

Parental Involvement and Academic Performance in Ghana

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Introduction

If provided an opportunity to save via formal financial services, will youth participate? This is one of the fundamental questions being asked by YouthSave, a four-country study targeted for young people ages 12 to 18 living predominantly in low-income households. Youth do save informally and—if given an opportunity—also may participate in formal banking services (Save the Children Federation, Inc., 2012; UNCDF, 2011), but such opportunities are few. The limited research available suggests that financial inclusion has important youth development effects and deserves greater study (Chowa & Ansong, 2010; Deshpande & Zimmerman, 2010; Elliott, 2012; Scanlon & Adams, 2009; Ssewamala & Ismayilova, 2009).

YouthSave is a pioneering project designed to increase savings and development among low-income youth in Colombia, Ghana, Kenya, and Nepal. The goals of YouthSave research are to measure the uptake, savings outcomes, experiences, and impacts of youth savings accounts (YSAs) on clients and financial institutions. In Ghana, a rigorous research design that includes a control group with quantitative and qualitative evidence has been implemented to assess the impact of savings accounts on youth development and asset accumulation.

Parental Involvement and Academic Performance

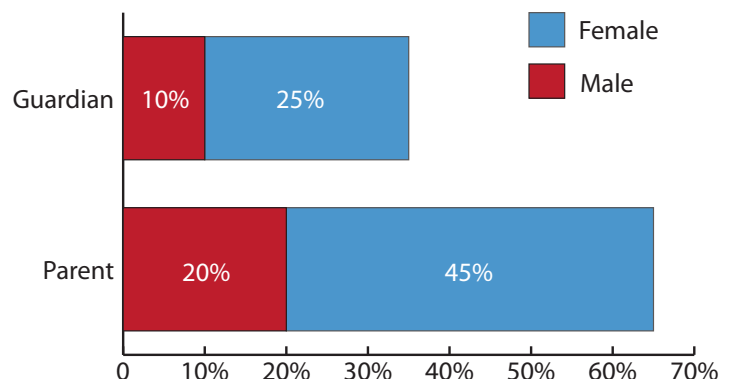
A key question of the YouthSave Ghana Experiment is how savings and other factors impact educational outcomes. Most empirical evidence suggests that parental or guardian involvement (hereafter referred to as parental involvement) is associated positively with students' performance in school (Nyarko & Vorgelegt, 2007; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010). Although research in this area is increasing, attention has not focused on specific populations (e.g., 12- to 14-year-old

children in Sub-Saharan African countries). This brief reports data from the ongoing YouthSave Ghana Experiment to offer preliminary findings of the extent of parental involvement in children's schooling and how socio-demographic factors are associated with parental involvement. Understanding baseline associations will enable investigators to determine if these factors are affected by the YouthSave intervention.

Methods

The YouthSave Ghana Experiment uses a cluster randomized design with 100 schools selected randomly from eight of Ghana's ten regions. Fifty schools were assigned randomly to treatment condition, and another 50 were assigned randomly to control condition. Sixty students were selected randomly from each school for a total of 3,000 youth in treatment condition and 3,000 in control condition with oversampling for attrition. This process yielded a sample of 6,252 youth who completed a baseline survey. Data from this research brief are from 4,572 parents and guardians who also completed a baseline survey. Figure 1 presents the gender distribution of parents and guardians interviewed.

Figure 1: Gender Distribution among Parents and Guardians



Data were collected from May through June 2011 by our partners at the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) at the University of Ghana. At baseline data collection, parents or guardians (hereafter referred to as parents, mothers, or fathers) were asked eight questions about their level of involvement. Four questions assessed parents' engagement in their children's education at home, and four questions assessed parents' engagement with their children's school environment. Key variables we examine are multidimensional measures of parental involvement, socio-demographic characteristics of youth and parents, and math and English scores. Analyses are limited to univariate and bivariate methods.

Nature and Level of Parental Involvement

We investigate the nature and level of parental involvement—including engagement and monitoring—by comparing parents who had never been engaged in their children's education to those who had been involved both in the school environment and at home. Nyarko (2011) observes that while Ghanaian parents often have engaged in their children's schooling in one form or another, their involvement historically has been limited to school-related activities at home (e.g., ensuring completion of homework).

