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## The Job Search Experiences of Postgraduate Ghanaian Women Aged 25-45 Years in Accra, Ghana

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Walden University  
2022

Abstract

The Job Search Experiences of Postgraduate Ghanaian Women Aged 25-45 Years in

Accra, Ghana

by

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MA, Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration, 2012

BSc, Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration university, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

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## Abstract

A number of educated women has increased over the years, leading to more women participating in the labor market and contributing to social and economic development. Despite the increase in number of women with Master's level (MA, MSc, MPhil, MBA) education, there remains challenges in the employment of women into professional positions compared to men. This study sought to examine the job search experiences of postgraduate women at the professional level to understand the challenges and difficulties they encounter, thereby contributing to policy formulation and implementation to address this phenomenon. The theoretical foundation for this study was the feminist theory, which focuses on women's inclusion, employment, empowerment, and equality. The research question examined the job search experiences of postgraduate women aged 25 to 45 years seeking professional employment in Accra, Ghana. A qualitative approach was adopted, and purposive sampling and snowballing methods were used to identify and interview 10 postgraduate women. Data were collected through interviews, which lasted 15 to 45 minutes for one to two participants daily within 4 weeks. Phone-in interviews were used to capture data through audio-recordings, and memos and field notes were taken to identify patterns and themes of issues for coding, data interpretation, and analysis. Key results of the study include creating flexible working hours for women to support family roles and commitments, equal employment opportunities and more inclusion of women in employment. The study will contribute to academic studies and can inform employers, human resource managers, counsellors, and support policy formulation to reduce bottlenecks and increase professional employment for women.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late husband and friend, Kwasi Twum Addo, who passed on before I could graduate and to my two beautiful and inspiring daughters, Anima and Amoakoa Addo. Their patience and understanding during the period of study is commendable despite all the challenges and difficulties encountered on this journey to attain my goal of a PhD. I will always remember their sacrifice and love, which continues to inspire me to do more in my career and life.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In this study, I examined postgraduate women's job search experiences in the city of Accra, Ghana, and how these experiences impacted their lives and the socioeconomic development of their country. I sought to understand how these women felt during their job search experiences and what could have been done better to help inform policy makers, governments, institutions, and employers. This can help ensure that future experiences are better managed and lead to employment of more women in professional positions in order for them to contribute their skills, knowledge, and competencies to empower them and to earn incomes to support themselves, their families, and their communities.

In Chapter 1, I introduce the global perspectives of job search and employment for professional women and how women compared to men are given employment positions to support economies. This is followed by the nature of the study, the research question, and the conceptual framework, which serves as the philosophical underpinning of the study. Additionally, several definitions are provided, and limitations and assumptions of the study are further discussed. Finally, the chapter concludes with the significance of the study and its impact on society.

### **Background**

Global economies depend on human capital to support development and management of their resources to sustain growth. Human capital includes both the men and women in the society who are capable of contributing to the various sectors of employment, such as health, education, environment, governance, science and

technology, agriculture, and many more. Women form almost half of the global population and contribute to economic development across the world (Ritchie & Roser, 2019). However, despite many of them being educated, this has not translated into better employment positions, as the labor participation rate for women between ages 25 and 54 is 63% compared to 94% for men (UN Women, 2018). Morsey and Mukasa (2019) suggested that this may be a result of mismatch of jobs to skills, while Asekere and Awiasu (2021) attributed this to stigma, stereotyping, as well as harmful cultural, religious, and traditional beliefs. Following World War II, women have supported economic development by gaining employment in many sectors (Rose, 2018; Shatnawi & Fishback, 2018). Though several organizations, including the Beijing Conference and Women's Forum Affirmative Action, and society have changed traditional gender roles for women to include economic activities, there still remain challenges in bridging the gap of unemployment for women in countries like Ghana (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection [MoGCSP], 2015). Even though women have been given employment positions, their incomes and equal access to employment are not guaranteed as they are often relegated to subservient positions compared to men (UN Women, 2018; International Labor Organization [ILO], 2017).

### **Problem Statement**

The social problem addressed in this study included the challenges and difficulties experienced by postgraduate Ghanaian women seeking professional experience to contribute to employment and earn incomes. The Ghana Living Standards Survey 7 notes that despite the increase in women's education in Ghana, the ratio of professionally



employed women stands at 7.1% compared to that of men at 9.0% (GSS, 2019).

According to Anderson (2019), discriminatory laws in Ghana hinder women's participation in the labor market. This assertion is buttressed by Boahen and Opoku (2021) and Abakah (2018), who suggested that Ghanaian women are treated unequally in the labor market due to cultural norms and assignment of roles and responsibilities. They further suggested that the lower participation rate of women can be attributed to the culture, including responsibilities at home, childcare, and marriage, compared to men who are seen as the breadwinners of the family (Boahen & Opoku., 2021). These cultural and social issues serve as challenges and bottlenecks that hinder women from seeking jobs and participating in the labor market. Both the United Nations (UN) and the ILO have identified gender gaps in employment (ILO, 2017; UN Women, 2018). The ILO (2017) data on employment statistics for 178 countries highlighted the continuous inequalities between women and men in the labor market. ILO director Ryder asserted that women continue to face challenges in finding and keeping jobs (ILO, 2017). The Ghana Living Standards Survey 7, (2019) indicated that the employment gap by gender in most occupations is higher for men at 66.9% than women at 63.3% (GSS, 2019).

Additional studies have shown that the impact of unemployment leads to social and economic hardships, like poverty, health challenges, lack of social support, lack of material resources, a weak sense of purpose, and reduced family incomes (ILO, 2017). Efforts to reverse this gender problem of unemployment for women have included the UN's initiative on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) 3, which focuses on empowering women to earn incomes to support their families and households (Kochhar

et al., 2017; UN Women, 2018). Bah-Boateng (2018) asserted that despite Ghana's efforts to improve the economy through services and production, the labor force continues to experience employment challenges.

Several researchers have contributed to the literature on the unemployment issues and unemployment challenges of women (Arian et al., 2019; ILO, 2018). Though Abraham et al. (2017) and Ismail (2017) highlighted some challenges of graduate unemployment in Ghana and South Africa, in this study, I focused on the professional job search experiences of postgraduate (Master's level) women aged between 25 and 45 years to offer more insight into employment/job search challenges. I examined the issues, difficulties, and challenges of the job search for postgraduate (MPhil, MBA, MA, MSc) women aged 25 to 45 years who completed their Master's programs (either in Ghana or elsewhere) and were seeking professional management jobs 12 to 24 months after graduation. According to Abraham et al. (2017), educated women play a major role in reducing poverty through income generation and contributing to family expenditure. Despite significant efforts towards empowering women through employment, challenges persist (ILO, 2018; Kochhar et al., 2017). Hence, in this study, I explored and highlighted the employment challenges of postgraduate women to inform human resource counsellors, social workers, administrators, and other employers to assist women seeking employment. The GSS, (2019) Ghana Living Standards Survey 7, highlighted the gap in employment for men at 66.9% against 63.3% for women across all sectors. Therefore, the data from this study can illuminate and support employers and relevant authorities by

highlighting the gender challenges of marginalization, inclusion, and unemployment faced by postgraduate women in the job search process.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences of postgraduate Ghanaian women between the ages of 25 and 45 who have searched for professional and management jobs in Accra, Ghana. I examined the challenges and issues in the job search process within the Ghanaian economic and cultural context and how this affects women. I further examined women's job search encounters and processes (applications and interviews) to understand and highlight these issues to inform stakeholders and contribute to policy formulation within the employment sector.

### **Research Question**

The research question was as follows: "What are the job search experiences of postgraduate women aged 25 to 45 years seeking professional employment in Accra, Ghana?"

### **Conceptual Framework**

The feminist theory (de Beauvoir, 1949; Lorde, 1997; Power, 2004), which focuses on marginalized women, inclusion, employment, and gender equality, was used to highlight the experiences of these women in the job search process (see McCann & Kim, 2017). I used a qualitative method together with a hybrid approach of hermeneutic-phenomenology to explore the problem of job search/employment for postgraduate women in Ghana, which stands at 66.9% for men and 63.7% for women (GSS, 2019; Heidegger, 1976). I examined the employment of postgraduate women whose skills and

competencies qualified them to take up professional (9.0% men against 7.1% women) and managerial (1.6% men against .08% women) employment positions to earn incomes while contributing to national development (see GSS, 2019; Ghana Living Standards Survey 6 [GSS], 2014). The hermeneutic-phenomenological approach supported the interviewing of the postgraduate women's past and present job search experiences in order to analyze and synchronize findings based on the challenges and difficulties as encountered (see Adu, 2019; Arian et al., 2019). Using the feminist theory enhanced my understanding in critically interpreting the unique experiences and struggles of women (see McCann & Kim, 2017; Peoples, 2020) and provided participants the opportunity to share and narrate their experiences in finding jobs (see Kross & Giust, 2019). The study provided an understanding of the job search challenges and experiences faced by women in addressing social problems they encounter (see Diraditsile & Ontetse, 2017).

### **Nature of the Study**

In this study, I adopted a qualitative method and a hybrid hermeneutic-phenomenological approach in examining the lived experiences of postgraduate women in Accra, Ghana. Phenomenology derives its roots from the feminist theory. Adopting this approach supported the exploration and interpretation of shared experiences of participants while examining social, cultural, and historical data to understand the issues as described and explained by the participants (see Peoples, 2020). Purposive sampling and snow balling methods were used to recruit and interview 10 Ghanaian women with postgraduate degrees (MA, MBA, MSc), aged 25 to 45 years, living in Accra, Ghana, with job search experiences at the professional and managerial levels (see Korstjens &

Morser, 2018). Ghana's unemployment rate for ages 15 years and above stands at 11.4% for men against 13.8% for women (GSS, 2019). Participants were recruited through social media channels (WhatsApp and emails) and included students from the University of Ghana, Legon, the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) in Accra, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology, Kumasi (KNUST), and the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. Sustainable Development Goals in Ghana reported that 13.75% of women against 17.72% of men were enrolled at the tertiary level, with 8.79% of women graduating against 12.71% men at the first degree level in 2019 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2014.). All 10 participants had acquired postgraduate degrees from 2019 to 2021 and had job search experiences in Accra at the professional or managerial levels.

The phenomenological approach is rooted in philosophy and psychology and explores the lived experiences of a phenomenon by uncovering and understanding first-hand experiences as conveyed by the persons involved (Adu, 2019). The adoption of this approach facilitated the exploration and interpretation of lived experiences of the job search based on how they experienced the events in their world (see Peoples, 2020). Phenomenology is a qualitative approach that uses both the hermeneutic and transcendental methods in uncovering the phenomenon under study. Whereas the hermeneutic approach by Heidegger (1889-1976) allows the researcher to interpret and describe the events within the cultural, social, and historical context while sharing their experiences about the phenomenon, the transcendental approach, a descriptive method promoted by Husserl (1859-1938), requires the researcher to bracket their emotions and

preconceptions and narrate the story as it is (see Adu, 2019; Peoples, 2020).

Phenomenology, derived from the feminist theory, promotes gender equality, women empowerment, inclusion, and equal opportunities for work and education (McCann & Kim, 2017). Therefore, using the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach helped me uncover the rich experiences of the women through interviews, observations, record keeping, and memos to help understand the actions, events, descriptions, and lived experiences of participants (see Helmich & Mattick, 2018; Kross & Giust, 2019). The approach helped me draw out similarities and patterns of issues emerging from the interviews to interpret the actions of the women during their job search (see Helmich & Mattick, 2018) while aligning findings to existing theories in support of the study (see Peoples, 2020). The phenomenological approach guided me to uncover the women's experiences as shared, what it meant for them, and how these events have shaped their future job search processes (see Peoples, 2020). This study adds to research and academia and can be used to inform employers, policy makers, institutional representatives, and relevant partners through its recommendations for policy directions on the outcome of the findings.

### **Definitions**

*Economic empowerment:* Empowerment encourages, strengthens resolve, and supports individuals to do better than they previously did. Feminists assert that women empowerment addresses inequalities and ensures they have equal opportunities as their male counterparts (Fabrizio et al., 2018; Kabeer, 2017; Postl, 2017). According to Largarde and Ostry (2018) and UN Women (2018), the employment of women leads to

economic growth and benefits the entire society. Kabeer (2017) further noted that when women are empowered, they earn incomes and control resources while contributing to families, communities, and economic development. In this study, I used women's economic empowerment to buttress the need for their inclusion in employment to increase their contribution to national development.

*Feminist theory:* Feminism relates to addressing the inequalities in social gender and has several approaches and philosophies, including analytic, psychoanalytic, continental, pragmatist, and intersectionality (see Grant & Zwier, 2017; Postl, 2017). However, despite these differences among feminist philosophers, they unite on the interests of women, their roles and locations, and their exclusion from social/political issues compared to men (Grant & Zwier, 2017; McAfee, 2018). The issues of feminism started in the mid-1800s, focusing on advocacy and equal rights for women and equality of sexes and later pushed for education, workplace, and home issues in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (McAfee, 2018). Further on, feminists continued to advocate for issues related to differences among women in race, ethnicity, class and nationality, religion, and identity and gender (McAfee, 2018; Postl, 2017). Subsequent feminists have expanded the advocacy issues for women on social gender imbalances and disadvantages into other concepts and perspectives, including class of work, disability, family and reproduction, human trafficking, and sexuality (Grant & Zwier, 2017). In this study, the feminist theory focused on women's inclusion through employment/job search to explore the experiences of postgraduate women and to understand the phenomenon in relation to Ghanaian women searching for professional jobs.

*Gender discrimination:* Discrimination by gender is when one party is favored against the other. Whereas there is general unemployment for both graduate men and women, women face more challenges in gaining employment due to discrimination as compared to their male counterparts (ILO, 2020). Studies by Baskaran et al. (2017) and Htun et al. (2019) highlighted the discriminatory practices, unfairness, challenges, and unequal employment issues that face women in the job search process. The ILO (2020) noted that women face more discrimination (cultural, structural, and social barriers) in seeking employment compared to their male counterparts. In this study, the issue of gender discrimination was used to emphasize the imbalances of employment for women who seek professional employment in Ghana and examine why this is so.

*Gender gap:* Inequality leads to gaps, and when the ratio of employment for men and women are unequal, it is important that the gaps are addressed. Affum-Osei et al. (2019) and ILO (2020) labor market profiles highlighted the gender gaps that exist in employment of women compared to men and how this affects economic growth. Therefore, the study assessed the experiences of postgraduate women searching for professional jobs to understand the gender gaps that exist for Ghanaian women.

*Gender inequality:* Women and men play important roles in social, cultural, and economic growth and development. Hence, the imbalances in the distribution of resources, unequal opportunities, and in decision making promote gender gaps and affects economic growth (Klasan, 2018; Shubh & Shivam, 2019; UN Women, 2018). Studies by the ILO (2017), GSS (2019), and the GSS 2021 population census (GSS, 2021) suggested that there are gender gaps in employment and labor distribution, and



more specifically in the Ghanaian economy, which affects productivity. In this study, therefore, I examined the job search experiences of graduate women to understand the gender inequality/imbalance in the Ghanaian economy for professional women.

*Job search/employment:* Economies engage their human resources into various sectors as a labor force to contribute towards economic growth. Affum-Osei et al. (2019) suggested that despite Ghana's economic growth, there continues to be challenges in the job creation sector. In this study, I used the phenomenon of job search interchangeably with employment; hence, postgraduate women searching for professional jobs were classified as unemployed or looking for employment.

*Leadership:* Higher positions of decision making and leadership promote good governance and economic management. Despite this, women's roles have been inferior to men in social, political, and economic positions as they have been marginalized in many leadership positions, which reflects on productivity and governance of several economies (Moreno-Gomez & Yancy, 2017; UN, 2017). Therefore, it is imperative that both genders are given equal opportunities in leadership positions to support economic growth as gender inequality affects economic performance and development (see Klasan, 2018). According to Affum-Osei et al. (2019), the growth of an economy can be assessed by its ability to employ more people in many sectors, and women are in the disadvantage in leadership positions. The study, therefore, addressed the employment of professional women into leadership and decision making positions to contribute their skills and knowledge in support of social and economic development.

*Master's (Degree):* Many students, after acquiring their initial degree at the bachelor's level, pursue an additional degree for 1/2 years to attain their Master's degree in specializing in different fields of work. These higher degrees are graduate programs that focus on a special area of interest in science, arts or philosophy, or area of professional practice. Asif et al. (2019), Kgotlhane et al. (2018), and Yasar and Turgut (2020) highlighted issues of anxiety, inequality, and challenges of unemployment faced by university graduates and women in the labor market. The Ghana Living Standards Survey 6 (2014) and 7 (2019) referred to higher education at the Master's level to include Master of Science, Master of Arts, Master of Business Administration, and Master of Philosophy. In this study, postgraduates/higher education was aligned to the acquisition of a Master's degree in science, arts, and philosophy in any special area of interest.

