niece and two non-family members in addition to his father, in a gruesome homicide event. There was general speculation that the crime was induced by mental illness exacerbated by chronic abuse of marijuana and other controlled substances. Indeed, several media reports described the perpetrator as "mentally deranged" and a "mad man" (e.g. "Mad Man' Murders Parents, Four Others" 2016). The 35-year-old assailant, was described as an ex-convict and a chronic drug user who served time in prison for larceny. Following his release from prison, he asked his parents to buy him a piece of land to start a farming enterprise. His parents obliged and for months, he lived on his farm while

³ To ensure the proper assignment of cases, a social scientist with a record of conducting research on Ghana read the case summaries and assisted in assigning them into the four thematic categories.

he engaged in farming. Around 7:30 p.m. on the day of the murder, he armed himself with two sharp machetes, came to his parents' home and without provocation, committed mass homicide. In a fourth case, a 22-year-old man killed his 78-year-old father by striking him in the head with a stick; the pair were returning home after drinking at a bar. Neighbors and other witnesses told police that the assailant was known to occasionally behave "abnormally," a euphemism for mental derangement. Police referred the assailant for psychiatric evaluation.

In the remaining two cases, men suffering from mental disorders killed their fathers on the instructions of purported "strange voices" that they claimed urged them to perpetrate the crimes. In the first case, a 23-year-old man killed his 80-year-old father. Armed with a machete, the assailant went to his father's bedroom, raised the head of the sleeping man and slashed his throat with the machete. The assailant told police during their investigations that he killed his father under the instructions of a strange voice. Earlier that day, the assailant accompanied his two siblings to work on their farm, a couple of miles away from the crime scene. Later, he asked his brothers to excuse him from work. Unbeknownst to them, he returned home to commit the act. His siblings returned home to a crime scene. In the second case which ironically occurred on Fathers' Day, a 21-year-old man hit the head of his 65-year-old sleeping father with a pick axe, killing him instantly. The assailant told police that on the eve of the murder, he heard a voice telling him to go and hit his father. Following the murder, the assailant waited an entire day before reporting the murder to his older brother who lived across town.

Witchcraft Accusation

The data show that accusations of witchcraft by sons against fathers contributed to three (16.7%) of the 18 patricide offenses. These homicidal episodes were preceded by a witchcraft imputation and an allegation of bewitchment in which the perpetrator blamed his father for difficulties he experienced in life—economic hardships, marital difficulties, and physical and mental maladies. To illustrate, a 22-year-old man suspected that his step-father was a wizard whose maleficent spiritual powers were the cause of his woes in life. A day prior to the murder, the assailant had returned from a Christian spiritual healing camp where his suspicions about his step-father's diabolic wizardry were reinforced by faith healers. He had threatened to kill his step-father on two previous occasions before committing the homicide.

In a second case, a 30-year-old man killed his father whom he accused of being a maleficent wizard. He had on several prior occasions accused the father of being a wizard who had used his witchcraft power to torment and oppress

him. Moments preceding the lethal attack, the young farmer had renewed his imputation of witchcraft against his father. Following the murder, he told police that he had a dream in which he saw his father place a curse on his life which was followed by financial troubles. In his encounter with his father moments before the murder, he asked him to perform rituals to reverse the curse but the father denied imposing any such malediction on him.

In the third case involving witchcraft accusation, a man accused his father of being a wizard who had utilized his spiritual powers to hinder his advancement in life, including his ability to prosper materially and to find a wife. In the months preceding the murder, the assailant made recurrent imputations of witchcraft that his father vehemently denied. On the day of the murder, the accusations, denials and counter-accusations degenerated into an altercation during which the assailant struck his father on the head with a stick. The old man went into a coma before his death.