Figure 2. Nature of Engagement within the School Environment

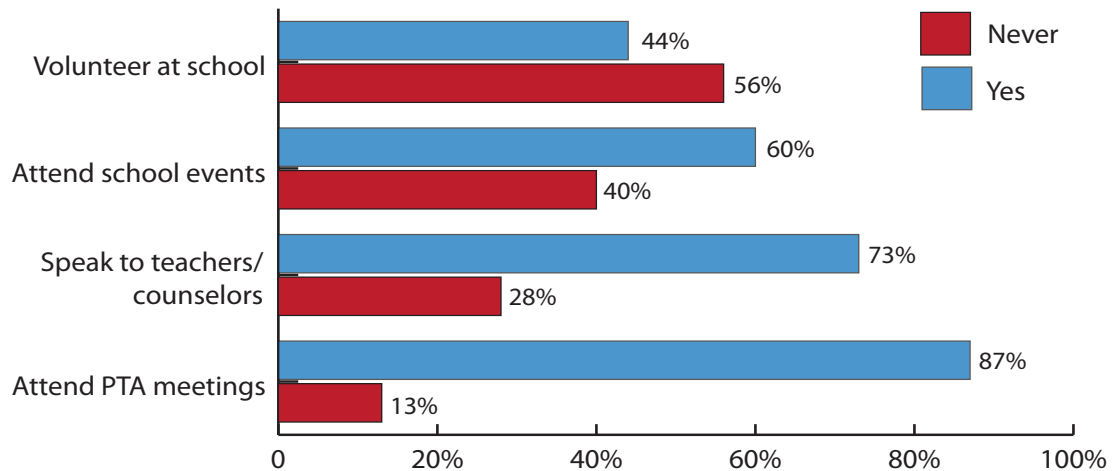
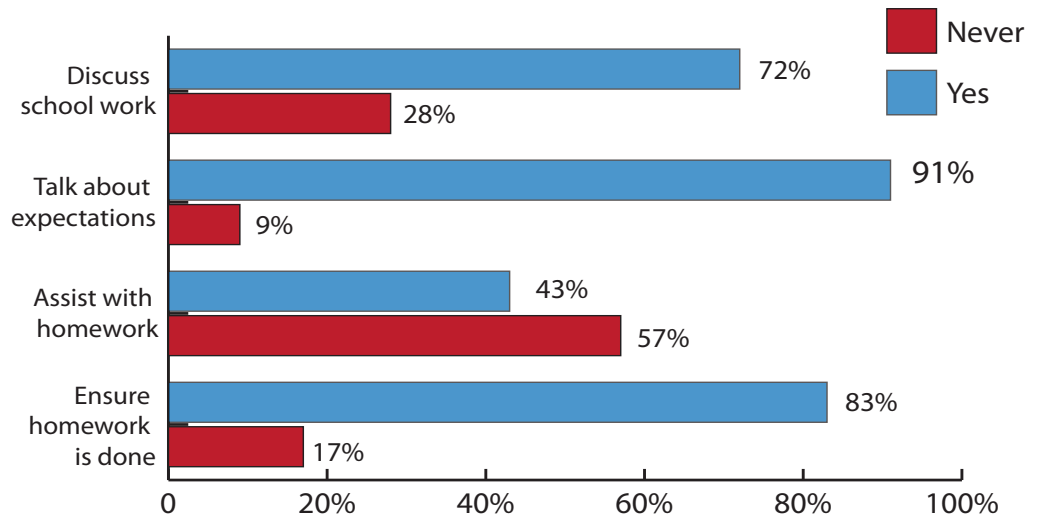


Figure 3. Nature of Engagement at Home



This is changing as more parents are interacting with the school environment by attending school meetings and recreational events (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1994). Other empirical research consistently has found associations between a host of socio-demographic factors (e.g., economic circumstances, personal priorities, self-interest, child's and parents' level of education, family structure, and family size) and the nature, extent, and educational outcomes of parental involvement (Schmitt & Kleine, 2010; Schimpl-Neimanns, 2000).

Engagement within the School Environment

As depicted in Figure 2, parental involvement in the school environment appears to be high because a majority (87%) report attending PTA meetings, the most common form of parental involvement at school.

Engagement at Home

Parents report a high level of involvement with their children at home (Figure 3). The majority of parents (91%) report discussing expectations with their children, but nearly 6 out of 10 parents (57%) report they never assist their children directly with homework.