*Phenomenology:* Theoretical frameworks have their origins from diverse knowledge of philosophies of science and social knowledge and facilitate the study and understanding of the world (Peoples, 2020). The phenomenological research derives its framework from the phenomenological philosophy, which describes something important and how it operates and reveals itself in the lived experiences of those who encountered it (Peoples, 2020). There are two approaches to the phenomenological study, and this includes Husserl's transcendental approach and the hermeneutic phenomenological approach by Heidegger (see Peoples, 2020). In this study, I adopted Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenological approach to allow for the inclusion of previous knowledge and preconceptions of the researcher and the participant in understanding the phenomenon of job search for postgraduate women (see Suddick, et al., 2020) . The

hermeneutic approach helped me to examine the lived experiences of persons in several parts in trying to understand the whole phenomenon through a circle of examination and reexamination of stories for better interpretation until the phenomenon emerged (see Peoples, 2020). Using the Heideggerian approach allowed me and the participants to review past (preunderstandings and for-conceptions) and current experiences (lived experiences of participants) while modifying knowledge and renewing and joining pieces of information as provided as new evidence and data that were relevant to the study (see Giorgi et al., 2017; Peoples, 2020). Essentially, the Heideggerian philosophy, unlike Husserl's transcendental approach, allows the use of feminist theory, which focuses on women's issues as a basis for the research and also supports the disclosure of bias, experiences, and previous understanding of what happened to help explain and interpret the experiences of participants (Peoples, 2020).

*Philosophy:* Philosophies are theories that guide the research process by providing a basis for a study (McCann & Kim, 2017; McFee, 2018). They help explain people's behavior and experiences and use history to answer issues, address questions, and access arguments (Florida State University, n.d.). Some notable philosophers include Marx, Plato, Locke, Mill, Kant, and Aquinas, who addressed a wide range of disciplines, including law, feminism, religion, science, and literature (Florida State University, n.d.). In this qualitative hermeneutic-phenomenological study, the philosophy applied was based on feminist theory, which focuses on women's empowerment, inclusion, and wellbeing (see McFee, 2018). Peoples (2020) suggested that philosophies are fundamental to the exploration and examination of lived experiences of people to

understand why they behave the way they do and to interpret these experiences as an established phenomenon. Therefore, I used the philosophies of the feminist theory as a basis to propound the lived experiences of women inclusion in employment through the job search process to open opportunities for their participation in the labor market and contribute to economic development.

*Professional positions:* Professionals can be employees who have acquired higher degrees, including Master's in science, arts, philosophy, and business, who are engaged in the legislature, management and administration, governance, physicians, among others (GSS, 2019; ILO, 2017). Hence, I sought to examine the employment of professional women who have acquired higher education at the Master's level, including MA, MSc, and MBA.

*Sociocultural:* Social and cultural values of a population have strong impact on the way they behave. Several societies are guided by the sociocultural norms, values, and principles they hold as a people and influences their decisions in characterizing their roles in society (ILO, 2017; UN, 2017; Wood, 2019). According to Abraham et al. (2017) and Abakah, (2018), some cultures within the Ghanaian society ascribe women to household and family chores; hence, it was imperative that I highlighted these societal norms and values, which may impact the job search experiences of postgraduate women. Thus, to understand the experiences of postgraduate Ghanaian women looking for professional jobs, I based the context in the Ghanaian society, their behavior, and how the women's experiences have impacted their job search approach to professional employment.

*Socioeconomic*: The employment of women has social and economic contributions to the Ghanaian economy. The Ghanaian society can benefit from the increased participation of women in leadership, governance, legislature, education, science, and technology through equal employment opportunities and its neglect may have negative consequences (Affum-Osei et al., 2019; Gyabeng, et al., 2019). According to the ILO (2017), UN (2018), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF; 2019), women's contribution to economic growth is essential to national development, and the Ghanaian economy is not an exception. Consequently, I sought to highlight the relevance of women's inclusion in professional employment to enhance economic growth and development.

### **Assumptions**

In this study, I assumed that information provided by participants during the interview was truthful in terms of the events and experiences they lived and that they responded to research questions with honesty. Furthermore, the ages and locations of employment search as provided by participants were assumed to be true reflections of events that took place and participants were not coerced in any way by me in divulging information. Finally, I assumed that participants did not use their personal perceptions or those of other persons known to them but shared their own stories to enhance the research process.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Despite several efforts by the UN, World Bank (WB), ILO, and other gender activist to increase women's participation, encourage women's empowerment, support

Affirmative Action, and promote gender equality, the issue of low employment for women remains a challenge (GSS, 2019; ILO, 2019; WB, 2020). Women continue to struggle in gaining professional employment in organizations regardless of their qualification and competence compared to men; hence, in this study, I examined the job search experiences of postgraduate women who have achieved higher level education status and have or continue to experience challenges in gaining employment in the city of Accra, Ghana.

The boundaries of this study were limited to the city of Accra, Ghana, which has high level of unemployment and more specifically for professional women (see GSS, 2019). The GSS 2021 population census indicated that Ghana's population stood at 30.8 million, with 49.3% accounting for men and 50.7% for women. Despite women being the highest population, the employment population for men stands at 71.1% and 67.1% for women (GSS, 2021). It further noted that the Greater Accra and Ashanti regions continues to be the highest populated cities, with over 1/3 of its residents in Accra accounting for 50.9% women and 49.1% for men (GSS, 2021). While this may not be the same for other cities in the world, and for the study population of 25 to 45 years, the experiences of these women within this age bracket can help understand their experiences and inform policy formulation and improvement in job search experiences towards increase women's professional employment. The ILO (2019) and the GSS (2019) sets the age 15 years and above as an adult and employable age; hence, the target age of 25 years was chosen to set the age for the job search by participants who may have completed both their first and second degree programs. The age bracket of 25 to 45 years was chosen to

capture postgraduate students who fell within this target and had job search experiences 12 to 24 months of after completing their Master's programs. In Ghana, the average age of completing degree programs falls within age 21 to 22 years and 25 to 30 years for master programs/postgraduate and 25 to 45 years and beyond for matured students for both graduate and postgraduate levels (University of Professional Studies, Accra [UPSA], 2020). Hence, setting the age for 25 to 45 years excludes 46 years and above who could be possible participants for this study, and this could be a limitation.

According to Peoples (2020), theoretical frameworks enhance the study of the world through diverse philosophies of science and social knowledge, and the epistemological framework of phenomenology supports the understanding of human experiences and the meaning they attach to them. Furthermore, the use of theories facilitates the researcher's ability to base the qualitative research on methodological approach and to bring other considerations and perspectives to increase understanding and objectivity of the phenomenon (Peoples, 2020). In this study, I adopted the general feminist theory, which focuses on addressing social gender issues that relate to empowerment, inclusion, employment, and inequality (see Peoples, 2020). However, other feminist theories, such as analytical, psychoanalytical feminism, continental feminism, pragmatist feminism, and intersectional feminism, do not directly focus on women's employability (McAfee, 2018; Postl, 2017). These theories advocate for women's rights, social justice, oppression, inclusion, sexism, and gender equality but do not directly align to the employment of professional women.

Again, I excluded Husserl's transcendental approach to the phenomenological study as this approach does not allow for the inclusion of theories or preconceptions, preunderstanding, bias, and previous knowledge on any philosophy as it blocks the mind to any ideas and focuses on gaining new knowledge as it emerges from the study (see Peoples, 2020). Hence, the adoption of the hermeneutic phenomenological approach to the study allowed participants and me to declare bias, preunderstanding, and preconceptions and to align the study to a philosophy that gave credence to the understanding of the phenomenon in consideration with other prior knowledge in existence.

To ensure transferability, the study ensured the research context and assumptions by providing sufficient information on measurements and methodologies applied, including locations, populations, data collection, analysis, coding, and interpretation of data. According to Adu (2019), transferability helps to assess whether the issues identified in the study can be replicated and generalized in other contexts and supports external validity. Essentially, though the study was conducted in Accra, Ghana, West Africa, it outlined its methodologies and data collection and analysis, which can be replicated or generalized for other populations, times, and settings in Africa and beyond, based on the findings of the study of lived experiences of postgraduate women who participated in the study.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of the study included the use of social media (WhatsApp and emails) and the phone-in interviews without in-person observations protocols. Additionally,



participant selection was limited to only three public universities in Ghana and one abroad (United Kingdom). Hence, the exemption of participants (postgraduate Ghanaian women aged 25 to 45 years) from private universities as well as other universities abroad could provide other findings, which may alter the outcome of the study. Other limitations included using postgraduate Ghanaian women in professions such as journalism, legislators and consultants, engineers, lecturers, and academics, which may have limited the scope and impact on the outcome of the findings. The issue of honesty and openness of respondents during the interview could have also been a challenge if participants did not share true experiences or exaggerated some experiences during interviews.

### **Significance of the Study**

The relevance of this study was to examine and understand why postgraduate Ghanaian women have challenges in the job search process and to highlight the issues in order to inform stakeholders towards improving the situation for economic development. The contribution of Ghanaian women through economic development is crucial as the ratio of professional women in employment remains lower than that of men (GSS, 2021). The study also supports administrators, human resource counsellors, employers, and social workers who continue to support women seeking jobs to understand their employment challenges to address their low participation in the labor market. Ghana in collaboration with the UN is implementing the MDG 3 to educate and empower its women to contribute towards economic development (UN Women, 2018). According to the ILO (2017), women who earn incomes are empowered, have economic security, and contribute to their communities. The GLSS 7 (2019) showed the employed populations

by occupation for professionals as 9.0% for men against 7.1% for women, while men formed 1.6% in the legislature and management positions against .08% for women (GSS, 2019). Again, the literacy levels for men is 57.8% against 49.8% for women aged 15 years and above, showing that men have higher literacy levels than women (GSS, 2019). Therefore, identifying the challenges of searching for a job for these women can help highlight the gender disparities in employment for Ghanaian women to inform policy makers, employers, educational institutions, government agencies, and development partners to create avenues for employment and reduce the challenges to increase professional employment for women. This can lead to women empowerment, employment, and earning incomes to support families, communities, and economic development, while creating awareness on how to improve the job search processes in bridging the gap of unemployment for postgraduate Ghanaian women (66.9%) for men against (63.7%) for women (GSS, 2019).

### **Summary**

While there has been strong advocacy and an increase in women's education, the problem of unemployment for educated women continues to persist as they compete for jobs with men in gaining professional employment. In this study, I examined the experiences of postgraduate Ghanaian women aged 25 to 45 years searching for professional employment to understand the barriers and challenges they face in gaining access to equal employment. Shicfman, Oden and Koestner (2019) highlighted the disparities and imbalances in employment ratios for women and men. The Ghana Living Standards Survey 6 and 7 (GSS, 2014; GSS 7, 2019; GSS, 2021) further outlined ratios of

inequalities in the men and women with professional employment in Ghana and indicated the need for an increase in women's employment for economic development. Affum-Osei et al. (2019) noted unemployment challenges in Ghana and indicated that despite the growth and development in Ghana, this has not translated into an increase in employment and high productivity, with more females at a disadvantage.

Consequently, in this chapter, I outlined the introduction and background to the job search/employment for women as well as the phenomenon at the global level and also within the Ghanaian context. Further, I highlighted the problem of the job search for women and the purpose of the study in exploring the job search experiences of postgraduate Ghanaian women aged 25 to 45 years in the city of Accra, Ghana. The research question that set the basis for conducting interviews and gaining deeper understanding of the phenomenon was provided, and the feminist theory was adopted as the philosophical underpinning for the study using the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to explore the past and present experiences of the women to share their story. The chapter further provided the nature of the study by highlighting the rationale and selection of the design and methods used for data collection and analysis. Definitions of various terminology used in the study on women, employment, social, and cultural and economic issues relating to the study were provided within the context of the study. Additionally, assumptions were made based on geographical settings, participants' data, and information provided, and approaches were highlighted to provide reasons to give meaning to my context of the study. The scope and delimitations highlighting the boundaries of the study, populations selected and why others were not selected, and the

potential generalization of the study were duly stated. Limitations of the study in the design, methods adopted, weaknesses, and researcher bias on the phenomenon were indicated as well as measures to be adopted to address these issues in the study. Finally, the significance of the study to policy makers, institutions, employers, and women were provided to support future studies and bring about positive change in increasing employment of professional women to empower them and to enhance economic growth.

In Chapter 2, I focus on literature that supported the phenomenon of the job search for women, women's empowerment, inequality, and their inclusion through employment towards their contribution to social and economic growth. The theoretical framework of the feminist theory and the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach was used as a blue-print/basis for the study in examining the experiences of postgraduate women searching for professional employment.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The contributions of women in social and economic development is acknowledged the world over, and their employment and job search experiences play a major role in their inclusion in the labor market. The WB, (ILO, UN, governments, and other organizations have continued to stress the inclusion of women through education, knowledge, and skills development towards their contribution in decision-making processes for themselves, their families, and communities where they belong (UN Women, 2018). The UN Women (2018) noted that the economic contributions of women ensure their participation in decision making and close the gender gaps through productivity, income equality, and economic diversification. The UN MDG seeks to empower women through gender equality (Goal 5), promote decent employment (Goal 8), alleviate poverty (Goal 1), and reduce inequalities (Goal 10; UN Women, 2018). According to the UN (2018) and the IMF (2019), increasing female employment enhances economic growth and gross domestic product (GDP). Studies by the ILO (2017) and the WB (2020) showed that women contribute immensely to the socioeconomic development of nations, and the neglect or disregard for their contributions affects the development of nations.

However, the ratio of employment of men is higher than for women in the labor market, highlighting disparities in the employment of women (ILO, 2019) and the traditional, cultural, and religious difficulties and challenges they encounter in seeking employment to increase their participation in the labor market (Wood, 2019). Abakah (2018) and Petronella (2017) discussed the challenges Ghanaian women face in their

pursuit of governance and leadership positions through professional employment to contribute to decision making and equal career opportunities. Ghanaian women encounter several barriers, stereotypes, and pushbacks that affect their job search and participation in professional employment (Darko-Asumadu et al. 2018; GSS, 2019).

Despite these studies, there remains gaps in the literature that focus on the job search experiences of Ghanaian women seeking professional employment. Hence, in this study, I explored the experiences of postgraduate Ghanaian women to understand their challenges and difficulties, with the objective of highlighting these challenges and drawing attention to employers, government, and institutions to help reduce the bottlenecks and create opportunities for the employment of more professional women towards economic development.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

To locate literature relevant to job search for postgraduate women, the literature focused on women, women's empowerment, gender inequality, unemployment, and underemployment. I applied search engines, journals, and articles from the Walden library, Ebsco, ProQuest, Sage Publication, social science databases, international organizations including the WB, ILO, and IMF in supporting research on the phenomenon. Additional data were sourced from government agencies and accredited institutions in Ghana, including the GSS, as well as think tanks such as IMANI Ghana and Ghana Center for Democratic Development, on afro barometer statistics on employment and women related issues to support the literature review on job searching within the Ghanaian community.

## Theoretical Framework

This qualitative hermeneutic-phenomenological study was based on the feminist theory, which focuses on marginalized women, empowerment, inclusion, and gender inequality and served as the foundation that guides the research design and analysis in highlighting the lived experiences of postgraduate women searching for professional jobs (see McFee, 2018; Peoples, 2020). Peoples (2020) suggested that the theoretical framework and the literature review process work together to support and guide the logical development, interpretation, and understanding of the various parts of the literature review. Hence, the feminist theory was used to explore the experiences, challenges, and difficulties women encounter in the job search process and to outline and critically analyze these experiences to better understand the phenomenon (McCann & Kim, 2017). Using the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach allowed me to include preunderstanding/knowledge of social and cultural events that occurred in the world of the women as they share their lived experiences, their being there, and how that affects them (see Peoples, 2020). I used the feminist theory as a basis to focus and examine women's experiences through the lenses of empowerment, gender discrimination, inequality, and gender roles, while aligning their experiences in relation to the job search/employment encounters (see McCann & Kim, 2017; Peoples, 2020; UN Women, 2018). Thus, the selected theoretical framework was aligned to the study of the experiences of postgraduate women searching for professional jobs in the city of Accra, Ghana.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **A Phenomenological Approach to the Study**

The two main approaches under phenomenology are the philosophies of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976; Peoples, 2020). Whereas Husserl was the founder of the phenomenological approach, his student Heidegger developed further understanding and philosophies on the theory (see Peoples, 2020). Heidegger's philosophy of preunderstanding was later expounded and supported by Gadamer (1900-2002) as fore-conceptions, new lenses. Gadamer believed that one's understanding is modified by the continuous renewal of information as it is revised and interpreted as one looks at the phenomenon over and over again (as cited in Peoples, 2020). Husserl's transcendental and descriptive approach focused on being a stranger, intentionally suspending, bracketing, and closing all thoughts, bias, and previous understanding about the phenomenon to bring out clarity as a researcher studies the issues (Giorgi et al., 2017; Peoples, 2020). However, Heidegger's hermeneutic interpretative approach was adopted as his philosophy allowed participants and the researcher to open up to previous, past or fore understanding and experiences of the phenomenon (Peoples, 2020). Heidegger believed that inclusion of previous experiences enhances the understanding of the whole process and helps breakdown information gathered to gain new knowledge for further interpretation. Heidegger suggested that the hermeneutic approach takes turns in a circle as a researcher breaks down the information into parts, reflects on them by merging these ideas into a broader framework, and tries to understand what took place and why to emerge with new understanding of the past and



present experiences of participants (Peoples, 2020). Using Heidegger's approach facilitated the analysis of the patterns, codes, and themes that emerged in the interviews and coding them appropriately (see Peoples, 2020). Heidegger's approach assisted me in capturing and understanding both past and present job search experiences of participants to clarify what happened and why and also to interpret new and emerging data in the course of the research.