Family Conflicts and Disputes

Unresolved conflicts and associated tensions between offspring and father over a wide-range of issues contributed to eight (44.4%) additional patricides. Below are descriptions of some of the patricides and the circumstances and conflicts that triggered them. In the first case, a 19-year-old man killed his 70-year-old father in a dispute over money. The young man, who had constructed a one-bedroom mud house, approached his father for financial assistance to roof the structure, but his father refused. On the day of the murder, the victim sold a quantity of cocoa beans. Following this, the son renewed his request for financial assistance. The father once again refused. When the father left the house that evening to visit his friend in a neighboring village, his son trailed him. Upon reaching a remote location, the young man pulled out a concealed machete, striking his father several times until he became unconscious. He then searched his father's pocket, retrieving about US\$50. When the father regained consciousness, he was helped to a nearby village where he identified his son as the assailant. He died while being conveyed to a hospital. In a second case, a 26-year-old man fatally beat his 65-year-old father over cash and farmland. On the day of the murder, the assailant approached his father with a request for money and a piece of farmland. The father had previously sold some cocoa for cash. When the father refused to honor the request, the son beat the father until he collapsed and died.

In a third case, an argument between a son and father regarding who had broken the son's tape recorder escalated into the son's fatal assault on his father. On the day of the murder, the assailant returned home to find his tape recorder inoperable. He suspected that his mother, who had previously damaged the recorder, had broken it again. When he

confronted her with his suspicion, she denied responsibility. The assailant, who had a protracted conflict with his mother, used the opportunity to vent his anger over other matters. The father, who had been absent from the home, returned to find his son and wife quarrelling. He threatened to call the assailant's older brother to come and "discipline" him if he did not end the quarrel with his mother—this being a widespread practice when parents feel incapable of physically disciplining their adult offspring. When the assailant continued the quarrel, the father walked towards the bedroom, apparently to call his older son. In response, the assailant went to his own room, retrieved a gun that he kept under his bed, then fatally shot his father.

In a fourth case, recurring conflicts between a father and son over a cockerel led to a patricide. In a fifth case, a 14-year-old girl conspired with her boyfriend to poison her 57-year-old father. The father objected to his young daughter's amorous relationship and warned her to terminate it. Enraged by her father's orders, the boyfriend supplied the daughter with a poison that she used to lace her father's dinner meal. After consuming the meal, the victim complained of abdominal pains and was rushed to a hospital where he was diagnosed as having been poisoned. He died a day later.

In a sixth case, the 55-year-old patricide victim had two wives and several children. When the mother of the seven children died, her children became embittered toward the father, who they believed caused their mother's death through his neglect and lack of concern for her. Three weeks following their mother's death, the children argued with their father, renewing accusations about his dereliction of responsibility towards their deceased mother. The father singled out one of the daughters, accusing her of insubordination towards him, then grabbed a machete, threatening to kill her. His 18-year-old son intervened between the father and his sister, overpowering him and taking the machete, which he used to slash his father to death.

In a seventh case, a 17-year-old boy stabbed his 40-year-old step-father to death. Hours before the murder, the father had instructed him to go to the farm to harvest crops for the family's dinner. The boy refused the father's orders and his sister went in his place. At dinner, the teenager was reprimanded by his step-father for refusing to go to the farm and was then denied any of the prepared meal. This infuriated the boy who insulted his parents. As the step-father approached his step-son to discipline him, the assailant rushed at him with a knife and fatally stabbed him.

In an eighth case, a 30-year-old unemployed man killed his 65-year-old father. Father and son lived in the same house. On the day of the homicide, the deceased had purchased food from a street vendor and returned home to eat it. The father, who had been in the house, emerged from his room and saw his son eating, then took the food from him. The assailant became offended at his father's behavior and

chased after him to collect his food. In the process of doing so, he pushed his father who took a fall that killed him.