Extent of Engagement at Home and in School

As Nyarko (2011) and Elam and colleagues (1994) point out, Ghanaian parents historically have been more involved with their children at home than in school. To assess whether engagement within the school environment is still lagging behind engagement at home, we compare parents who had absolutely no involvement to those who had at least some. We find that average involvement at home ($M=2.89$, $SD=0.25$) exceeds average involvement at school ($M=2.77$, $SD=0.19$), but the difference is minimal. Almost all parents report that they never devote time to assist with children’s homework at home (Figure 4).

Regarding engagement in school, involvement in most measures is moderate across the board with the exception of attendance at PTA meetings (Figure 5).

Parents report attending PTA meetings “very often” more than for any other measure of involvement at school. Such meetings are often mandatory for parents who may attend to avoid penalties.

Parental Involvement and Socio-demographic Characteristics of Parents

Nearly every empirical study on parental involvement finds that parents’ engagement in their children’s education varies by socio-demographic and economic circumstances, such as marital status, educational level, and the child’s gender (Georgiou, 2007; Schimpl-Neimanns, 2000; Schmitt & Kleine, 2010). These differences are consistent with findings from the Ghana Experiment baseline data. In the following sections, we present differences in parental involvement found for parents’ marital status, education level, and gender and the child’s gender.