### **Purpose of Using the Feminist Theory**

The use of the feminist theory for this qualitative hermeneutic-phenomenological study allowed me to examine the experiences of women seeking professional jobs and to understand and interpret these lived experiences as shared by the participants. The feminist theory focuses on women's inclusion, employment, empowerment (independence/self-actualization), and their vulnerability (McCann & Kim, 2017). Adopting the feminist theory and Heidegger's hermeneutic-phenomenological allowed me explore women's job search experiences and to reflect on past and present experiences (see Peoples, 2020). Conversely, the use of the Husserl's transcendental or descriptive approach, which focuses on bracketing or blocking previous knowledge, would not have allowed participants to share past/previous job search experiences (see Adu, 2019; Giorgi et al., 2017; Peoples, 2020). Additionally, Husserl's transcendental approach does not allow the use of a theory, as it focuses on suspending theories or other thoughts and focusing solely and intentionally on the phenomenon of job search as described by the participants to gain more clarity on the issue (see Peoples, 2020). Consequently, Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenological approach was adopted to

allow for the use of the feminist theory and to give participants the opportunity to open their mind to previous and present job search experiences to enrich the deep understanding of the phenomenon and what they encountered in the process.

Therefore, using the feminist theoretical framework, the study enhanced the exploration and understanding of the lived experiences of the women, their job search/employment, their inclusion into leadership, empowerment, and equality have been considered during the job search process (see Adu, 2019). The outcome of the study can help guide advocacy, human resource managers, and policy programs for change in political, social, and economic discourse for women's inclusion. Additionally, it highlighted issues of imbalances in society to help women earn incomes and make choices and decisions as individuals in contributing to family, communities, and society.

### **Women's Unemployment/Job Search**

Though Ghana's women form 51% of the population, their participation and decision making in economic development is limited (GSS, 2019; UN, 2017). This can be attributed to the patriarchal, male-dominant sociocultural system, which assigns minor roles to women compared to men (Abakah, 2018; UN Women, 2018; Wood, 2019). Studies by Anderson (2019), Asif et al. (2019), and Stephan (2018) suggested that marriage, cultural, and family issues hinder women from achieving their employment status (i.e., underemployment) or gaining employment. Abakah (2018), ILO (2017), and WB (2020) suggested that the increasing women's employment and giving them equal employment opportunities breaks barriers and cultural traditions and support socioeconomic development. Despite these sociocultural values and challenges, Ghanaian

women continue to fight for gender equality and combine family obligations with career development by playing the dual roles of marital and professional lifestyles (Dowuona-Hammond et al., 2020; Gyabeng et al., 2019). Asiedu et al. (2018) and Darko-Asumadu et al. (2018) suggested that Ghanaian women in management positions represent a combination of cultural/traditional values and social lifestyles and that their sociocultural, organizational, and situational environment create some barriers for their professional and career development. Htun et al. (2019) indicated that some laws, barriers, and challenges continue to limit women's ability to gain employment, economic independence, and income levels, hence the need to reduce gender gaps and inequalities to enhance economic growth. Both the Ghana Living Standard Survey 7 (2019) and the GSS (2015) revealed that Ghanaian women continue to lag in their employment in professional roles, with women in urban areas such as Accra being most affected.

Studies by Adu-Oppong et al. (2017) and the ILO (2017) suggested that despite the increase in education of women at the higher level, their contribution to socioeconomic development has not been equal to men. Additionally, the Ghana Living Standards Survey 7 (2019) and the ILO (2019) suggested that though women form 51% of the population, their representation at leadership positions, such as the legislature, is 13% (36 out of 275), although their engagement at professional and managerial positions stands at 61% and 65% for men. As Largade and Ostry (2018) proposed, the redistribution of resources among men and women gives women equal opportunities and access to employment, whereas investment in women employment leads to economic growth, which benefits more in society. Therefore, provision of equal employment

opportunities for postgraduate women at the professional level can increase the contributions of the human capital to enhance economic development.

### **Unemployment for Women and Its Attendant Effect on the Economy**

While the increase in women's employment is critical, it also affects their lives and the economy. In some countries, unemployment comes with intimate partner violence and psychological challenges (Bhalotra et al. 2021), increased poverty, criminal activities, and low community participation and gender targeted support (Breuer & Asiedu, 2017; Diraditsile & Ontetse, 2017). This is more prevalent in African countries and in Ghana as the cultural and traditional roles assign leadership and income earning positions for men and supportive roles for women (Boateng, 2018; Gilliam & Talpade, 2021; Osei-Hwedie & Agormor, 2018). Despite the need to increase women in the labor market, the employment of educated women leads to violence and backlash from partners while some men have psychological problems due to cultural and traditional stereotyping and income differences (Bhalotra et al., 2021; ILO, 2017). Increasing the engagement of educated women into professional employment supports household incomes and families (ILO, 2019), reduces corruption and political opportunistic challenges, and protects children and women's rights. However, this comes at a cost for some families when women earn more incomes than their spouses, as spousal arguments increase, family time is reduced, women disrespect their husbands, and men lose their leadership roles and attend to household activities (see Bhalotra et al., 2021). Van der Lippe et al., (2017) confirmed this assertion and noted that while unemployment for both men and women support the assignment of household chores, women take up additional roles than men.

They posited that unemployed women spend more time on housework than men, especially when there are higher unemployment rates in the country (Van der Lippe et al., 2017), and this can lead to career adaptability and self-esteem (Ismail, 2017). Despite the above challenges, the impact of women's participation in the labor market outweighs its attendant effects both for families and economies; hence, access to women's employment should be increased to support their inclusion, decision making, incomes, and family support.

### **Economic Contributions of Educated Women**

According to the ILO (2019), 4.5% of the total number of Ghanaians with advanced/higher education are unemployed. Furthermore, the GSS (2019) provided that the literacy rate (secondary and higher education) for males (6.6%) is higher than for females (3.1%) for persons with a university education. Of these persons with a university education, 0.6% are male professionals and 0.2% are female. Educating women at the higher level of postgraduate education is essential for empowering women, their inclusion, and providing incomes that allow them to contribute to society and economic development. Studies have indicated that the education of women at the postgraduate/higher level provides skills, knowledge, and competencies, which enhances their opportunities for employment at the professional level and their participation in policy making to address issues affecting women, children, and society (Manzor & Wali, 2018; UN Women, 2018). Abraham et al. (2017) noted that higher education is a strong factor in the development of the human resources of a country, which leads to high efficiency and acceptability of employment. According to the UN Women (2018), the

labor participation for women aged 25 to 54 is 63% compared to 94% for men. Further studies by Manzor and Wali (2018) and the WB (2020) suggested that the provision of equal employment opportunities for both men and women leads to economic growth, while high employment leads to enhanced resources. It is important to note that despite Ghana's economic growth, its employment opportunities have not translated into employment for the country's youth (Affum-Osei et al., 2019). Thus, Ghana's ability to increase its human capital into several sectors by employing more women can strengthen economic growth and enhance nation building (Affum-Osei et al., 2019; Manzor & Wali, 2018). According to the ILO (2019), Ghana's unemployment rate for 2019 was 4.46% for women and 4.21% for men. Consequently, the increase in employment ratios for educated women at the professional level can ensure their participation in decision making at the policy level, leadership within communities, districts and governance levels, increased incomes, and economic independence (Htun et al., 2019; ILO, 2017).

Tables 1 and 2 provide data from the Ghana Living Standards Survey 6 (2014) and 7 (2019) on Ghana's employment to population ratio (proportion of population employed) for persons aged 15 years and above (GSS, 2014; GSS, 2019). Table 1 highlights the employment of professionals, legislators, and managers for both male and female Ghanaians above 15 years, whereas Table 2 provides data on the total working population, the employed and unemployed for both men and women within the urban and rural settings (see GSS, 2019).

**Table 1***Employed Population 15-35 Years/15 Years + by Occupation and Sex*

Ghana Living Standards Survey 2014 (6) vs 2019 (7)	GLSS6 - 2014		GLSS7 - 2019	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Professionals (15 years and above)	6.6%	3.4%	7.9%	5.0%
Employed professionals (15 – 35 years)	10.6%	5.4%	9.0%	7.1%
Legislators/managers (15 years and above)	1.8%	1.1%	2.5%	1.2%
Employed legislators/managers (15 – 35 years)	3.1%	1.8%	1.6%	0.8%
Total working population/economically active	77.1%		65%	

Table 1 shows that there has been an increase in both male and female professionals, legislators, and managers above 15 years during the period of 5 years (2014-2019). Despite the positive increase in growth in employment of professionals, legislators/managers the ratio of male/female employment for these professions have been marginal, hence the need for government to continue to pursue policies and programs aimed at empowerment, equality, and more opportunities for educated women to take up these positions to increase the human capital, growth and development of the country (Htun et al., 2019).

**Table 2***Ghana's Employment to Population Ratio for 15 Years and Older*

Ghana Living Standards Survey 2014 (6) vs 2019 (7)	GLSS6 - 2014		GLSS7 - 2019	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Total employed	78.4%	73.1%	66.9%	63.3%
Total unemployed	1.6%	1.8%	5.4%	6.4%
Unemployed (urban)	2.4%	2.6%	7.6%	8.1%

Unemployed (rural)	0.8%	0.9%	3.0%	4.5%
Employed (urban)	73.3%	67.9%	63.3%	59.1%
Employed (rural)	83.7%	79.9%	71%	68.2%

In Table 2, Ghana's employment for both male and females for the period 2014 to 2019 (5 years) showed that total employment for both genders in 2014 was higher than for 2019, while total unemployment ratios for 2014 (1.6% males; 1.8% females) was lower than for 2019 (male 5.4%; 6.4% for females). In 2014, urban unemployment for females was higher at 2.6% than for males 2.4% and similarly higher in 2019 (8.1% females: 7.6% males) showing high urban unemployment for females in both 2014 and 2019. The data for 2014 and 2019 showed higher urban unemployment rates for women (2.6% in 2014 and 8.1% in 2019) than for men (2.4% in 2014 and 7.6% in 2019) hence the disparity/inequality in employment ratios for urban populations.

Despite the unemployment situations highlighted above, the employment of females in urban populations in 2019 continued to lag behind at 59.1% against their male counterparts at 63.3%, indicating that though there were employment opportunities for both genders, more males were employed in urban areas in 2019 (63.3%) than females at 59.1% in 2019. Essentially, Table two showed that urban employment opportunities for males were higher at 73.3% (2014) and 63.3% (2019) than for females at 67.9% (2014) and 59.1% (2019) respectively.

Again the tables (one & two) show the inequalities in employment for professional women and even when employment opportunities are available, more men are hired than women, hence the need to explore the experiences of postgraduate women



in urban areas like Accra, Ghana to examine what the issues are and to highlight these for policy formulation and increased of employment for professional women.

### **Economic Impact of Unemployment for Ghanaian Women**

The economic impact of unemployment can reduce the growth and development of a country. This is confirmed by Kebeer (2017) that, education, employment and empowerment of women provides access to economic resources, expansion and growth. Consequently, Ghana is working with the WB and UN on implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, towards decent employment especially for females (Goal 8) and bridging gender equality (Goal 5) to enhance economic development (UN Women, 2018). Abraham et al., (2017) suggest that the increasing roles of women in the labor market has become a lifeline for families while breaking traditional, cultural and socio-economic barriers in the globalization process. Biagyira (2018) further suggests that the increase in jobs can reduce educated and uneducated employment. However, failure to employ more women can lead to health, poverty, inequality, psychological stress, family problems as well as community participation (Bahiru & Mengistu, 2018; Breuer & Asiedu, 2017; Diraditsile & Onteste, 2017; Yasar & Turgut, 2020). In Ghana women form the bedrock of support for household management and livelihood activities despite earning lower incomes as both home keepers and career women/professionals (Boateng, 2018). Hence their professional employment into organizations, governance and leadership positions will increase household incomes and support families. The UN Women (2018) notes that the empowerment of women leads to access to decent jobs, productive resources, independence, voice and agency, decision making and

contributions to local and international platforms. Additionally, the employment of educated women at the higher levels/postgraduate level will bridge the gap of unemployed women, increase economic and social development while empowering them to play an essential role as individuals, support families and community initiatives (ILO, 2019; Klasan, 2018). Therefore, it is imperative that more women are employed into professional positions to reduce the employment gap, increase incomes, promote women inclusion at leadership and policy levels and contribute knowledge, and experience for economic, social and national development (see , 2019).

### **Contribution of Women in Governance, Leadership, and Politics**

Globally, women are caregivers of children and elders and help manage family and economic challenges of households (see Klasan, 2018). Women's increased participation in decision making and control within households will enhance the health and education of children and distribution of resources (Kebeer, 2017) and their inclusion and contribution at leadership levels leads to positive impact and growth in economies (Baskaran et al., 2017). In Africa, women support the family due to cultural and societal roles, while the men are the breadwinners (Boateng, 2018; Osei-Hwedie & Agormor, 2018). Consequently, the employment of women will lead to leadership positions, increased incomes and grant access to resources in addressing the inequalities and supporting economic performance (Klasan, 2018; Petronella, 2017). The ILO (2017) notes that despite the increase in highly educated women who need and search for jobs, institutional measures and policies to obtain equal labor market participation have not been provided to address the challenge. The contributions of women in decision making

and governance levels will increase income levels, reduce poverty, and support families and communities (see Klasan, 2018).

Ghana's support for employment of women dates back to Independence with the appointment of a female legislator and the establishment of the National Council of Women to insure the inclusion of women in economic development (see GSS, 2014). Accordingly, Ghana has participated and supported several initiatives (legislations and policies) towards increasing women participation in policy and decision making, promoting equality and empowerment, reducing discrimination of gender, race, social, economic and education through legislation in its constitution in Article 17 (two & four) (Ghana's Constitution, 1992). Furthermore, Ghana's National Gender Policy (2015) by the Ministry of Gender Children and Social Protection addresses issues of inequality and employment of women and strategies to enhance participation in leadership, governance and decision making across all sectors (MoGCSP, 2015). The policy also aims at enforcing legislations to promote women inclusion and economic rights, transforming gender norms and cultural stereotypes, unequal power and implementing gender mainstreaming in a bid to reduce women unemployment and discrimination against women (MoGCSP, 2015).

The WB (2019) indicates that women hold 24.6% parliamentary positions globally, while women form 13% of Ghana's parliament (UN Women, 2019). It further indicates that only three countries have over 50% women in parliament including 61% for Rwanda, 53.2% for Cuba and 53.1% for Bolivia (UN Women, 2019). In Europe the higher inclusion of women has contributed to more participation and economic

development. Bagues and Campa (2021) asserted that the introduction of the quota system in Spain contributed to the increase of women's participation politics, despite failing to remove the barriers and difficulties that hinder them from participating in these roles. Ghana's parliament has a total of 275 members and continues to advocate for women's participation and decision making towards gender equality, hence it has increased women's participation from 36 in 2016 to 40 in 2020 (Osei-Hwedie & Agomor, 2018). Of the 275 parliamentarians 14.5% women are Ministers of State and District Chief Executives (Gyabeng, et al., 2019; Osei-Hwedie & Agormor, 2018). Ghana's support for women's inclusion dates back to 1959 when it set a quota for the inclusion of women in parliament and ratified a UN recommendation for 30% quota of women in elective and appointment positions (Asekere & Awaisu, 2021). However, this has not translated into an increase in women's political leadership as parties fail to close the gender gaps due to culture and strong political will (Osei-Hwedie & Agomor, 2018). Ghanaian women continue to seek leadership positions but are left behind in the selection process as they compete with their male counterparts for similar positions (Rincon et al. 2017). Challenges and difficulties that dissuade women from participation include politics of insults, family obligations, cultural and traditional believes, stereotypes and high cost of funding in lobbying for these positions (Osei-Hwedie & Agomor, 2018). Bauer and Darkwah, (2021) suggest that despite these challenges, there has been an increase in women's participation in the executive and legislature Ghana's Fourth republic. According to Amponsah et al. (2019) women's inclusion in decision making at the governance and leadership positions is critical and a commitment to pass a legislation

to bridge this gap will reduce the disparities. Ghanaian women continue to seek professional, leadership and governance positions to make decisions that will pave way for more women to contribute to productivity and nation building, hence the redress of job search challenges is critical.

