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The Media, Social Norms and the Emerging Dimensions of Human and National Security in Ghana



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INTRODUCTION

Like many developing nations, Ghana faces a continuous challenge in creating adequate productive employment and economic opportunities for its spurring working aged population, despite economic growth (Ministry of Finance, 2025). The World Bank's Ninth Ghana Economic Update identifies the struggle to translate this growth into job opportunities, making it a major policy concern for the government. Economic insecurity influences individuals' ability to meet their material needs. Also, it can shape the choices and strategies through which individuals seek security and social mobility. Where legitimate economic opportunities appear limited, individuals seek alternative sources of income, social status or protection (Manstead, 2018; Browman et al., 2019). This tends to make unconventional alliances attractive, raising questions about how economic conditions affect social attitudes and personal advancement. For instance, a recent television debate from a renowned television network suggested that young women might seek relationships with married men for economic benefits, using religious justifications (Joy Prime TV).

The significance of the discussion is not simply whether the views expressed were morally acceptable. It is the possibility that repeated public exposure to alternative unconventional ideas may contribute to their normalisation, particularly when they are presented to large audiences without sufficient critical interrogation. Social norms matter because they are shaped by perceptions of acceptable or legitimate behavior (Tankard & Paluck, 2016). The media plays a key role in influencing these norms by choosing topics to discuss and how they are presented, aiding in social norm formation. This discussion highlights the impact of media on social norms and their possible implication on security in Ghana.

National security is not concerned only with external aggression, terrorism or threats against the state. With the rise of changing dynamics of warfare like malign influence & cognitive warfare, which can feed on existing economic and or social upheavals, national security requires resilience and well-being of the society that the state exists to protect (Solov, 2025).

The media has been a major tool used in misinformation, disinformation, propaganda among many others, proliferating internal and external aggression and influence (Kravchenko & Trehubenko, 2025). Thus, the media can potentially play either a protective or destabilising role in society.

The purpose of this article is to simply explore the interplay between economic insecurity, media influence, and social norms, advocating for a responsible media that can enhance Ghana's overall security.

ECONOMIC INSECURITY AND THE APPEAL OF ALTERNATIVE SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

Economic insecurity greatly impacts individual responses to personal and social circumstances in Ghana, particularly among youth. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), the unemployment rate reached 13.0% in Q3 of 2025. The World Bank shows the pressing need for productive employment to accommodate Ghana's expanding working age population. Limited access to secure jobs and sufficient income often forces individuals to seek alternative economic solutions, such as informal work, entrepreneurship, migration, relying on family support, or depending on wealthier individuals. Moreso, Ghana's labor market underscores the prevalence of informal and precarious employment, depicting that economic activity does not equate to secure and adequate livelihoods (GSS, 2024).

In the context of economic insecurity, relationships with financially powerful individuals can become attractive to some, offering access to resources such as money, accommodation, business opportunities, and social connections. The pursuit of these relationships may not directly stem from economic insecurity, but the conditions created by such insecurity can make them appealing as a survival or mobility strategy. This distinction is crucial, as the goal is to understand the economic factors influencing these choices rather than to justify them. The issue escalates when these survival strategies are normalised or legitimised as pathways to economic advancement, questioning social norms and the role of institutions, including media, in shaping perceptions of acceptable responses to economic hardship.

INDIVIDUAL CHOICES TO SOCIAL NORMALISATION

Social norms are basically the shared expectations and perceptions that guide behavior within a society (UN Women, 2023). They are shaped by repeated expression and acceptance of ideas with the public. While individual decisions during economic hardship do not automatically create these norms, persistent expressions can shift perceptions of what is deemed normal (UN Women, 2025).

According to UN Women (2025), the media's influence on gender attitudes is not negligible, it has the ability to either propagate discriminatory notions or encourage healthier social norms. This shows that the media plays a major dynamic role by either reinforcing stereotypical views or fostering positive social changes. To add, Gyane, (2025) revealed a link between social media usage and adolescents' sexual behavior, depicting the impact of media environments on young people's understanding of intimate relationships.

In this context, portraying relationships with married and wealthy individuals as a legitimate means for economic advancement has far reaching implications. If such portrayals are presented without critical discussion, they might alter perceptions of marriage, economic dependency, gender relations, and social mobility. One television program may not directly change social norms, but the cumulative impact of repeated messages can influence societal views. It is not certain at what

point an individual coping strategy can gain social legitimacy. Altering social norms requires attention to individual attitudes and the institutions that reinforce those norms (UN Women, 2025). The media's influence in this regard, warrants consideration beyond entertainment or journalism to its role in shaping societal resilience.

POWER THE MEDIA WIELDS IN SHAPING SOCIETY

National media has an important role in shaping how people understand society. Television, radio and other mass media platforms do not simply report what happens in society. Through the issues they highlight, the voices they give space to, and the way those issues are presented, may influence public attitudes and social expectations. That puts it in a position to decide whether to reinforce harmful stereotypes or positive norms (UN Women, 2025).

Changing social norms is complex, there are hardly direct causal links. Social norms may be influenced by many institutions, families, communities, religion, education, the media among many others (UN Women, 2024).

In Ghana, national television plays a big role in public discourse on relationships, wealth, gender, and success just to mention a few. When these topics are presented without captious scrutiny, they risk being consumed while influencing perceptions of acceptable behavior. The responsibility of the media is not just to depict social attitudes but to provide context and foster decisive discussions. Ultimately, how national media addresses ideas has significant social consequences that impact societal resilience and security.

FROM SOCIETAL SECURITY TO NATIONAL SECURITY

The United Nations' (UN) Human Security Framework views security as encompassing threats to people's survival, livelihoods and dignity, including economic insecurity, violence and other threats to everyday life. Economic insecurity, harmful relationship practices, and weakening social cohesion are societal vulnerabilities that, while not direct national security threats, can destabilise families and communities (UN, n.d). The human security framework shows how these persistent vulnerabilities contribute to broader instability through their interactions.

For Ghana, this broader understanding of security is relevant. The country's National Early Warning Centre is mandated to identify emerging crises and security threats, with explicit emphasis on human security and early action (presidency.gov.gh). This suggests that national security requires attention to the social and economic conditions that can create or deepen vulnerability, rather than responding only after a crisis has emerged.

Thus, Ghana's security institutions should pay greater attention to these early and less visible forms of insecurity. To this end, strengthening economic opportunities, supporting stable communities and promoting responsible public narratives can all contribute to societal resilience. This also gives

the media a potential role within the broader national security architecture. A national media institution can contribute to security by informing the public, challenging harmful misinformation and or normalisation, encouraging constructive debate and promoting awareness of social risks. Thus, the media is one of the societal institutions capable of contributing to prevention and resilience.

CONCLUSION

Economic insecurity influences individual choices in seeking income and social mobility. The media as an institution can be a major instrument in shaping social expectations beyond personal decisions. It should be acknowledged as a potent instrument of national security, and not merely a source of information and entertainment. A single media program may not directly cause social instability, but normalising alternative and or harmful behaviors can perpetuate existing issues within communities.

The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) posits that the media can foster social cohesion and resilience, contributing to national stability (MFWA, 2025). The media can facilitate responsible public discourse by providing context, countering harmful narratives, and fostering social resilience. The focus should be on how economic insecurity, social norms, and media narratives impact national security in Ghana, promoting a proactive approach to security with emphasis on prevention, resilience, and social stability.

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