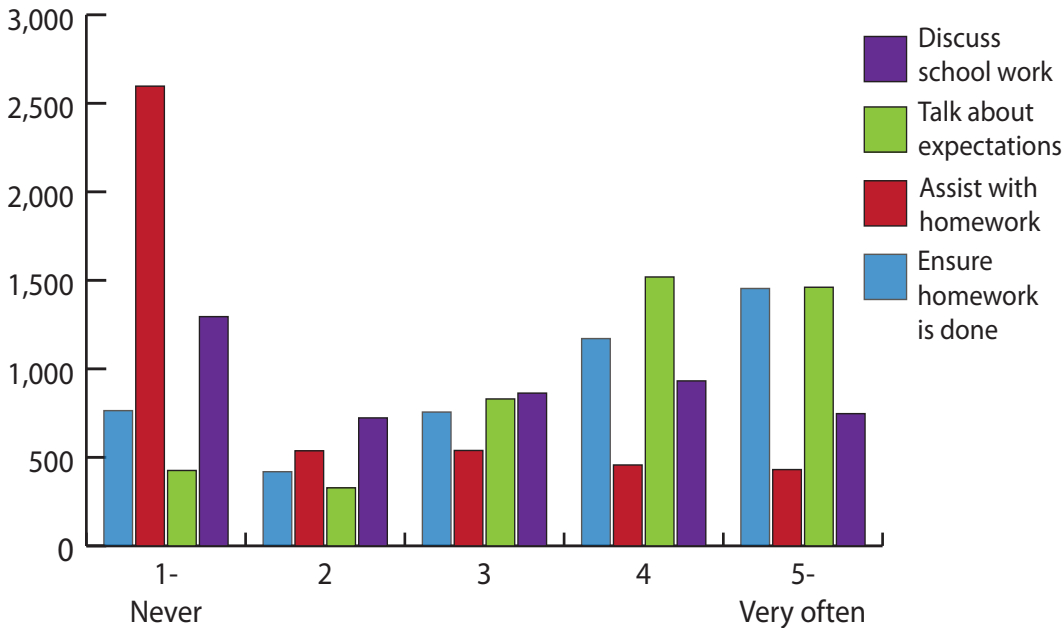


Figure 4. Extent of Engagement at Home

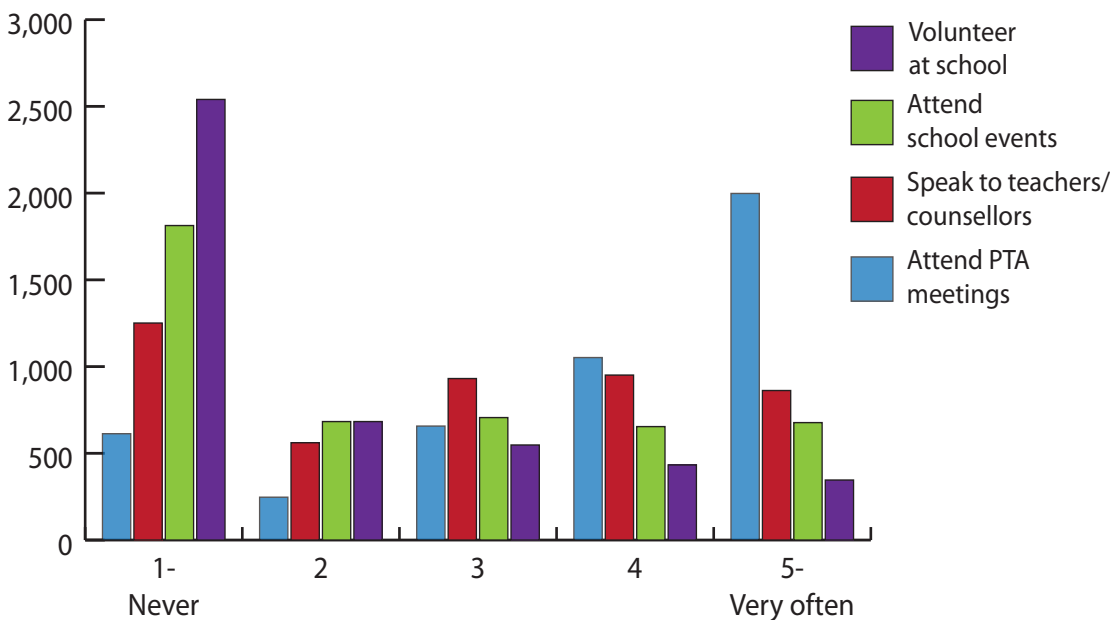


Figure 5. Extent of Engagement within the School Environment

Marital Status

Married parents are more likely to be involved in their children’s education than single parents. Using a scale of 1 (never involved) to 5 (very often involved), married parents report checking whether their children have done their homework more frequently ($M=3.51$) than single parents ($M=3.37$; $p<.001$). Among the 1,270 single parents, 38.7% assist their children with homework, but 44.8% of the 3,291 married parents provide more direct assistance with homework (Figure 6).

Education Level

Before assessing the relationship between parents’ education and engagement, we compare each child’s current educational level to their parents’ highest level of education. Almost two thirds of youth already have attained

a level of education equal to (20%) or greater than (36%) that of their parents (Figure 7).

A comparison of parents’ educational level and involvement in their children’s education shows parents are more engaged when their own educational level exceeds their children’s current level of education (Figure 8). However, parents less educated than their children are more engaged within their children’s school environment than parents who have a level of education equivalent to or greater than their children’s. Less educated parents are more involved perhaps because many would like to see their children attain higher education than they did.

Similarly, parents more educated than their children are more engaged at home than those whose education is equivalent to or lower than that of their children (Figure 9).