Employment for women is higher in the informal sector such as Agriculture and trade, with a higher number taking up the service and industry sector (GSS, 2019). However, the ratio of women in the professional sector is lower at 61% compared to 65% for men, hence the need for access and employment of more graduate women to take up professional employment, politics, governance, legislature, and public sector management positions to contribute to national development. In this study, I will explore the experiences of postgraduate women seeking professional jobs are examined to better understand the reasons for the lower number of professional women employed in Ghana despite the governments interventions and initiatives to enhance women inclusion at all sectors of employment.

Manzor and Wali, (2018) suggest, there is the need for policy makers to enhance education and employment towards increasing employment. Bhalotra et. al., (2021) note that women's incomes contribute to household and livelihood in both formal and informal support to economic development and this is an indicator of strengthening growing economies like Ghana. The increase in women's employment in governance, leadership and political positions will make a difference by paving the way for addressing issues and challenges that concern women and children adequately (UN Women, 2018). Given that women understand their challenges better and can provide guidelines and

suggestions on policies that will enhance their productivity and contributions to the economy, the engagement of women into decent and higher level positions will help address some challenges while creating opportunities for initiatives and contribution of skills and competences otherwise ignored.

### **Contribution of Women to Business and Entrepreneurship**

Women contribute immensely to entrepreneurship and business, hence the employment of women in these areas will increase the human capital necessary for growth in these sectors (ILO, 2018). In Africa, men are noted to be the breadwinners of the households while women contribute through other entrepreneurial and business operations (Osei-Hwedie & Agormor, 2018). In Ghana, women's roles at home and careers are important to the sustenance of the family and men hold dominant positions in careers that earn more income (Gilliam & Talpade, 2021). Due to the patriarchal family culture and roles, women work harder to find and keep jobs to earn incomes to support the family, hence they dominate the marketplaces with low incomes (Gilliam & Talpade, 2021). However, in order to increase family incomes, as well as community, social and economic development, it is imperative that educated women are given opportunities to earn additional incomes to support the family, communities and the society they belong to. Women entrepreneurs perform several activities and combine time management, diligence and resourcefulness to enhance their operations while creating several opportunities for others (see Shuhh & Shivami, 2019). Women's participation in leadership positions in developing countries contribute to business improvements and growth (Moreno-Gomez et al. 2018).

In Europe, the contributions of women has led to increased economic growth and increased GDP for Organization of Economic Cooperation Development (OECD) countries by USD 6 million and this can be replicated in African countries like Ghana to enhance socioeconomic growth and better livelihoods (ILO, 2018; UN Women, 2018). Though the employment ratio for men and women in Ghana is marginal (4.2% for men and 4.5% for women) the gender gap for employing professional women is 5.0% and 7.9% for men, hence the need to employ more educated women (at postgraduate level) to close this gap (ILO, 2019). The employment to population ratio for Ghana's unemployment in the urban areas stands at 61% compared with 65% for rural areas, hence high unemployment in urban areas with a large percentage of women compared to men without jobs (GSS, 2019). Additionally, the employment gap by gender in all occupations is higher for men than women in various employment positions creating a gap in the ratio of employment (GSS, 2019). It is important that skills and knowledge acquired by women are put to use and directed at empowering them into business and entrepreneurship sectors to earn incomes while creating initiatives, policies and supporting in governance and leadership positions.

### **Barriers and Challenges to Employment**

Studies show that women suffer discrimination, cultural and structural barriers in the job search process, hence a reduction in discriminatory laws and policies will increase economic growth (ILO, 2020; WB, 2020). The UN Women (2018) suggests that the relegation of women into background positions including decision making, unequal resource distribution and electoral positions account for some of the challenge's women

face in contributing to the Ghanaian economy. Evidently, there are reasons for the gaps in gender unemployment at the professional level in Accra, with women's unemployment at (4.5%) and (4.2%) for men (GSS, 2019; ILO, 2019). It is important to note that gender gaps reduce economic performance hence the need to employ more professional women to reduce inequalities and enhance economic growth (see Bagues & Campa, 2021; Klasan, 2018).

### **Challenges Facing Women Seeking Professional Employment**

Women's roles and responsibilities at home dissuade them from reaching potential employment and career opportunities as their culture demands they take care of the homes and their families regardless of their education and professional competence (Gilliam & Talpade, 2021; Wood, 2019). Despite their education and professional competence, Ghanaian women are encouraged to get married and find jobs that will support their husbands as primary income earners (Gilliam & Talpade, 2021). Women who secure professional employment play the dual role of work and life and endure the pressure that come with work and family responsibilities (Darko-Asumadu et al. 2018). Hence the focus is on seeking jobs and not professional employment or careers that will place them at leadership positions to contribute to decision making or development but on earning incomes to support the family (see Gilliam & Talpade, 2021; ILO, 2017). Whiles most Ghanaian women in the urban cities are geared towards independence, professional employment and career advancement, the sub-urban and rural settings focus on household roles and petty trades and jobs that earn incomes to support the family (see Gilliam & Talpade, 2021). These roles and responsibilities serve as difficulties that



hinder the career choices, job search and professional employment of most Ghanaian women who seek to be included in the labor market (Darko-Asumadu et al., 2018; Gibson et al., 2017).

Whereas Ghanaian women are encouraged to gain higher education and secure jobs to support their future husbands and families, their male counterparts are encouraged to aim at higher professional employment, governance and leadership positions as breadwinners and leaders of the family (see Gilliam & Talpade, 2021). This sets a pace for disparity, inequality in the jobs hunt process as it creates the perception of gender roles and leads to gaps in professional employment positions for women.

### **Cultural and Religious Challenges Facing Educated Women in Securing Jobs**

The Ghanaian culture encourages women to work however it does not inspire and push them into higher career positions due to the patriarchal, traditional, and religious gender practices which have governed the society for decades (Wood, 2019; Gilliam & Talpade, 2021). According to Rincon et al. (2017) though women strive to take up senior management positions they are faced with many challenges. Abakah (2018) attributes these challenges to the patriarchal culture while, Gilliam and Talpade (2021) agreed with this assertion and note that these cultural and traditional roles are embedded in the upbringing of women and men in their formative years prior to and during their selection of professions into higher education.

Wood (2019) asserts that society's history is shaped by past and present events and the patriarchal system forms one of history and religious beliefs that continue to shape the lives of many communities and families. Africans and Ghanaians in particular

rely on religious beliefs to guide and shape their way of life, hence the perception that women play lesser roles to men and should allow men to take up higher and stronger responsibilities forms a challenge for progression and inclusion in decision making and job seeking processes. The patriarchal system promotes male supremacy and relies on men to be the leaders and breadwinners in the family; hence women are not encouraged to compete with men in job searches, rather they are guided to allow the men to take up employment to earn incomes for the family while they support the family with whatever incomes they find. Indeed, in some religious systems, women are required to desist from making decisions, owning land, earning incomes, and contributing to discussions within the household (see ILO, 2019; Wood, 2019). These deeply rooted traditional, religious beliefs serve as bottlenecks for highly educated women to seek professional and leadership positions in the labor market as they are seen as rebels or insolent should they do otherwise (see Wood, 2019). Consequently, with women labeled as dominant and household partners and men as leaders, women who acquire higher education do so for the benefit of their own knowledge and personal attainment rather than for participating in decision making, seeking employment and earning incomes as equal leaders and partners in the society (see Wood, 2019).

### **Employment Discrimination**

The ILO (2017) asserts that women face more discrimination in employment than men, and this prevents or reduces their chances of employment. It further suggests that women face discrimination in social, cultural and structural ways and delays their employment compared to men (ILO, 2017; ILO, 2020). Breuer and Asiedu (2017) posit

that women, compared to men, face higher unemployment across the world, and gender discrimination exists for graduate students. Albanesi and Sahin (2017) note that though gender unemployment rates were positive for both men and women in the 1980's the differences faded in 1983 and women continue to face higher unemployment than men. Darko-Asumadu et al. (2018) posit that employers tend to favor unmarried workers especially women than those who are married as they carry more responsibilities and have to merge family and career responsibilities. This position is supported by the GSS (2019) that gender gaps exist in employment of women as they encounter difficulties and violations which could otherwise secure their employment. Gilliam and Talpade (2021) suggests that gender roles and inequalities serve as discriminatory factors in supporting women's inclusion and employment in leadership positions. While Wood (2019) supports this position that stereotyping and inequalities in cultural and religious traditions also enhance discriminatory practices, he notes that it further denies women the opportunity to serve in leadership and decision making positions. Amoah-Boateng (2018) argues that the gender inequalities in politics which led to discrimination for women's participation informed the formation of a women's manifesto for Ghana. This effort strengthened and increased women's participation and right to contribute to decision making at the leadership and governance levels in recent times (see Amoah-Boampong, 2018).

Gender discrimination in social institutions affects women's participation in labor market and economic growth (Anderson, 2019) and discrimination could be in age, gender, ethnic, wage, background and parental leave (Htun et al., 2019; ILO, 2017). Countries across the world continue to inhibit women's employment, inheritance,

resource ownership or ability to act independently (Htun et al., 2019), while some discriminatory laws and policies hinder women's employment and managing family life (Htun et al., 2019). The ILO (2020) suggests that women face more discrimination in social and cultural barriers which hinder their job search experiences. In Ghana, about 2.4 million persons above 15 years are unemployed with 4.5% being women compared to men at 4.2% (GSS, 2019). Over the years women have been discriminated against in the labor force as they were inferior to men, however with the increasing numbers of highly educated women this has changed, hence the need for equal access to job market to sustain this effort (see ILO, 2017; Van der Lippe et al., 2017).

Ghana's gender policy aims to address these gaps in education, socioeconomic and cultural issues by empowering women (including the disabled) to have safe and secure livelihoods with equal opportunities to decent work and incomes (MoGCSP, 2015). Ndinda and Tidings (2018) and Bulley et al., (2017) posit that gender inequality and discrimination reduces a country's level of income and growth, especially for low income countries. This assertion is supported by Darku-Asumadu et al., (2018) that gender-based discrimination in social institutions reduces per capita income and women's participation, contribution in the labor force and total productivity. Additionally, the loss of human capital as a result of gender inequality results in 16% (USD 12 trillion) loss of income world-wide (ILO, 2017). According to the GSS (2019) there is a gender gap in unemployment in the Ghanaian economy and women are at a disadvantage due to discrimination among other factors. Morsey and Mukasa, (2019) suggest that women's participation in the labor market is lower than men due to discrimination on cultural,

religious, and institutional factors. Hence, they have to work harder than their male counterparts to enhance their job seeking opportunities. Discrimination in the hiring and promotion of women at employment positions serves as a deterrent for other highly educated women to aspire to take up professional positions (Anderson 2019; Bulley et al., 2017). Consequently, the inclusion and employment of professional women will contribute to individuals, families, communities and economic growth, hence the need to explore the experiences and challenges associated with job search for professional women to understand the challenges and difficulties that affect them.

### **Understanding the Challenges of Job Search for Women and Bridging the Gap**

Though there are challenges for both men and women in seeking jobs, the difficulties of women outweigh that of men (ILO, 2019). It is also noted that while women support the family at the household levels their contribution as professionals in management, leadership and governance levels support economic development (WB, 2020). Understanding the challenges, they encounter and providing access to increase their participation in the labor market is essential to improving the economic conditions of nations, communities and families. Abakah (2018) assert that Ghanaian women are denied their contribution to nation building due to their relegation through inequality in employment, minor pathways for career development and stereotyping at cultural and traditional levels. Both the Ghana Living Standards Survey 6 & 7 (GSS, 2014; GSS, 2019) highlight the low level of women professionals in leadership, governance and management levels, while showing the disparities in ratios for employment for men and women. Whereas employment opportunities exist for women, the challenges that hinder

them from taking up these positions such as cultural and traditional, gender segregation at employment centers and institutions, lack of understanding of women's issues and assignment of pathways for career development and flexibility in employment must be addressed (Abakah, 2018; Boateng, 2018). This is to ensure that the human resource contribution of these educated women does not go to waste and adequate provisions are made to accommodate and provide equal access to their entry into the job market.

Women have always been resourceful, merging household activities and family life with career opportunities and professional employment (see Darko-Asumadu et al., 2018; ILO, 2017). Their contributions must not be left untapped to support developing countries such as Ghana to emerge into the middle and high income countries, creating opportunities for younger generations and developing stronger and higher leadership positions for women to support men both at the micro and macro levels.

In achieving this, gender inclusion and increase in women's participation and job search experiences for women must be re-examined and employment pathways made available to bridge this gap. Women seeking employment must be given the same opportunities as the men regardless of their family obligations and gender (ILO, 2017). Harmful traditional, religious and cultural practices must be revisited to make access to employment easier and equal for both men and women, while women should be encouraged and mentored to take up leadership and governance positions at younger ages and provided similar platforms for roles and responsibilities both at home and at work to reduce the stigma, stereotyping and bridge the employment gaps (see Abakah, 2018; Asekere & Awiasu, 2021; Gipson et al., 2017; ILO, 2020; Petronella, 2017).

Governments, Institutions, educational institutions, human resource managers, administrators, counsellors and employment agencies must begin to review employment processes to adequately support women's inclusion through job opportunities. Deliberate efforts must be made by governments, organizations and employment agencies in setting aside quotas and specific entry points for educated women to access and gain employment without challenges. Responsibilities and job opportunities for both household and organizations must be reviewed periodically to assess its impact on supporting entry points for women, mentoring, and maintaining them to ensure they contribute to economic and national development. Strategies to alleviate the fears, challenges and difficulties associated with job search and entry points for graduate women into professional employment should be outlined, implemented and monitored for effective implementation. Bottlenecks within these strategies should be addressed through education, advocacy, lobbying, and partnerships with relevant stakeholders to ensure sustainability of the job access and maintenance of educated women in leadership positions. Though these efforts may take time, the gradual implementation of these strategies will pave way for more women to feel confident, encouraged and enlightened on how they can support their families, communities, societies through their skills for better livelihoods. Best practices from Europe and America can be adopted and adapted to support more women into professional employment without destroying positive traditional, religious and cultural values that uniquely identify with the Ghanaian community and historical heritage. Women's advocacy groups, political think tanks, lobbyist groups in leadership and governance sectors must begin to hold government

accountable to treaties and development goals that support gender mainstreaming and women's employment. Women's organization's in both public and private sectors must collaborate and work with educational institutions and employment sectors on strategies that will provide flexible access for women's employment into leadership and professional positions.

The ILO (2017) suggests that early marriage and pregnancy in some developing countries contribute to low entry and job seeking for women. It further notes this affects women's education entry into the labor market hence the need for policies and strategies to enhance school-to-work transition and the provision of equal employment structures for both men and women and targeting some specific labor markets to reduce existing barriers (ILO, 2017). The provision of flexible working hours, vacations, support for elderly and childcare through employer support can increase women's participation as they take up majority of these responsibilities compared to men and these responsibilities become barriers for their equal participation in employment. The ILO (2017) recognizes that while women take up home care as part of their responsibilities, they also wish to join the workforce to earn incomes to support the families. It further notes that 32% of women worldwide prefer paid employment with another 45% interested in household and paid jobs and 21% opting for home and family care only (see ILO, 2017). These statistics indicate the willingness of majority of women to enter the job market to contribute their efforts and yet support their families. Statistics by the ILO (2017) suggest that across the world 32% of women want paid jobs with 42% in North Africa showing interest in paid jobs while 37% agree in sub-Saharan Africa. These figures are higher than in that of



Latin America and the Caribbean with 30% agreeing to paid jobs and 18% in North America with the lost being in the Arab states with 22% agreeing to work (see ILO, 2017). Evidently, women the world over are interested in working to earn incomes to support themselves and their families and the access to these jobs must be provided to enhance their employment opportunities.

In sub-saharan Africa, there is low productivity and the increase in employment for its human resource will address this shortfall (see Dadzie et al. 2019). Morsey and Mukasa (2019) indicate that despite the significant increase in education for African youth the benefits of education through employment especially for women is yet to be achieved. Ghana's employment situation is not any better as it is predicting 300,000 new jobs annually to absorb the unemployed youth, yet structures for creating this employment has not changed with low-skilled jobs and inadequate number of high quality and productive jobs (Dadzie et al. 2019). Limitations to employment of Ghanaian women include economic, sociocultural and stereotypes and lack of access to capital and use of digital technology (Dadzie et al. 2019). These notwithstanding, the ability of government to strategize and create opportunities for educated women in the existing and projected jobs for 300,000 annually will compensate for the shortfall and support women's employment opportunities into the labor market. This will reduce the level of poverty and build some confidence in young women at the graduate level to pursue higher education and secure jobs which will be available after their completion of their education. Ghana's unemployment is estimated at 11.9% (2016) with a labor force participation of 71.7 percent with a ratio of 75.% for men and 69.2% for women (Dadzie

et al. 2019). While the labor force participation remains low for women, the men may not take up all the job opportunities and a gradual employment of women through equal access and job search and availability will gradually close the gaps that exist for men and women in the professional field (see Dadzie et al. 2019; ILO, 2019). The Ghana National Development Planning Commission (2021) has projected an agenda for creating jobs and equal opportunities for Ghanaians and this strategic plan should support easy access for more women into employment for greater productivity.