Miscellaneous Motivation

Two cases (11.1%) were classified under "miscellaneous motivation." In the first case, an 11-year-old boy stabbed his 38-year-old father to death while the man lay in his bed sleeping. The boy told police that just before he fatally attacked his father, he had a dream that he was at his grandmother's house and had split open an animal. When he woke up, he committed the same act against his father as in the dream. According to case reports, the stomach of the father was nearly split in two and the man died instantly. Frightened about what he had done, he rushed to an uncle's house to tell him of the patricidal act. Because he was a minor, the boy was released into the custody of an uncle as police continued investigations. According to Act 29, Section 26 (1960) of Ghana's Criminal Code, "nothing is a crime which is done by a person under twelve years of age" (Acts of Ghana 2017). In the second case, a 19-year-old man stabbed his 35-year-old father to death with a butcher knife. According to the case report, the assailant worked independently as a professional meat griller at a house he shared with his father and other family members. On the day of the homicide, the son was grilling and selling meat. As the father emerged from outside the house and headed for his room, he (the father) stumbled on an object in the doorway, tripped and fell. In a dash, the assailant lunged at him with the butcher knife he had been working with, stabbing the father on the arm and in the ribs. The victim was rushed to a nearby hospital but died shortly thereafter. The daughter of the victim said there was no dispute between the father and son and could only surmise that his brother might have been under the influence of alcohol, marijuana, or some illicit drug and therefore acted without knowledge of what he was doing.

Post-Crime Offender Death and Dispositional Outcomes

One (5.6%) patricide offender who killed six persons was himself beaten to death by an enraged transitory mob that had congregated near the crime scene after news of his crime spread through the community. In another case, the patricide offender fatally shot himself with the same firearm used to kill his father and two other victims. Dispositional outcomes were not available for the other 16 cases. The absence of information regarding the dispositional outcomes may be explained in a couple of ways. First, the outcomes of the cases may not have been reported in the media. Second, there is often a significant lapse between the time of initial arrest of a homicide suspect and the final disposition of the

case. Homicide cases in Ghana are routinely referred by the local police to the Attorney General's Department in Accra for legal advice, and it is not uncommon for a case to be held in abeyance in the Department for ten years or longer ("Ghana's Attorney General" 2010).

Discussion and Conclusion

The goal of the present study was to extend current understanding of patricide by analyzing patricide and step-patricide data from Ghana. As was noted in the introductory section, there is presently a paucity of scholarship on patricide in non-Western, non-industrialized societies. The objective, therefore, was to help fill this void in the literature and contribute to current understanding of the phenomenon. Several of the findings of the present study are consistent with research results on patricide contained in the extant literature. First, in Ghana, patricide is considered an unspeakable crime, a malefaction of serious gravity; for this reason, patricide offenses garner substantial media attention. Second, patricides in Ghana represent only a minuscule proportion of all homicides in the country. Third, sons are more likely than daughters to kill their fathers. Fourth, older sons are more likely than juvenile and adolescent children to commit patricide. Fifth, a significant proportion of patricide offenses arise out of interpersonal conflict between father and son. Sixth, several patricide offenders suffered from psychological impairments or psychiatric disorders. Seventh, patricide events tended to occur at home and manifested signs of overkill.

How do the findings of the current study relate to Heide's four categories of parricide offenders? It is notable that 6 of the 18 patricide offenders in the present analysis suffered from severe psychiatric disorders and their mental conditions were deemed to have contributed to the patricide. These cases align with Heide's category of the seriously psychiatrically impaired or psychotic child who kills a parent because they have "lost contact with reality." Additionally, the teenage offender who schemed with her boyfriend to murder her father over his objections to their romantic relationship appeared to fit the category of the antisocial individual incapable of empathizing with the pain and suffering of others, and only motivated by the fulfillment of their own desires and pleasures. In addition to Heide's typology, effort was made to relate the current findings to the four principal thematic motives observed by Shon (2009) in his study of nineteenth century American parricides. Of the 11 cases where conflict between father and offspring contributed to patricide, two were triggered by disputation over financial matters, 6 were over seemingly trivial issues including food, a broken tape recorder, and ownership of a cockerel. Notably, three of the patricides involving conflict between father

and son were culturally specific to this Ghana study, involving witchcraft imputations; here, witchcraft accusations, denials and counter-accusations triggered the patricide.

A few of the findings of this research deserve additional comment. First, it is likely that the remarkably low prevalence of patricide offenses is attributable to the strong patriarchal family structure that exists in Ghana, coupled with strong cultural injunctions against challenging a parent. Even adult children in Ghana are constrained by extant cultural mores from engaging in verbal disagreements, let alone physical altercations, with their parents. Second, it is notable that one-half (9 out of 18) of the patricide offenses were perpetrated by juvenile, adolescent, and young adult offenders. Three were perpetrated by persons under the age of 18. These offenders were aged 11, 14 and 17 years. Two adolescent patricide offenders were 19 years old while the four young adult offenders were aged 21, 22, 23 and 26 years old respectively.