Figure 6. Marital Status and Assisting with Homework

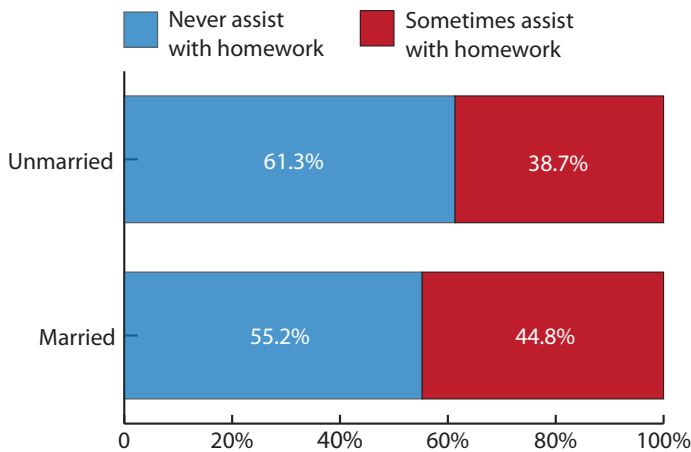


Figure 7. Child’s Current Education Level Compared to Parent’s Education

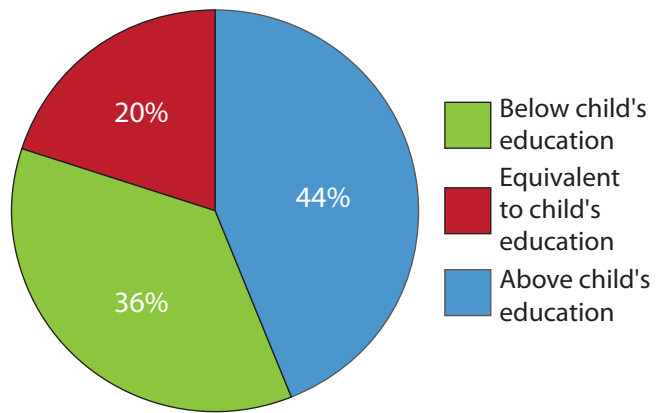
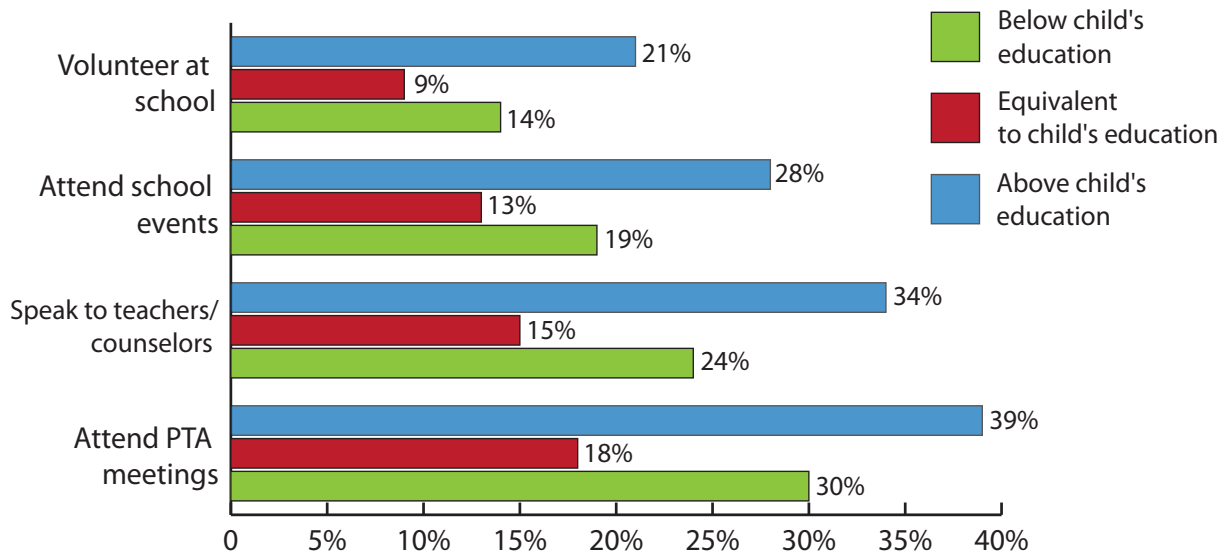


Figure 8. Educational Level of Parents Engaged within the Child’s School Environment



Using a 1-5 rating scale, parents with a university-level education report talking to their children about what they learn in school more often (M=3.95) than those who have completed senior high school (M=2.91), completed junior high school (M=2.62), or have no formal education (M=2.36). Parents with a university-level education also report attending children's school events more regularly (M=3.09) than those with no formal education (M=2.20). Likewise, parents who are university graduates say they make sure their children have done their homework (M=4.17) more often than those who have no formal education (M=2.83).

Child's Gender

Overall, parents' involvement is fairly consistent for male and female children. However, parents are more involved at home than at school for female children (Figure 10) and more involved at school than at home for male children (Figure 11). This gender difference may be a consequence of social norms that long favored active participation in school for boys and at-home schooling for girls. This disparity is changing as Ghana attempts to eliminate the gender gap in education (ICF Macro, 2010).