According to Morsey and Mukasa, (2019) the issue of job mismatch could be a contributing factor to the unemployment challenges as most institutions may be training for unavailable jobs or job seekers may be skillful in areas which are not on the job market. They note that women have the propensity to feel more competent than their men and may seek alternative jobs (Morsey & Mukasa, 2019). This assertion could be a contributing factor to the difficulties faced by some educated women as they may move from existing mismatched employment to seek for unavailable jobs to match their skills for job satisfaction including flexible hours (to support family and household care), career advancement or better remuneration (Morsey & Mukasa, 2019). Despite these challenges women remain below the labor market employment ratios and must be supported to contribute to the labor market for better productivity.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

### **Major Themes in Literature**

In this study, I used literature to highlight women's employment, inclusion and empowerment and explored the experiences of postgraduate women with job search

experiences for professional employment in Accra, Ghana. Major themes used in the study include women's economic contribution (ILO, 2017; Moreno-Gomez et al., 2017; Shubh & Shivam, 2019) women empowerment (Bauer & Darkwah, 2018; Kabeer, 2017) unemployment for women and its attendant effect on the economy (WB, 2020) and benefits of women's inclusion in employment at the higher level to support decision making and socio-economic development (Lagarde & Ostry, 2018). I further examined the experiences of postgraduate women with job search experiences to understand their challenges and difficulties and to highlight these issues to that can help address them to provide equal opportunities to bridge employment gap/ratio for professionals women in Ghana and beyond.

### **Known and Unknown Literature**

Studies by Affum-Osei et al., (2019); ILO (2019); Klassan (2018) and the WB (2020) discuss job search experiences of women and their contribution to economic development. Additionally, research on gender discrimination and inequality in employment of women (Asif, et al., 2019; Htun, et al., 2019; ILO, 2017; Klasan, 2018), empowerment and inclusion of women (Amponsah, et al., 2019; Kabeer, 2017) and the consequences of unemployment (Abraham et al., 2019) highlight women's job search and employment experiences. Breuer & Asiedu, (2017); Manzor and Wali, (2018) and Bhalotra et al., (2021) further discuss women's education, their careers, and roles in the household. However, this study focused on postgraduate women who have acquired higher education at the Master's level aged 25 to 45 years with job search experiences for professional employment in the city of Accra, Ghana. The issue of unemployment of

professional women in Ghana remains unexhausted in literature and my study probed and examined the issues and experiences to gain better understanding of the phenomenon to contribute to research while informing human resource experts, policy makers, government agencies and employers to help address the outcome of the findings.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences of postgraduate Ghanaian women aged between 25 to 45 years with job search experiences in Accra, Ghana at the professional and management level. I looked at the challenges and issues in the job search process within the Ghanaian economic and cultural context and how this has affected Ghanaian women. I examined the experiences of these women in their job search encounters and processes (applications and interviews) to understand and highlight these issues to inform human resource managers, policy makers, and stakeholders in the employment sector. In Chapter 3, I outline the research question derived from the hermeneutic phenomenological study, which supported the exploration of the phenomenon of job search by postgraduate Ghanaian Women. The structure of the research includes descriptions and methods used, the population sample, procedures adopted in identifying and engaging participants as well as ethical and confidential strategies adopted in capturing participants data. The role of the researcher in collecting data, techniques used, and methods of coding and identification of themes and patterns during interviews are also provided. Reliability and validity of the study as well as ethical considerations are further discussed.

#### **Research Question**

What are the job search experiences of postgraduate women aged 25 to 45 years seeking professional employment in Accra, Ghana?

### **Context of the Study**

The study was based on the feminist theory in a philosophical context, and I adopted a qualitative research approach to explore the phenomenon of job search experiences of postgraduate women aged 25 to 45 years seeking professional employment in the city of Accra, Ghana (see Peoples, 2020). I examined the experiences of women who were seeking professional employment as well as those who had job search experiences within public and private organizations. Based on the feminist theory and a hermeneutic approach, I examined and interpreted the experiences of 10 women through interviews and audio recordings (see McCann & Kim, 2017). In using the hermeneutic approach, I considered preunderstandings, historical knowledge of social and cultural settings, and bias of the participants and myself in the interpretation of experiences and job search encounters (see Kross & Giust, 2019; Peoples, 2020). This enhanced the understanding of participants' experiences and the difficulties or challenges encountered in their job search process with the various organizations in Accra. The outcome of the study highlights and provides further understanding of the experiences and challenges of postgraduate women seeking professional jobs to inform policy makers and employers, bridge the unemployment gap of men to women, and create more opportunities for employment of women into professional positions for national economy (see Brueur & Asiedu, 2017; ILO, 2019).

#### **A Hermeneutic-Phenomenological Study of Qualitative Research**

A hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to research was used to explore the lived experiences of postgraduate women and highlight their challenges, difficulties, and

issues they encountered in gaining access to professional employment after attaining graduate education.

Phenomenology bears philosophical underpinnings and examines the human experiences as lived. There are two schools of thought with the phenomenological approach, including Husserl's transcendental approach (1859-1939) of nondisclosure and Heidegger's hermeneutic approach (1889-1976) of complete disclosure (Giorgi et al., 2017; Peoples, 2020). Whereas Husserl's transcendental approach focuses on descriptions and proposes the need to disassociate one's feelings, experiences, and thoughts in finding out the phenomenon, the hermeneutic approach by Heidegger stresses the need for disclosure of one's bias and preunderstanding of previous experiences of the phenomenon in interpreting and understanding the whole issue (Kross & Guest, 2018; Peoples, 2020). In alignment with the hermeneutic approach, I interpreted text from interviews and identified common themes to understand the experiences of the job search phenomenon while describing it in a manner that explains participants lived experiences (see Adu, 2019). The purpose of using the hermeneutic approach is to facilitate the analysis of interviews to uncover common issues as shared by the participants to understand how they lived through these experiences (see Wood, 2019). The hermeneutic approach to the phenomenon of job search helped the interpretation of the philosophy and the experiences (culture, history/experience, and belief) of the women during their job search encounter. The approach further enhanced the collection of data on specific place, time, culture, society, and family issues, which may have impacted on the interpretation of the experiences encountered in the job search process (see Adu, 2019).

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The aim of this study was to examine the lived experiences of postgraduate Ghanaian women aged 25 to 45 years with job search encounters (active and past experiences) for professional and managerial jobs. The main research question for the study was as follows: What are the job search experiences of postgraduate Ghanaian women aged 25 to 45 years seeking professional employment in Accra, Ghana? The capital city of Accra was chosen for this study as it accounted for the highest population of professional workers employed in both the public and private sector and hosts the largest location for key public and private sector organizations (employment opportunities) as well as public and private universities that offer graduate programs (see GLSS 7, 2019). Additionally, studies by the GSS in 2014 and 2019 suggested that Ghanaian women continue to lag in professional employment, especially in the city of Accra, with men accounting for 6.6% in 2014 against 3.4% for women and 7.9% for men in 2019 against 5.0% for women in 2019 (GSS, 2014; GSS, 2019).

The job search process leads to employment, which contributes skills and knowledge acquired to economic development through governance, leadership, public policy, economics, business, science among others (Diraditsele & Ontetse, 2017; Ozeomena, 2018). Additionally, several studies have suggested that the impact of employment for women leads to empowerment, independence, income earning, and support to family, communities, and the economy (Brueuer & Asiedu, 2017; ILO, 2017). Furthermore, other literature has highlighted the challenges associated with unemployment as health, psychological trauma, loss of confidence and self-worth,



vulnerability in supporting family and friends, and inability to contribute to family, community, and socioeconomic development (Anderson, 2019; Stephan 2018; Ndinda & Ndhlovu, 2018). Hence, in this study, I examined the lived experiences of postgraduate women searching for professional positions to better understand the issues to support policy formulation and inform institutions, employers, and agencies in developing strategies to address the phenomenon.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I developed research questions, outlined the selection criteria, used purposive sampling and snowball methods to select participants, and upon their consent, conducted interviews within specific and agreed timelines. I ensured an appropriate setting and a conducive timeframe and environment for all participants to provide flexibility and a favorable atmosphere for participants to share their experiences without compulsion or intimidation. Information and data collected were shared with participants to cross check and gain their feedback and consent on the contents of the interview to ensure the reliability of the findings as well as validation of the information of participants (see Kross & Giust, 2019). To avoid bias and unsolicited views of the researcher that may impact on the outcome of the study, I declared any personal experiences in relation to the study by conducting a reflexive journaling process (see Adu, 2019; Kross & Giust, 2018). I recognized that my previous and current work and experiences on advocating and supporting women's economic empowerment and education may have affected the analysis of the study; however, these issues were addressed by ensuring that audio records, memos, and journals of interviews and the interpretation of the study were

compiled in accordance with applicable standards in qualitative studies in order to avoid bias and unethical standards (see Kross & Guist, 2018). I used coding techniques, including identification of patterns and themes of the content of the study, to highlight the issues raised by participants in the study (see Adu, 2019). The outcome of the issues raised was the basis of the findings as reported by participants on their job search experiences for postgraduate Ghanaian women aged 25 to 45 years seeking professional employment positions in Accra, Ghana.

### **Methodology**

In this section, I outline (a) the criteria for selecting the participants, (b) the population sample, (c) the eligibility criteria of participants, (d) methods of data collection and tools and instruments adopted and how the data were interpreted to highlight the meaning and reliability and validity, (e) and, finally, how the data were analyzed to provide logical and sequential issues that aligned with the research question.

#### **Criteria for Selecting Participants**

A total of 10 Ghanaian women aged 25 to 45 years who have attained postgraduate qualifications (MBA, MA, MSc) from universities in Ghana, Legon, GIMPA, KNUST, and University of Leeds in London participated in the study. The geographical location field work was limited to the city of Accra, which is the capital of Ghana, to help narrow the research to the study population. Thus, I examined the job search/employment issues in the urban city of Accra, which showed high unemployment for women 2.6% in 2014 and 8.1% in 2019 against men at 2.4% in 2014 and 7.6% in 2019 (GLSS6, 2014; GLSS7, 2019). Essentially, I focused on selecting participants both

from Ghana and abroad to give a better understanding of job search issues for Ghanaian women who have attained postgraduate education seeking professional employment in management positions.

### **Population Sample**

A total of 10 Ghanaian women aged 25 to 45 years with postgraduate degrees from three universities in Ghana and one in the United Kingdom were selected to participate in this study. Participants from three universities with postgraduate degrees from the University of Ghana, Legon (Liberal Arts), GIMPA (Liberal Arts, Management, & Business Administration), and KNUST, with one university from the United Kingdom, University of Leeds, participated in the study. The four universities have over 10 years' experience in training students from graduate to postgraduate and mature students (25 years and above).

### **Eligibility Criteria**

Invitational letters were shared through social media on WhatsApp and emails to select postgraduate Ghanaian women aged between 25 and 45 years who had attained their Master's degrees and had job search experiences 12 to 24 months after completion of their education within the period of 2019 to 2021. Using the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach, participants were allowed to reflect and share previous and current job search experiences, feelings, and encounters to enhance understanding of the phenomenon (see Helmich & Mattick, 2018). The invitational letters were followed with calls and confirmation of participation interests through email responses specifically indicating their consent. This was to ensure compliance with the Walden URR ethical and

confidentiality protocols and to secure their consent in addition to notifying them of the guidelines and confidentiality of their information and purpose of the study.

With the consent/confirmation of participants willingness to be interviewed, timelines and preference for the interview process (phone-in or in-person) were agreed upon, with all participants preferring to hold phone-in interviews due to availability, flexibility, and time (see Ravitch and Riggan, 2017). Confirmation of participation was done simultaneously with availability to interview through emails, which provided some flexibility for both myself and participants and the collection of research data.

A sample size of 12 postgraduate Ghanaian women responded to the emails; however, only 10 were selected as they met the selection criteria. The remaining two were disqualified as their year of completion of the Master's degrees was outside the selection criteria of 2019 to 2021. Data saturation was achieved after further probing and digging of participants' job search encounters, and no new information was derived in response to research questions (see Guest et al. 2020). The individual interviews were conducted for 20 to 45 minutes for a minimum of one and maximum of two women daily for a period of 2 weeks from Monday to Sunday, depending on the availability of participants. A copy of social media invitational email attached as Appendix A.

## **Instrumentation**

### **Data Collection Method, Tools, and Instruments**

A purposeful sampling and snowball approach was used in identifying and selecting the 10 postgraduate Ghanaian women aged between 25 and 45 years with job search experiences in Accra. This ensured that the selection of participants aligned with

the specific characteristics of the target group as well as the objectives of the study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2017). Participants were engaged through personal contacts, telephone, and email invitations, including participants who studied outside Ghana and met the selection criteria. All 10 participants were introduced to the purpose of the study, its voluntary nature, as well as ethical and confidential considerations explained prior to obtaining their consent to engage in the study.

Data collection was conducted through phone-in interviews with audio recordings, journaling, memos, as well as observation of participants responses (voice and tone) to gain their views and meanings to their experiences (see Helmich & Mattick, 2018). Sample interview questions together with consent letters were shared via email to inform and secure participants' approval to explore their first-hand and personal experiences of the phenomenon (see Adu, 2019). Adopting Heidegger's approach, I listened, observed, and interpreted participants' information and shared experiences of both current and previous knowledge to explore the phenomenon of job search for professional employment (see Adu, 2019).

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Interviews were conducted for 2 weeks, with participants engaging in 20 to 45 minute interviews through phone-in calls (see Saldana and Omatsa, 2018). In all, a minimum of one and maximum of two interviews were conducted daily within 4- to 8-hour intervals from Mondays through Sundays, depending on availability of participants and to provide flexibility. Interview notes were reviewed and transcribed within 24 hours using the audio recordings unto word perfect and were coded immediately using

alphabets, numbers, and colors. Another week was dedicated to the review of notes, audio recordings, and memos, which allowed for follow up calls to confirm or clarify and understand issues arising from the interviews of the previous week. In all, 10 participants were involved in 15 to 45 minutes of phone-in interview sessions. Prior permission and consent of participants was sought for recording and confidentiality of interview content was duly explained to participants (see Guest et al., 2020; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). All 10 participants received a gift card of \$10 (Ghana Cedi equivalent) as part of the interview protocols indicated in the consent form. A copy of interview observation protocol attached as Appendix B.

The city of Accra, Ghana was used as the location for data collection for the ten postgraduate Ghanaian women to share their experiences. This was because Accra is the capital city and remains the highest population for business, organizations and employment opportunities for professional jobs . Semi-structured interview questions were used in engaging the ten selected women through observations (responses and vocal expressions), in a phone-in interaction (see Helmich & Mattick, 2018; Guest et al. 2020) and research questions were used to explore the phenomenon and personal experiences of participants (see Peoples, 2020). The use of the semi-structured interview process allowed participants to be flexible in their response to research questions while providing them the opportunity to share their stories within the concept of questions outlined (see Adu, 2019). Personal consent/approval, confidentiality and purpose of the study was duly explained to participants prior to the interview and their feedback solicited to provide

deeper understanding of conversations of details provided during the interview (Saldana, 2017). A copy of interview questions attached as Appendix C.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Adu, (2019) suggests that the data analysis process is informed by the research design and includes the research problem, the purpose of the study, research questions and how the data is collected. In examining the lived experiences of postgraduate women seeking professional employment, I focused on gathering the data, transcribing, and interpreting the raw data and organizing and presenting it in a meaningful way (see Adu, 2019). I gathered data through a meticulous verbatim transcription of audio recordings and repeated listening of the recordings and searching for themes and patterns in alignment of research questions. Additionally, I used field notes to support the understanding and interpretation of the raw data collected and adopted a manual coding approach to capture data through MS word to highlight recurring themes and later transferred into MS excel which supports large data management and allowed for easy display and alignment of themes and organization into charts. I organized data to draw meanings by aligning the notes and interpreted data with themes and observed patterns and recurring responses to research questions. The process involved general organization and coding of themes and patterns derived from the data and subsequently aligning specific categories to the themes to give proper descriptions and meaningful interpretation of participants responses. Themes and patterns derived from the interview questions were coded to help me understand what the main issues and challenges were in the job search process for women (see Adu, 2019; Saldana, 2017).