In Ghana, a person reaches adulthood at age 18. Also, a child under the age of 12 is considered incapable of committing a criminal offense. Act 29, section 26 (2) of Ghana's Criminal Code (1960) stipulates that "Nothing is a crime which is done by a person of or above 7 and under 12 years of age" (Twumasi 1985, p. 181). The motives for the patricides by these young offenders were eclectic, with no motive predominating. Ghana's criminal code bars the imposition of a death sentence against a juvenile offender. The criminal procedure code also emphasizes the expeditious processing of juvenile offenders. According to Section 33 of the Juvenile Justice Act (2003), "the case of a juvenile charged with an offence shall be dealt with expeditiously and if the case is not completed within 6 months of the juvenile's first appearance in court, the juvenile shall be discharged and is not liable for any further proceedings in respect of the same offence" (Acts of Ghana 2017).

Third, the strong, pervasive belief in witchcraft appears to exercise a significant influence on patricidal killings in Ghana. While witchcraft accusations in the society tend to be directed mainly against mothers and other female relatives (Adinkrah 2015), some adult sons scapegoated their fathers, accusing them of using witchcraft to create economic and other hardships for them. Fourth, it is notable that a significant number of patricides were perpetrated by assailants with mental health problems. In Ghana, mental health programs for the mentally ill are limited. There are only three psychiatric hospitals, all of which are under-resourced, with shortages of qualified personnel, drugs, and treatment services. In addition, there is a huge stigma associated with mental illness and receiving care at a mental health facility (Barke et al. 2011). Many Ghanaians believe that mental illness is caused by witchcraft, sorcery, or is a retributive supernatural sanction for transgressive behavior. Mentally ill persons usually seek treatment at

traditional healers and prayer camps, rather than from psychiatrists and mental health facilities (Read et al. 2009).

Fortunately, patricide is a rare crime in Ghana. Nevertheless, with accurate information about the phenomenon, the Ghanaian authorities can prevent or minimize the incidence of new crimes. The study shows that mental disorder, witchcraft imputation and conflicts between offspring and fathers were key precipitants in homicidal encounters. Primary prevention strategies should focus on widening the availability of mental health services to benefit those who need it. At present, it is estimated that only 2% of mentally-ill Ghanaians receive mental health services (Liu 2016). Minimizing witchcraft imputation to curtail witchcraft-related fatalities may involve educating the public about disease causation, lack of economic advancement, and premature deaths (Adinkrah 2015).

A couple of limitations of the current study must be acknowledged. First, the study focused on patricides reported in the Ghanaian mass media. Despite the diligent manner in which crime journalists in Ghana conduct their investigations into crime, it is hard to determine the completeness of media data. It is conceivable that only the most violent and dramatic cases of patricide are described in comprehensive detail by the media outlets for the sensationalism they create while the less violent cases receive less coverage and description. It is also possible that some patricide offenses were overshadowed by more prominent news stories on a particular day, whereby editorial discretion may have been exercised not to publish as many details on stories of patricide cases. Despite these limitations, the study adds to the literature on patricide offenses and offenders in the non-Western world, providing important insights into the phenomenon.

Concerning research implications, the present study being of an exploratory nature, raises a number of opportunities for future research. There is a need for additional research to address certain additional issues. For example, follow-up research is needed to explore how the legal system handled each patricide case, given the dearth of information on the disposition of cases in media-reported data. A second potential direction for future research would be to combine media, law enforcement, judicial, psychiatric, and all other pertinent data on patricide to continue to examine the patterns of the behavior and the salient factors that determine them. Another future research direction should explore patterns of matricide and step-matricides in Ghana in order to compare the two forms of parricide. Also, it is hoped that the study reported here will be replicated for other societies where scholarship on patricide is lacking. Such research would enhance current understandings of lethal violence as a form of human behavior.

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