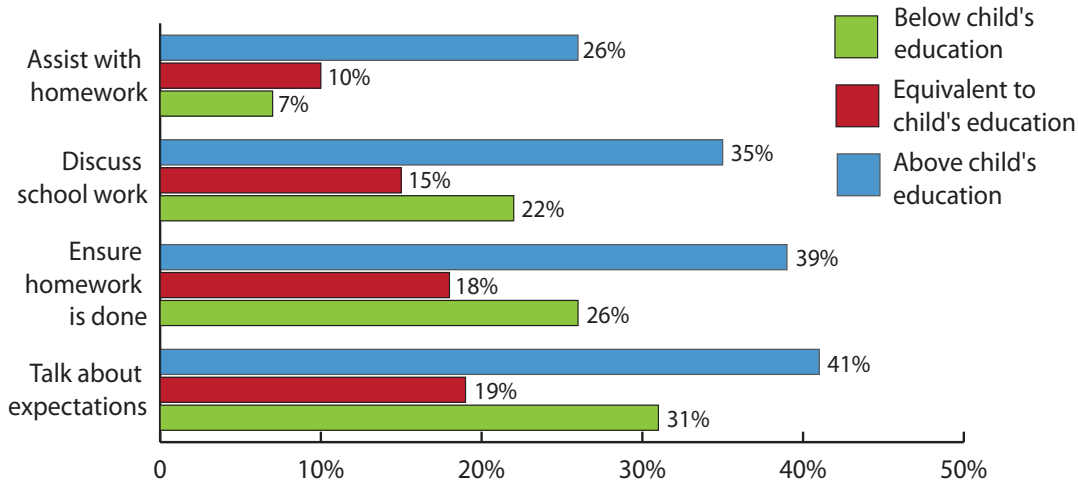


Figure 9. Education Level of Parents Engaged with Child at Home

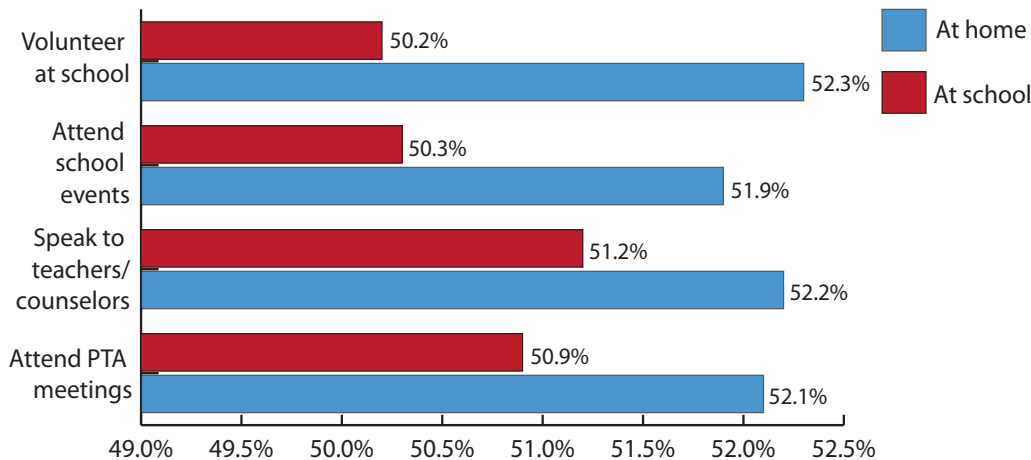


Figure 10. Female Child and Parental Engagement

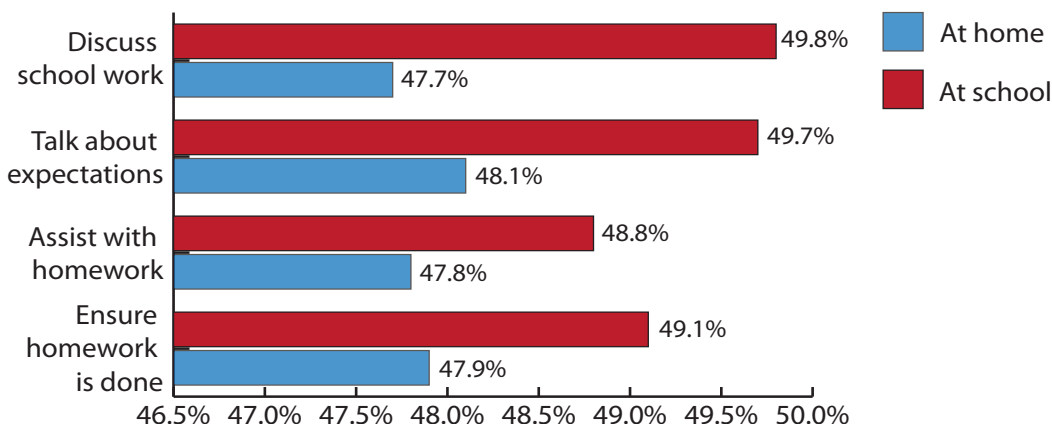


Figure 11. Male Child and Parental Engagement

Parent's Gender

We find slightly higher involvement at home among mothers (72.66% of 2,371 interviewed) than fathers (71.6% of the 2,205 interviewed) (Figure 12). More fathers talk about their expectations (90.3%) than discuss school work, assist with homework, or ensure homework is done. Reflecting a contrary trend, 67.18% of fathers engage at school contrasted with 64.56% of mothers (Figure 13). Overall, engagement at school is low contrasted with engagement at home.