## **Issues of Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility/Internal Validity**

The validity of the study is essential to other researchers to represent real life stories of the participants of the study, which when replicated within similar settings using the methods and analysis applied will provide similar outcomes or findings. Merriam (2009) suggested strategies in qualitative research towards confirming the validity of findings including triangulation, credibility, engagement during data, researcher reflexivity, and peer review. In the study, I used triangulation to ensure multiple approaches to data collection (interviews, observation and documentation of the study), while credibility of the data was established through participant's validation of interview recordings or notes to avoid misrepresentation or exaggeration of facts or meanings and to avoid bias during my interpretation of interview content (see Kross & Guist, 2019). I ensured adequate engagement during data collection process through continuous probing, which supported my documentation of shared experiences and helped me outline challenge issues to arrive at the findings. Furthermore, I engaged in reflexivity through journaling and the declaration of perceptions or personal experiences to avoid the inclusion of bias and values in the outcome of the study. Finally, I used the peer review process to by sharing the data with participants to ensure the data and other relevant information provided reflected and aligned with approved guidelines and to avoid plagiarism (Kross & Guist, 2018). My declaration of prior knowledge and experiences in the study was consistent with the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to ensure that the researchers bias, and experiences were not recorded as those



of the participants (see Peoples, 2020). I further used interviews, observations, recordings and journals in eliciting information on the experiences of job search by postgraduate women to provide sufficient responses to the research questions.

### **Transferability/External Validity**

To ensure the study can be generalized in other research studies for similar groups or participants, I outlined the processes and data collection tools used in the design and identification of participants, as well as my sampling and data analysis methods used in arriving at the outcomes and conclusions. Additionally, I conducted an audit trail of data and records of interviews with thick descriptions of events and stories that outlined the methods used in the selection of the postgraduate women aged 25 to 45 years, seeking professional jobs in Accra.

### **Dependability/Reliability**

I ensured reliability of data by focusing on accuracy and consistency of the data of the provided. This was done through meticulous documentation of data processes including data collection, choice of methodology, transcription of audio recording and reconciling with memos and data analysis to arrive at findings. Though the experiences of participants may not be the same due to culture, environment, and geographical location, the reliability of the study could be assured by adopting methodologies and approaches used to prove the phenomenon exist and could be generalized to some extent if tested (see Adu, 2019). As Adu, (2019) asserts, the reliability of a phenomenon of the study can be assured if the same measurements when applied to other sources provides the same consistent results or outcomes. Additionally, I used of triangulation, peer reviews,

reflexivity and audit trail of documentation to arrive at the findings which can support the reliability of the data (see Kross & Giust, 2019; Peoples, 2020). To ensure reliability, I cross checked audio recordings with participants to confirm and ensure consistency while limiting errors during the data collection exercise (see Kross & Giust, 2019).

### **Confirmability**

Korstjens and Moser (2018) suggest that the researcher must establish that the interpretations of events and stories are in alignment with data derived from interviews and observations of participants and not the personal thoughts or reflections of the researcher. Therefore, in ensuring that the findings of the study align with the views of participants, I maintained and stored audio recordings, journals and memos of interactions, interviews and observations of the study on pen drives and hard copy files to serve as the reference point for deriving the data.

### **Intra- and Inter-Coder Reliability**

I coded interview transcripts using colors, letters and numbers to help derive and highlight the meanings of interview responses to research questions, recurring issues and patterns to identify themes and codes for analysis the study.

### **Ethical Procedures**

To ensure confidentiality and the protection of participants rights and privileges, data identity, reputation, beneficence and avoid unethical challenges, I ensured that participants confirmed and emailed their response to willingly participate and share/divulge personal information and their experiences of the phenomenon (see Adu, 2019; Bowie, 2017). This was done immediately after they responded to invitational

emails to ensure the reliability and validity of the data of the study and to meet the requirements of the Institutional Review Board (IRB – 01-24-22-0669961) in compliance with the dissertation process.

Data collected was treated with utmost confidentiality, as I highlighted and labelled data for ease of identification, review and retrieval. Soft copies were duly stored electronically with special codes while hard copies and field notes were stored at dedicated storage places with appropriate coded labels for retrieval and replacement for confidentiality, data protection, accuracy, and audit trail of data movements.

In the next chapter, I outline the tools used in data collection and how the findings were arrived at. Additionally, I highlight the research design and how the research questions were used to arrive at the findings of the study.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 3, I discuss the research design and rationale for the study, the role of the researcher and methodology for identification, selection and interviewing the participants as well as instruments used in the data collection process. I also provide recruitment procedures, and data analysis methods and issues of trustworthiness of the data and ethical procedures that were adopted in obtaining the consent of participants and the confidentiality of the participants to protect them from unethical use of the data were also provided. In Chapter 4, I focused on the data collection process, settings, demographics, analysis of the data and provide evidence of trustworthiness and the results/findings of the study.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

In this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study, I examined the job search experiences of postgraduate Ghanaian women aged 25 to 45 years in Accra, Ghana. I sought to examine the lived experiences of postgraduate Ghanaian women to understand the challenges and difficulties they encountered in their job search experiences and to learn what issues/themes were important for addressing future challenges. In Chapter 4, the data collection process, the analysis, and the outcomes of the study are provided. The identity of participants of this study was kept confidential for ethical reasons, and only participants' shared experiences on job search encounters are provided for educational and policy making purposes. The purpose of the research question was to ascertain the job search experiences of postgraduate Ghanaian women in Accra. Adopting the purposive sampling and snowballing methods, an eligibility criterion was set for postgraduate Ghanaian women aged 25 to 45 years with job search experiences in Accra. The city of Accra was used as it is the capital of Ghana and has a high density of professional employment and universities that provide postgraduate education (GSS, 2019). Semi structured interview questions were developed and shared with participants following the IRB approval. Invitational emails were sent to social media platforms, including WhatsApp as well as emails to the public to identify and select participants. Interested participants who responded were given follow-up emails to consent and participate in the study, which led to the scheduling of interviews with participants based on the availability after they responded to consent emails.

### **Setting**

I completed data collection through telephone interviews with audio-recording, and I took field notes to support the interview process. Copies of the invitational emails were sent through WhatsApp, emails and shared on social media platforms. A copy is attached to this study as Appendix B.

I collected participants contacts from friends and recommendations from some participants and fixed dates and time of interviews after brief introductions to the study. Participants were informed of their right to discontinue at any time if they were uncomfortable, and they were also assured of their confidentiality and the purpose of the study. In addition to the Consent Form, to which all participants responded through email, they were all provided a \$10 gift card (data for use on their phones). The interviews lasted between 15 to 45 minutes. After a brief introduction of the study, I obtained the demographics of participants and conducted the interviews. Participants were assured they could request for copies of the study, and follow-up calls were made to confirm the content and details of the interview (see Korstjen & Moser, 2018).

### **Demographics**

Participants were postgraduate Ghanaian women aged 25 to 45 years who had job search experiences in Accra. They had acquired their Master's degrees either in Ghana or abroad in the areas of MA, MSc, MBA. Postgraduate programs included MA Social Policy, MSc Real Estate Management, MSc Procurement, MSc English & French, MBA Human Resource (two participants), MBA Finance, MSc Development Finance, and MSc Clinical Psychology. Seven participants were alumni of the University of Ghana, Legon,

while two were from GIMPA, KNUST and another from University of Leeds, United Kingdom.

A total of 12 participants were interviewed; however, two had completed their Master's programs outside the criteria/parameters of 2019 – 2021 and hence were disqualified. Of the 10 women, eight were within the ages of 25 to 35 while two were within the ages of 36 to 45. Seven out of the 10 women were employed (two part-time employed), while three were still searching for employment. One out of the seven employed women was an entrepreneur by choice (self-employed) whereas the remaining five were in corporate institutions (both public and private). Three out of the 10 participants were married with children whilst the remaining seven were unmarried.

To ensure confidentiality of participants, colors, letters, and numbers (pseudonyms) were used to identify them. For example, RedA01-GP1 identified the participant with RedA (color red and letter A) with the number (01) in Group 1 (GP1), participant GoldB02-GP1 was identified as GoldB (color gold and letter B) with the number (02) in group (01), and participant GreenC01-GP1 was identified as GreenC (color green and letter C) with the number (03) in group (01). This was repeated for participants four to 10. Table 3 provides the demographics for the 10 participants of the study.

**Table 3**

*Demographics of Postgraduate Ghanaian Women Aged 25-45 Years With Job Search Experiences in Accra, Ghana*

Participant ID	Age bracket	Employment status	Master's program offered	University & year of completion	Marital status
RedA01-GP1	25-35	Part-time Employment	MSc French & English	University of Ghana, Legon - 2019	Married
GoldB02-GP1	25-35	Employed	MSc Real Estate Management	University of Leeds, UK, 2019	Unmarried
GreenC03-GP1	25-35	Unemployed	MSc Occupational Hygiene	University of Ghana, Legon - 2019	Unmarried
BlueD04-GP2	25-35	Employed	MA Social Policy	University of Ghana, Legon - 2019	Married
YellowE05-GP2	36-45	Employed	MSc Procurement	Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology - 2021	Married
OrangeF06-GP2	25-45	Unemployed	MBA Human Resource	University of Ghana, Legon - 2021	Unmarried
PurposeG07 - GP2	25-35	Unemployed	MSc Development Finance	University of Ghana, Legon - 2021	Unmarried
VioletH08-GP3	25-35	Part-Time Employment	MSc Clinical Psychology	University of Ghana, Legon - 2021	Unmarried
BlackJ09-GP3	36-45	Employed	MBA Human Resource	Ghana Institute of Management & Public Administration - 2021	Married
WhiteK10-GP3	25-35	Employed	MBA Finance	University of Ghana, Legon – 2021	Unmarried

### **Data Collection**

I interviewed 10 participants, all residing in the city of Accra, Ghana. The English language was used, which is the mode of communication and facilitation at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level at all universities in Ghana. Purposive and snowball sampling were used as some participants recommended other classmates who joined the interviews (see Korstens & Moser, 2018). I used semi structured interview questions and asked follow-up questions where necessary to elicit additional information from participants (see Adu, 2019). IRB approval was received on 01/24/22 and followed with invitational emails and WhatsApp message (sharing of emails) from 01/25/22 to 01/30/22 to ensure compliance with IRB protocols. All participants responded to consent forms to participate in the interviews after reading and agreeing to the guidelines.

### **Location and Duration**

Participants were interviewed through telephone conversations at their various homes based on their availability. Interviews lasted 15 to 45 minutes, and semi structured questions were used with follow-up questions where necessary to elicit additional information and clarification.

I recorded the data using a special recorder for interviews, together with a cell phone. Notes were taken to complement the telephone interview comments, and I took special notes in-depth comments, experiences, and recommendations. Additionally, all recorded interviews were captured on the laptop and transcribed into MS Word with each participant's identity, which was later coded for confidentiality.



## **Variations**

In Chapter 3, I explained that my plan was to use purposive sampling to identify participants through three selected public university databases to conduct part in-person and part phone interviews. However, due to delays in liaising through the university databases and the limited timeframe, social media outlets such as WhatsApp and emails were used to identify and select participants. Additionally, interviews were slated for weekdays to allow time for weekend review and cross checking; however due to some interview slots on weekends, cross checking was done simultaneously during the week to avoid delays. Initially, 16 participants were targeted for interviews; however, only 12 confirmed, with two failing to meet criteria for completion of postgraduate programs (2019- 2021), resulting in a total of 10 participants.

An unusual occurrence in the interview process was the nonrecording of one participant's interview; however, this was heavily supported by field notes and cross checking from the participant to ensure the content was well captured and reflected the views of the participant.

## **Data Analysis**

The data analysis was conducted using the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method, which focuses on collecting and analyzing the views and lived experiences of participants (see Adu, 2019). The process facilitated my interpretation of participants' views as expressed in the interview based on their history, circumstances, and experiences (see Adu, 2019). The five steps under the IPA were used to analyze the data by (a) reviewing the transcripts to understand participants' responses to the research

question, (b) reviewing the data to identify relevant information based on research question, (c) writing down the interpretations in addressing the research question to understand the intent of participants based on responses provided, (d) developing themes based on the interpretations gathered, and (e) comparing and contrasting the affiliations within the themes gathered (see Adu, 2019).

The 10 interviews were transcribed into MS Word and grouped into three codes using the manual coding method. Anchor codes were identified: Experience was assigned to the interview questions that related to participants' experience and outcome/impact was assigned to participants' responses to the interview questions aligning to outcomes or impact of job search experiences. Anchor codes served as a guide/summary in alignment with the research question to identify individual codes prior to categorization. As Haven and Grootel (2019) suggested, data analysis involves the transformation of data into themes, patterns, and meanings through several processes to derive outcomes.

### **Specific Codes**

Data were coded in groups out of 10 interviews. Group 1 had three participants, Group 2 had four participants, and Group 3 had three participants. All group codes were consolidated separately; codes in Group 1 were merged/consolidated to fall under anchor codes (outcomes or experience) to help identify recurring themes and important quotations. This was repeated for Groups 2 and 3. Under anchor codes (experience), recurring codes were numbered to identify high values and low values. This was repeated for all Groups, 1 2, and 3.

All consolidated codes under outcomes and experiences were moved to MS Excel and were grouped under categories or clusters. Clusters served as categories in sorting out themes (high value and recurring themes) that aligned with anchor codes (experiences or outcomes as earlier sorted).

Four categories/clusters emerged. The clusters/categories were colored to help identify important themes and quotations emerging from data and aligned to these colors based on similar codes. For example,

- Blue was used to categorize all codes related to job search strategies; for example, optimism, follow ups, use of portals, and networking.
- Red was assigned to codes relating to job search challenges and difficulties, such as gender equality and women's inclusion and leadership, harassment, and intimidation.
- Green was assigned to job search elements, such as experiences, remuneration, age, and impact on job search/employment.
- Purple was assigned to critical requirements, such as Master's, continuous education, and skills upgrades essential to the job search.

In all six themes emerged from participants' quotes and descriptions of job search experiences. These include the following:

1. Master's an advantage/skills upgrades essential
2. Networking/search job portals
3. Age irrelevant/competence is key
4. Family commitments matter

5. Preference for men/gender equality
6. Age matters/job search difficult

Though there were similar themes with lower values (low remuneration, optimism is important, performance is key, job insecurity, unbiased work environment), they were aligned to the above themes identified in the categories/clusters in response to research questions.

### **Discrepant Cases**

Conflicting themes that emerged are included in the analysis to provide more understanding of other aspects of participants' experiences in the study despite different opinions (see Fitzpatrick, 2019). These discrepant cases helped to highlight other experiences for participants that were different but relevant to understanding the feedback they received. For example, the issue of age in job search/employment mattered in some cases while it did not matter in other cases whereas acquiring a Master's as a woman mattered in employment, it did not necessarily lead to promotion/inclusion in leadership as a woman in employment.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

In demonstrating evidence of trustworthiness, the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were used as criteria to support the study. Rose and Johnson (2020) posited that the use of these elements in a qualitative study is relevant to support trustworthiness.

## **Credibility**

To confirm the credibility of the research findings, quotations from participants were used to highlight the lived experiences that confirmed the phenomenon (see Kostova, 2018). I adopted a peer review approach that allowed for cross checking with participants on shared stories, real life experiences, and events and descriptions that reflected the phenomenon to reduce the elements of bias on the study (see Adu, 2019; Amin, et al., 2020). Using quotations by participants confirmed the credibility of the findings and explained what they experienced and how they felt about these experiences. In support of the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to the study, I further used reflexivity and declaration of preconceptions and knowledge in the research area as a woman with professional experience in the job search to avoid bias and to come up with a true reflection of participants experiences (see Forero, et al. 2018; Oliphant & Bennett, 2019; Peoples, 2020). Haven and Grootel (2019) noted that the researcher is part of the instruments in the qualitative study, has a voice, and uses their lenses in data analysis and findings. Another way to confirm credibility is the explanation of outliers, variant comments that show different views of some participants on the same issues in the data, and how this flexibility can amend the study outcomes to provide other opinions based on participants experiences (Amin et al., 2020; Haven & Grootel, 2019).

## **Transferability**

In this study, I used a step-by-step approach in the selection of participants, data collection, sorting, coding, categorization and highlighting of themes (see Adu, 2019). The provision of these guidelines enhanced the transferability of the findings by other

researchers to confirm the processes I used in arriving at these findings. According to Adu, 2019; Kostova, 2017; Squires & Dorsen, 2018) the use of thick descriptions and quotations of participants in describing and interpreting data in qualitative studies give some understanding to the data provided. Thus ensuring that transferability can be achieved if the same process is used to undertake a similar study. Another issue of consideration is the use of the English language as the only mode of communication in the interviews which may differ if other languages are considered in transferring data.

### **Dependability**

I conducted an audit trail of the data collection process, and steps adopted in the data analysis to ensure dependability (see Forero et al., 2018). I further highlighted the step-by-step approach I adopted in the selection criteria, identification of participants, data collection methods, instruments, geographical location and environment. I noted the adoption of a particular method of data collection (phone-in due to participants preference and COVID-19 restrictions/protocols) and other approaches which can support the replication and generalization if tested.