Parental Involvement and Academic Performance

Most empirical studies show children perform better in school when parents are involved (Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004; Nyarko & Vorgelegt, 2007; Topper, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010), but a few show that parental involvement may not always be associated significantly and positively with children's educational performance (Izzo & colleagues, 1999). For this research brief, we compare all measures of parental involvement to children's performance in math and English. Results vary, which supports the mixed findings from existing empirical studies. In the YouthSave Ghana Experiment baseline data, most measures of parental involvement are not associated statistically with high achievement in math

and English. If this trend of non-significant relationships between parental involvement and educational performance changes after the YouthSave intervention, we may learn new insight into how the intervention may affect the impact of parental involvement on children's education.

Math Performance

Overall, more parental involvement is not associated significantly with better math performance (Figure 14). Paradoxically, students whose parents make sure homework is done perform slightly worse in math ($M=53.37$, $SD=16.87$) than students whose parents do not ($M=53.55$, $SD=16.24$).¹ Similarly, children whose parents interact with teachers and school counselors perform worse in math ($M=53.36$, $SD=17.10$) than those whose parents do not ($M=53.45$, $SD=15.84$). It is possible parents are engaging with school authorities because they are concerned about their children's already poor academic performance.

English Performance

When parents talk to their children about what they learned in school, children's performance in English is significantly higher ($t=2.21$, $p<.05$) (Figure 15). Otherwise, there is no significant relationship between parental involvement and English performance.