### **Confirmability**

To ensure confirmability of the data as provided by participants, I cross checked data with participants to provide credible data that reflected their experiences (see Korstjens & Morser, 2018; Forero et al., 2018). This ensured that the findings of the study were aligned with the true views of participants as audio recorded and supported with journals and memos in reference to interactions with participants. The cross checking process helped to confirm participants details and experiences which led to the

disqualification of two participants whose completion dates for graduate programs were outside the set parameters of 2019 – 2021.

## **Results**

The research question for the study sought to find out the job search experiences of postgraduate Ghanaian women aged 25 to 45 years in Accra, Ghana. Interview questions were grouped into experiences and outcomes and focused on

- Job search experiences: (a) challenges & difficulties, (b) woman seeking professional employment, and (c) male counterparts compared to women and
- Outcome of job search: (a) Impact of Master's on job search, (b) impact on professional, managerial, and leadership positions, and (c) age impact on employment

Kostova (2017) suggest that important quotes can be derived from data analysis process as a representation of the view of participants in providing understanding of a phenomenon. Findings from the data collected from job search experiences highlighted quotes such as: Age matters in job search, networking is essential, Job search is difficult, skills upgrades essential, gender equality and family commitments matter in job search.

In response to outcomes of job search, important quotes included having a Master's is an advantage, skills upgrades is essential, age is irrelevant, poor feedback, poor feedback on job search and age matters in job search emerged.

Discrepant cases identified highlighted that on one part, the issue of age mattered in job search and was a determining factor in employment or performance of duties. Conversely, some participants indicated that age did not matter in their job search process

as their age did not determine or hinder their employment or performance as women in managerial and leadership positions.

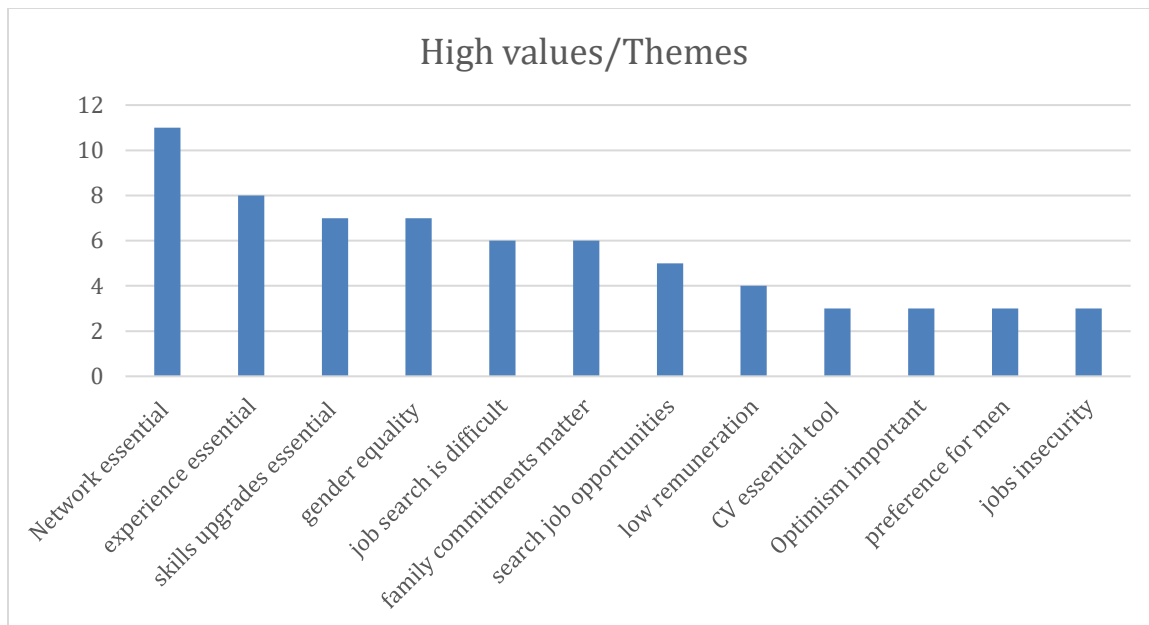


**Table 4***The Theme Development Process*

Participant ID	Participant quotes	Categories/clusters	Themes
YellowE05-GP2	‘Some people feel I am too young, but my boss says it is not about the age, it is about delivering on the job and performing – it does not matter the age, it is about what you able to do.’	Job search requirements	Experience, remuneration, age irrelevant to job search/employment
PurpleG07-GP2	‘Network is really important; it has really affected me. If you don’t have good networks in Ghana, you can have all the skills but without network you may not get your leg in.’	Job search strategies	Networking essential, use of job portals, follow ups, optimism essential
RedA01-GP1	‘I contacted other colleagues in language school – there is also competition, and it is about networking ‘whom you know’	Job search strategies	Networking essential, follow ups, search job opportunities,
VioletH08-GP3	‘Some companies do look at a certain age where some of these family commitments may not be a hinderance to their work due to productive hours and contribution.’	Challenges & difficulties	Age matters, Family commitments matters, preference for men, gender equality
GreenC03-GP1	‘The Master’s is an advantage in looking for a job and with that organizations provide more avenues to get a job as the 1 <sup>st</sup> degree does not make you anybody special’	Critical requirements	Master’s an advantage, skills upgrades essential to job search
BlueD04-GP2	‘Having the Master’s as a woman has helped improve work understanding and performance – Master’s has led to renewal of my contract as a new position requires the MSc level to start.’	Critical requirements	Master’s as advantage, women in leadership positions, performance and competence is key

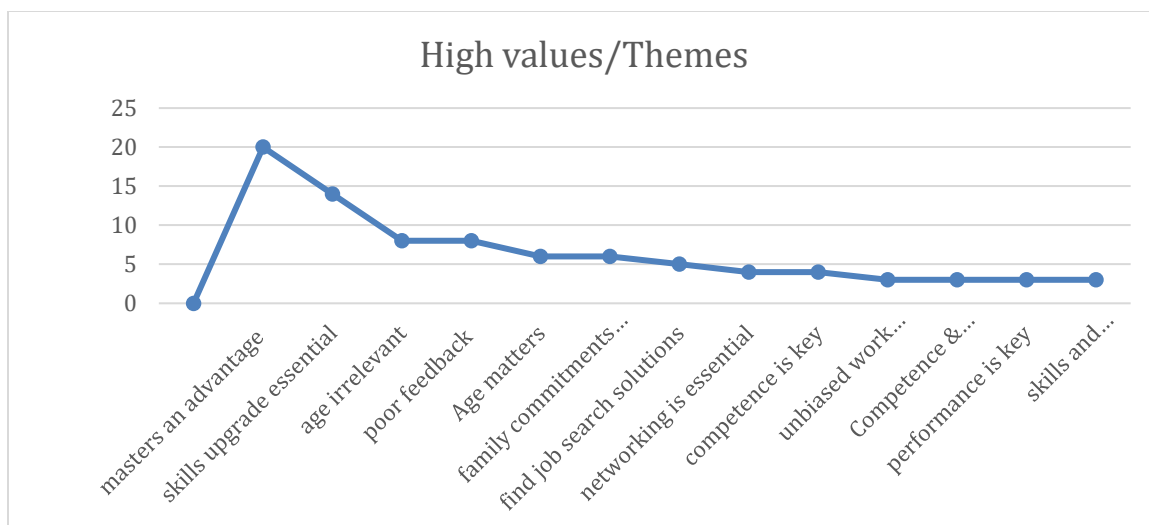
**Figure 1**

*Highest Recurring Themes—Experiences on Job Search*



**Figure 2**

*Highest Recurring Themes—Outcome/Impact on Job Search*



Results from the six themes were in response to the research question ‘what are the job search experiences of postgraduate Ghanaian women in Accra, Ghana’. The findings highlighted the following;

**Theme 1: Master’s an Advantage/ Skills Upgrades Essential**

The issue of acquiring a Master’s/higher education and upgrading of skills and competences to remain relevant in the job market stood out as a strong theme for eight participants out of ten. Participants believed that it gave them a leverage to gain access into senior and leadership positions and sometime decision making positions especially when they continue to upgrade themselves even while in employment. The following quotes buttress participants views on Theme 1:

RedA01-GP1 explained, “Having the Master’s chartered me into a particular direction.... having the Master’s has been an advantage ... it has been good with many opportunities.” Furthermore, GoldB02-GP1 shared, “Master’s was a leverage to move to another department.” GreenC03-GP1 added, “The Master’s is an advantage in looking for a job and with that organizations provide more avenues to get a job as the 1<sup>st</sup> degree does not make you anybody special.” BlueD04-GP2 stated, ”Having the Master’s as a woman has helped improve work understanding and performance. .... Master’s has led to renewal of my contract as a new position requires the MSc level to start.” In addition, YellowE05-GP2 claimed, “The Master’s is the ‘icing on the cake.” PurpleG07-GP2 also commented, “Master’s having a positive factor, it really has a high positive factor in my career as I believe that when I put skills to practice this could be effective.” Moreover, VioletH08-GP3 said, “So with the career path the Master’s gives you the exposure you

want.” Finally, WhiteK10-GP3 expounded, The MBA finance has helped the business I started helping the family business earlier and realized that my education is supporting the business and turning things around with partnerships and all. The above response from participants highlights their views on how the attaining a Master’s has helped them in their job search and employment.

### **Theme 2: Networking/Search Job Portals**

Networking was the next highest contributing response in answering research questions on how to gain employment and job search strategies. Nine out of ten participants stressed the need for networking as it paved the way for them to get linked into job opportunities or provided insight on how and where to gain access to jobs.

RedA01-GP1 stated ‘I contacted other colleagues in language school .... There is also competition, and it is about networking ‘whom you know’. While GoldB02-GP1 claimed ‘I heard friends got internship and enquired and through networking I got an internship’. GreenC03-GP1 explained ‘The issue of whom you know, networking and linking with other people to get jobs is crucial’. Furthermore, BlueD04-GP2 added ‘Challenges include networking for position. Officially employers poach form within, so they advertise for the purpose of meeting HR requirements’. PurpleG07-GP2 suggested ‘Networking is really important; it has really affected me. If you don’t have good network in Ghana , you can have all he skills but without network you may not get a leg in’. Finally, VioletH08-GP3 explained ‘I used networking from family and friends so did not have to use LinkedIn or social media’.

**Theme 3: Age Irrelevant/Competence Is Key**

The issue of age and competence also stood out as one of the strong responses from participants. In the case of age, some participants were of the view that it did not matter, rather their competences and performance were more important in supporting their job search and employment processes.

GoldB02-GP1 commented ‘Age has not become a barrier at my workplace. Your performance and competence should match your job search’. BlueD04-GP2 supported this claim and said ‘.... Credibility is much more important than age in the delivery of work’. YellowE05-GP2 explained ‘Some people feel I am too young, but my boss says it is not about the age, it is about delivering on the job and performing – it does not matter the age, it is about what you are able to do’. PurpleG07-P2 confirmed this assertion that ‘Age is not a factor in job search process’.

Further, BlackJ09-GP3 shared,

‘age has not been an issue at the job, organizations are more interested in your competence than age’.... There is equal assessment and promotion not an automatic promotion for male counterparts. It is more to do with your competence and experience. Those days are long gone where men are given more opportunities than women in my sector.

**Theme 4: Family Commitments Matter**

Three out of the ten participants were married with some having children. However, the issue of family commitments was strongly discussed in response to the challenges encountered in the job search and employment process. The study showed that

despite not being married the issue of family commitments was a challenge as some organizations considered women generally to be responsible for performing household chores and keeping family roles (see Anderson, 2019; Wood, 2019). Hence some employers used that as a basis to either disqualify them or consider men (preference men) for the positions (see Darko-Asumadu et al., 2018) because they believed the women may get married soon considering their age between 25 to 35 years and will not be available to contribute fully if employed within the organization (see Dowuana-Hammond et al., 2020; Gyabeng et al., 2019). These issues notwithstanding, participants believed that given the opportunity and with some flexibility they will perform their family and corporate roles creditably without difficulties.

RedA01-GP1 noted, 'I took a year off working and not job searching due to the demands of work and housework... I opted out of a managerial course because of family commitments. As a female employees have to worry about family commitments as they have to take up family responsibilities... women have to balance family life and work compared to men as they have no choice'.

BlackJ09-GP3 stated 'As a woman you have a lot of things to do including family, marriage and life and if you are not careful you may stop at your undergraduate but not pursue a Master's'. For future job search, YellowE05-GP2 suggested '... plan and strategize as a woman to multitask at your job. Take advantage of opportunities and flexibility at jobs and home to juggle both tasks effectively and efficiently.'

**Theme 5: Preference for Men/Gender Equality**

Wood (2019) and Breuer & Asiedu, (2017) assert that Ghana's patriarchal society gives men more prominence and leadership roles while women are assigned minor roles leading to gender discrimination and makes women lag behind in the distribution of resources.

RedA01-GP1 explained 'Some companies prefer to employ men compared to women because of family commitments and responsibilities like housekeeping and maternity leave'.

GoldB02-GP1 also commented 'Banking industries prefer to work with men compared to women especially in the investment banking sector, it is very time consuming and ratio of men to women is 80 -20'. Some experiences and comments indicate they would prefer men to women, women have to go on maternity leave and the schedule becomes an added assignment for men'.

GreenC03-GP1 stated 'Some jobs have been strictly male dominated in Ghana. You may be qualified but they will indicate that working with women is difficult, so others think women are not supposed to hold some positions. Some hold the orientation that women should not be given some positions'.

Further OrangeF06-GP2 commented 'I believe the age could be a factor and other times they expect the qualified and matured candidates to be employed. They once told me they thought I would not be able to control the staff due to my age as I fall within the 25 -30 years age'. Finally, WhiteK10-03 stated 'Women are not given the same opportunities as men'

### **Theme 6: Age Matters/Job Search Difficult**

On the theme of the importance of age and its challenges with the job search process participants noted the following,

RedA01-GP1 ‘Some companies do look at a certain age where some of these family commitments may not be a hinderance to their work due to productive hours and contribution ..... sometimes they ask for 4-5 years plus of experience and someone to add on, not to become a trainee, this affects the position applied for and the company offering’. .....Sometimes there is exploitation as my personal car was being used without remuneration and not being paid for some assignments. Funding may run out on some projects or projects may be cancelled’.

VioletH08-GP3 explained ‘Age matters as well as body size .... They come to the consulting room, and you are there, and they have to share their stories. Sometimes the person is a man, taller and matured than you and they feel uncomfortable sharing their stories and challenges, so the age affects the job’.

OrangeF06-GP2 added ‘Sometimes they say you are too young with a Master’s, they want someone a matured person despite your Master’s’. ....These jobs are not readily available usually you are placed in a junior or beginners level despite being at the Master’s level.... Feedback from applications .... They would respond but inform you other candidates have been selected’.



## Summary

In this study I examined the lived experiences of job search for postgraduate Ghanaian women in Accra. I outlined the findings based on participants views on job search experiences and challenges by highlighting the importance of networking, finding solutions to job search opportunities, upgrading skills in readiness for jobs and the need for Master's education as a leverage in gaining employment. I further highlighted the challenges of job search which included family commitments by women, gender inequality and preference for men, poor response to applications and how women should focus on competence and performance to maintain their jobs and hold management and leadership positions.

In Chapter 5, I will discuss the findings, and provide some interpretation to the outcome of the study. This will support human resource managers, organizations and policy makers in creating more opportunities and enhanced strategies for postgraduate women seeking jobs/employment towards more inclusion of women in the labor market, to address some of the identified challenges and improve the lives of individuals, families, communities and society in general.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine the job search experiences of postgraduate Ghanaian women aged 25 to 45 years in Accra seeking professional employment. This study was a hermeneutic phenomenological that addressed the lived experiences of women seeking professional employment and the challenges and difficulties they encountered. The study was conducted to provide an understanding of the experiences of these postgraduate women, to help contribute to the gap in research, and to provide knowledge and resources for human resource personnel/experts, agencies, organizations, and policy makers in addressing the challenges and difficulties of job search for postgraduate Ghanaian women and beyond.

Key findings of the study included job search experiences such as advantages of higher education/Master's and importance of upgrades in skills and job competences, networking with family and friends, and the use of job search portals to facilitate the job search process. The study revealed difficulties in the job search, including preference for men, gender equality, and family commitments that hinder the job search/employment processes. The findings suggest that in some cases, age is crucial to employment while it may be irrelevant to other organizations.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The findings confirmed some assumptions and in some cases they extended the discussion and disconfirmed others. In Chapter 2, the peer-reviewed literature addressed issues of discrimination, women's family role, and cultural settings being barriers and

challenges to employment (Gilliam & Talpade, 2021; Wood, 2019), stereotypes, and pushbacks (Darko-Asumadu et al., 2018; GSS, 2019). Relegation of women into the background (UNDP, 2017), preference for men (Brueuer & Asiedu, 2017; ILO, 2019; Wood, 2019), and unequal distribution of resources and gender inequality were also highlighted in the study (Anderson, 2019; Asif et al., 2019; Stephan, 2018). The findings of the study confirmed the assertion that the employment ratio for men hired remains higher than that for women as it highlighted the challenges and difficulties women face in job search/employment (see GSS, 2019). The interpretation of the findings is provided under the six themes that emerged in the findings.

### **Master's an Advantage/ Skills Upgrades Essential**

The findings revealed that postgraduate Ghanaian women with job search experiences saw the acquisition of a Master's degree as a strong advantage in seeking employment and gaining an advantage over those with undergraduate positions. The results further highlighted the need for upgrading of skills and competencies to perform better at interviews and also while in employment as it gives an added value to the skills and competencies required in performing job assignments. This confirms the assertion by Abraham et al. (2017) that higher education is a strong indicator for the contribution by the human resources of a country. Master's programs also provided avenues for participants to gain employment, earn an income, and secure promotion and positions into leadership and decision making areas of their career in order to contribute and make a difference in the labor market. Participants emphasized the need for job seekers to enhance their Curriculum Vitae (CVs) and continuously upgrade themselves even when

out of employment to make themselves relevant to industry and to prepare them for the world of work.

### **Networking/Search Job Portals**

Networking was another strong outcome in the study. Results confirmed the need for job seekers to become aware of job opportunities through family, friends, and acquaintances (see Appiah, 2020). The study confirmed that searching job portals and discussing the job search with other persons and looking out for opportunities facilitates the job search process and leads to employment (see Appiah, 2020). The findings also revealed that job seekers ought to be optimistic and pursue knowledge and avenues for career development to be ready for the job market.

### **Age Irrelevant/Competence Is Key**

Participants highlighted the importance of competence in the job search/employment process and noted that most organizations were concerned with competence and ability to perform rather than the age of the employee. They believed that the skills, competence, and contributions of the employer far outweighed their age difference in productivity. The results revealed that though this was not the case for all organizations, the ability of job seekers to show relevant skills and competencies gave them more opportunities than how old they were in the job search process.

### **Family Commitments Matter**

The findings highlighted the challenges of women's dual roles in the area of family and career life. Participants noted that their family lives, career development, and job search activities were affected as women due to the patriarchal roles Ghanaian

women play in the society compared to men who do not need to worry about these roles (Dowuana-Hammond et al., 2020). Some participants indicated they had to let go of some job opportunities to make way for family commitments while others had to work part-time to accommodate the dual roles as career women. These findings can support future policy reviews to develop flexible working terms for women to be able to merge their family and career lifestyles and still make incomes and contribute to economic development.

### **Preference for Men**

Participants indicated the challenges associated with organizational preference for men, stereotyping, and discrimination of women in the employment sector. The issue of preference for men is confirmed by Darko-Asumadu et al. (2018), discrimination and inequality leaves women behind in their contribution to the labor market (Gyabeng et al., 2019; ILO, 2020; Wood, 2019). The findings confirmed that employers' preference for men affects the inclusion of women and hinders participation and contribution to the human resources of the country (see Anderson, 2019). This assertion was further confirmed by the findings of the study as it highlighted the preference for men against women in the job search process, with women facing more difficulties in the job search. These findings can support the development of policies and deliberate strategies that support the inclusion of women and their participation in professional employment.

### **Age Matters/Job Search Difficult**

The results revealed that women aged 25 to 45 years faced challenges and difficulties that hindered their job search/employment such as family commitments and

the roles they played in society that denies or limits their contribution to the labor market. The study further confirmed that women's inclusion and leadership was less than men, as men were given priority, and resources were not equally distributed. I found issues of discrimination of women, stereotyping, and harassment for women in the job search and employment process. The results of the study confirmed that there continues to be a gap in the employment of women compared to men as only four out of the 10 women aged 25 to 45 who participated in the study were employed, with six participants still searching for jobs.

The results of this study extended the discussion for the need for increasing women's employment in the labor market to benefit from the higher education, skills, and competencies they hold for socioeconomic development. It further buttresses the need for women's employment and inclusion in decision making to address issues of discrimination and stereotyping of women in employment. The study did not confirm whether the unemployment or job search difficulties of women was affecting their family life and contribution to their communities.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The findings confirmed the appropriateness of the use of the feminist theory to examine the experiences of postgraduate Ghanaian women seeking professional employment as I focused on their inclusion in the labor market. The theoretical framework of this qualitative hermeneutic-phenomenological study focused on the issue of women's employment and inclusion, gender inequality, and women's empowerment in sharing their lived experiences to highlight the challenges and difficulties they

encountered (see McCann & Kim, 2017). Interviews conducted were supported by the hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry approach and allowed participants to share their stories and experiences in both the past and present (see Lauterbach, 2018). The adoption of Heidegger's hermeneutic interpretative approach supported me to share previous experiences, preconceptions, and understanding of the phenomenon of the job search for women and to clear any bias that may have existed to ensure that the voices of the participants were clearly articulated and interpreted in the study (see Adu, 2019; Peoples, 2020). This approach ensured that the lens of the researcher was clearly bracketed and removed from the voices of the participants in presenting the findings with the readers and research question in mind (see Adu, 2019).

The interpretation of the data was limited to the 10 participants' views as shared in the themes and quotations in Table 1. The interviews were transcribed, coded, and categorized to arrive at themes that emerged as issues of concern and experiences. The scope of the study included interviewing eight to 16 postgraduate Ghanaian women with job search experiences in Accra, Ghana and abroad. The participants were aged between 25 to 45 years and had postgraduate degrees in MA, MSc, MBA, with nine of them studying in Ghana and one from the United Kingdom. All 10 participants completed their education within the targeted years of 2019 – 2021 and had experiences of job search in professional employment in Accra. The findings confirmed the eagerness of all 10 women in seeking and remaining employed to contribute their skills and knowledge acquired at the postgraduate level to the Ghanaian labor market despite the challenges and difficulties they faced.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of the study included the factors that the researcher has no control over (Barron, 2019). These limitations include the geographical location of the study in Accra as I sought to narrow the job search experiences of women in the capital city with the highest population and high density of corporate and organizations (see GSS, 2021). The age limit of 25 to 45 years could have been a limitation for participants in the age group of 46 to 55 as there are women who remain in employment after their undergraduate and complete the postgraduate education while employed due to family roles and cultural challenges. The issue of generalizability could have been a limitation due to the sample size of 10 women even though saturation was achieved. The sample size did not include more participants from other universities in Accra and the regional capitals of Ghana that provided professional and postgraduate training, and this could have been a limitation.

The location of Accra was a limitation because other postgraduate Ghanaian women with job search experiences outside Accra could have provided different outcomes in a similar study. The years selected for participation of 2019 – 2021 could have also served as a limitation given that other postgraduate Ghanaian women with job search experiences outside these years could have had similar or different experiences that could have provided further understanding of the experiences shared in the findings.

The mode of interviews, which was limited to phone-ins due to the COVID-19 challenges and the ability to have in person interviews. could have served as a limitation of this study. The inability to hold in-person interviews was also a limitation as I could



not apply most of the observational strategies in the interview process and was limited to assessing the voice and tone of participants to understand their discomfort or inability to share some personal information that could have been crucial or relevant to the study and have shed more light on their experiences (see Adu, 2019).

Research bias could also have changed the outcome of the results; hence, I used the *epoche* approach to block my personal views and conceptions on the issues of the job search in order to hear the authentic voices of the participants (see Moustakas, 1994). Even though I conducted a reflexive study and adopted Heidegger's approach to declare my preconceptions and previous knowledge in the area of the job search as a professional woman, there may be an issue of unintentional inclusion in the lens of the study (see Peoples, 2020). I used field notes, audio recordings, and member checking with participants to confirm their views, which supported the credibility and confirmation of the views of participants to bring out their voices in the study.

### **Recommendations**

I recommend that job search strategies for securing employment include networking with family and friends, creating linkages, upgrading skills and competencies, and learning about the organizations where one intends to secure employment. I recommend a crucial review of Curriculum Vitae by prospective job seekers to reflect their strong abilities, knowledge, and skills that will enhance their chances of employment. I also recommend that job seekers remain persistent and optimistic in securing jobs and upgrading themselves while waiting to gain access to employment to make them ready for the job market. Additionally, I recommend human

resource practitioners, employers, and policy makers to consider addressing issues of preference for men and increasing women's participation in the job market. They should further consider developing policies and programs such as flexibility and programs that address the issues women face in their roles as career and family women.

This qualitative hermeneutic-phenomenological study addressed the lived experiences of postgraduate Ghanaian women aged 25 to 45 years seeking jobs in Accra. The basis of the study was derived from the feminist theory, which supports women's inclusion, employment, and empowerment (see Peoples, 2020). The purpose of the study was to understand the experiences and challenges and difficulties as shared by the 10 women and how these could be addressed to support future job search experiences. I also sought to contribute to the literature and to provide knowledge and feedback to human resource experts, organizations, and policy makers on how they can support future job search experiences of postgraduate Ghanaian women in Ghana and beyond. According to the WB (2020) and the ILO (2018), women contribute immensely to socioeconomic development, and the inclusion of women in governance and leadership positions can greatly contribute to the increase in productivity through its human resource. Ghana's development in recent years has been rapid, but this has not translated in the increase in employment and economic development (Affum-Osei et al., 2019).

### **Implications**

Potential positive change to be derived from this study includes an increase in women's employment through addressing some of the identified challenges, such as equality, discrimination in age, gender, and family commitments that hinder the easy

access to employment of most postgraduate women seeking employment. The redress of these challenges could support more income earning by women to support themselves, their families, and their communities. The implications for human resources and organizations could lead to organizational changes that spearhead and sustain women's advocacy for equality and nondiscrimination to give them that advantage to compete and support productivity (Asekere & Awaisu, 2021; Bagues & Campa, 2021; Bruktawit & Beyene, 2018). Women will be able to contribute skills and competences through productivity and decision making in organizations and become change agents in supporting other women and organizational values and goals.

The contributions of the study included change in policies that provide avenues for women's inclusion and leadership, flexibility at work for women to be able to attend to family and work issues with little or no stress while making an impact in society. The study implications for social change will lead to more women earning incomes to support households, increasing the human capital for economic growth, and being role models for future girls and women to reduce the employment gaps. This study should encourage women to continue job search/employment strategies, enhance their skills and competencies and contribute to organizations while playing dual and equal roles in improving family life and societal changes in their communities and organizations.

### **Conclusions**

In this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study, I examined the job search experiences of postgraduate Ghanaian women aged 25 to 45 years in Accra. I aimed at understanding participants job search experiences and how this affected their

employment, inclusion into the job market and performance at the leadership and governance levels as professional women. The findings highlighted several challenges including age and gender discrimination, poor response to job search, intimidation and job insecurity.

The findings highlighted the need for higher education/Master's as a strong leverage for employment in Ghana and for women in particular as it gave them more opportunities to compete with men at the job search/employment platforms. Networking with family and friends, use of employment portals, maintaining strong relationships with organizations and continuous upgrade of skills and competences remained crucial in the job search process leading to possible employment and retainment on the job market. The study noted women continued to seek higher education to compete equally with their men in the world of work though there still remains discrimination, gender inequality, harassment, challenges with family roles and commitments and preference for men than women in the employment sector.

The findings confirmed stereotypes and challenges women faced in merging the dual role of family and careers while advancing in employment and contributing skills and knowledge acquired to earn incomes to support families, communities and the society. Though the issues highlighted in the findings may not be exhaustive, the recommendations if considered can support the inclusion of women in the labor market and enhance their contributions to the social and economic development of their countries. Given that women continue to remain the highest population in Ghana, their inclusion into the employment sector could reduce the unemployment situation in the

country whiles empowering them to become change agents through decision making and productivity.

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### Appendix A: Social Media Post and Invitational Email

Dear prospective participant,

This is Gertrude Addo, a PhD Candidate at Walden University studying Human Services with a focus on Social Policy Analysis and Planning. Currently, I am undertaking research in Ghana to examine the job search experiences of postgraduate Ghanaian women who have acquired master's in business administration (MBA), Arts (MA), Philosophy (MPhil), Science (MSc) in Ghana or abroad. The purpose of the study is to understand the experiences, challenges and encounters by postgraduate women seeking professional employment at the administrative, managerial or decision making levels.

The participation of this study requires women aged 25-45 years with job search experiences in the city of Accra, and who have acquired their master's degrees in Ghana or abroad from 2019 – 2021. Interested participants will be asked to join in-person interviews, phone interviews including WhatsApp or Zoom due to the COVID 19 Pandemic. Interviews will last between 45 – 60 minutes and participants are free to discontinue at any time if they are unwilling to do so. The study will be strictly confidential and voluntary, and synonyms/titles will be used to protect participants identity. There are no risk to this study and no compensations for participation.

Please contact the undersigned if you are willing to participate.

Thank you

Sincerely,

**Gertrude Addo**

Ph.D candidate (Human Services, Social Policy Analysis & Planning)  
Walden University

## Appendix B: Interview Observation Protocol

### **Interview observation protocols for engaging participants on ‘the job search experiences of postgraduate Ghanaian women aged 25-45 years in Accra, Ghana’.**

As part of interviewing protocols for the study, I will obtain consent of participants for conducting the interview and requesting the preferred mode of interviewing tools including in-person, phone interview or virtual platforms. The use of virtual platforms include WhatsApp, Skype, or Zoom for the interview.

The observation protocol will help interviewer to conduct self-reflection on how the participant was able to respond to interview questions and support the interpretation of reactions, actions, emotions, easy response to interview questions, comfortability, and ability of participant to easily understand and respond to main and follow up questions. The following interview observation protocols will be applied during the field work;

#### **A. Observation protocol for in-person and phone-in interviews**

- i. Informing and requesting consent of the participant to record the interview (voice recording for transcription) during the interview for the 45 – 60 minutes of engagement and offering to share the outcome of the records for verification and consent.
- ii. Identifying and suggesting/requesting for interview location (proximity to participants choice) using a friendly environment to ensure the comfort of the participants.
- iii. Identifying or encouraging participants to choose locations with less noise and comfortable seating and relaxed atmosphere
- iv. Allowing time for participant to reflect and response to interview questions and remain interactive with the participant to ensure continuous engagement
- v. Observing behaviours, movements, comments body actions and comments of participants during interview to assess participants listening, maintaining eye contact and active response to questions.
- vi. Observation include facial expressions, gestures, and posture shifts (smiling nodding and agreement, leaning forward or disagreeing, shaking of head, frowning)

- vii. Noting non-responsive gestures from participants including verbal and non-verbal behaviour indicates he/she is listening, using hand gestures, or looking away frequently at something to show discomfort.
- viii. Looking out for participant active and engaging response to questions and answering questions or participating and engaging in the interview (smiling, nodding, agreeing, and disagreeing)
- ix. Observe fidgeting in the seat, continuous movement and looking away and not focusing, losing eye contact, pensive facial expressions, and unresponsive cues on questions, playing with phone or other gadgets paying attention to other interruptions, listening to music distracted by an off-task conversation or intruder at the time of interview.
- x. Informing participants of possible follow-up call for 20 – 30 minutes at their time of preference to help clarify interview responses when needed.

**B. Observation protocol for Virtual interviews (Skype, WhatsApp, or Zoom)**

Additional protocols to be used in addition to items (i – x) above;

- Suggestion of enclosed or quiet locations to avoid interruptions and distractions from passers by
- Checking microphone, internet connections and speakers and functioning webcam to avoid technology glitches and plugged-in headsets working properly.
- Participants to confirm good visual aids and hearing aids to support internet connections and responses to interview questions.
- Use of neutral background and extra lighting where necessary to help observe participants composure, facial expressions, reactions to questions and hesitations to avoid answering uncomfortable questions.



## Appendix C: Interview Protocol

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time of Interview:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewer:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewee:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interview Questions**

1. Thanks for agreeing to share your story and for making the time. Are you currently employed or still searching for professional employment in Accra?
2. Kindly share some of your experiences and challenges you encountered in your job search process during the application processes.
3. How would you describe your job search process as a woman with a postgraduate education seeking professional employment in Accra?
  - a. Are there some specific recommendations you would like to be addressed?
4. How has your achievement of a postgraduate degree enhanced your job search for professional employment as woman?
  - a. Would you say your male counterparts and course mates experience the same or similar issues?
5. What are your experiences as women seeking professional positions at the managerial, leadership and decision making positions?
  - a. As a woman seeking professional employment at the decision making level what were your expectations?
  - b. How has your job search as a highly educated woman affected your personal life and career options?
6. How would you describe your age bracket and the job search experience in Accra?
  - a. And would you say it could have been better if you were much older or younger?
7. Can you share your final thoughts on your job search experiences and any recommendations to improve or address future opportunities for professional employment of women?

**Closing statement:** Thank you for your participation today, I wish to confirm that the contents of your interview are purely for educational purposes and will be kept confidential. Meanwhile, the draft of this interview outcome will be shared with you

for your comments if you wish to ensure we echo your views correctly. Once again we appreciate your time and effort in this study.