Figure 12. Parent's Gender and Engagement at Home

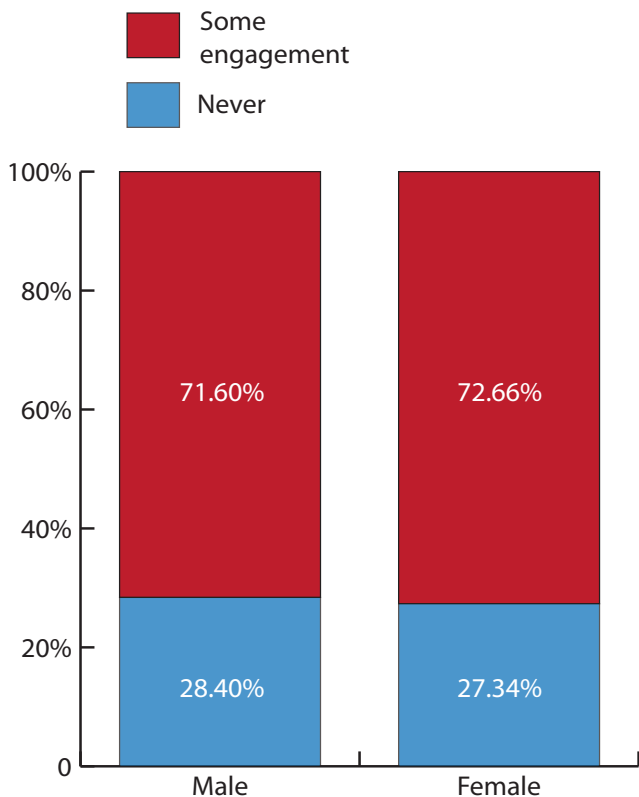


Figure 13. Parent's Gender and Engagement within the School Environment

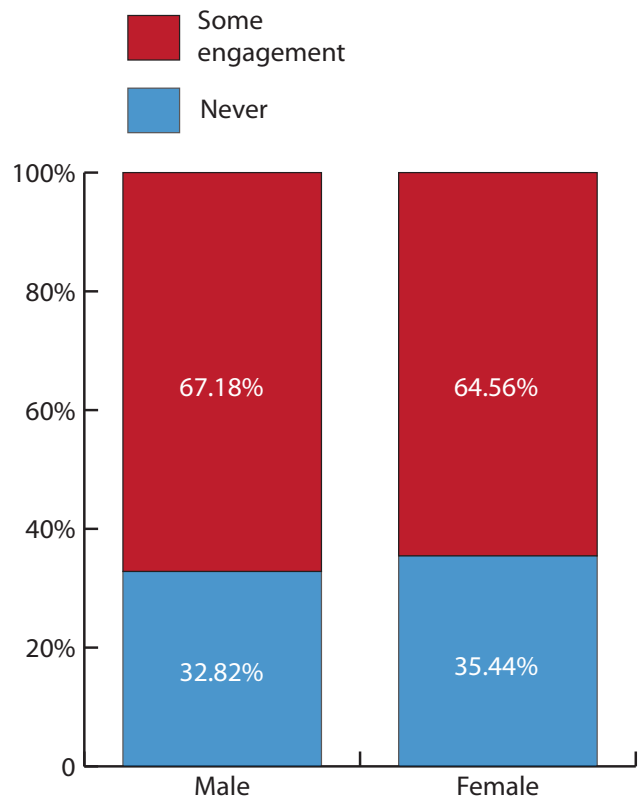


Figure 14. Parental Involvement and Math Grade

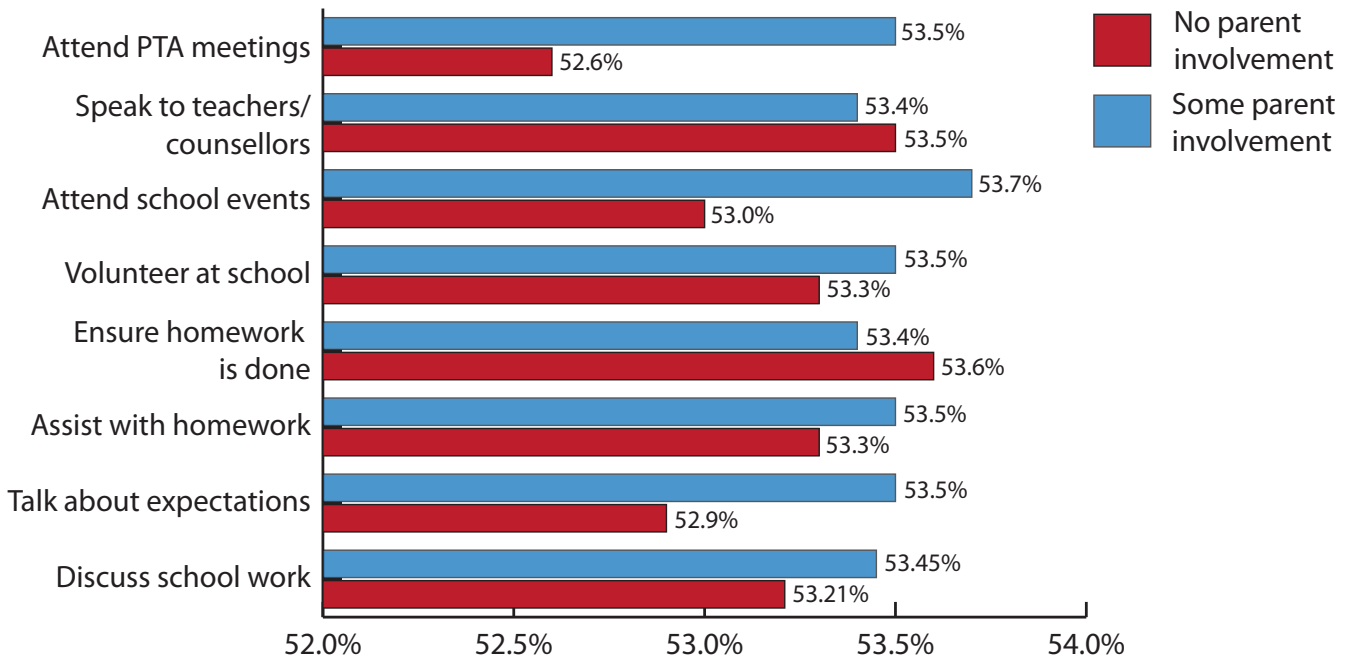
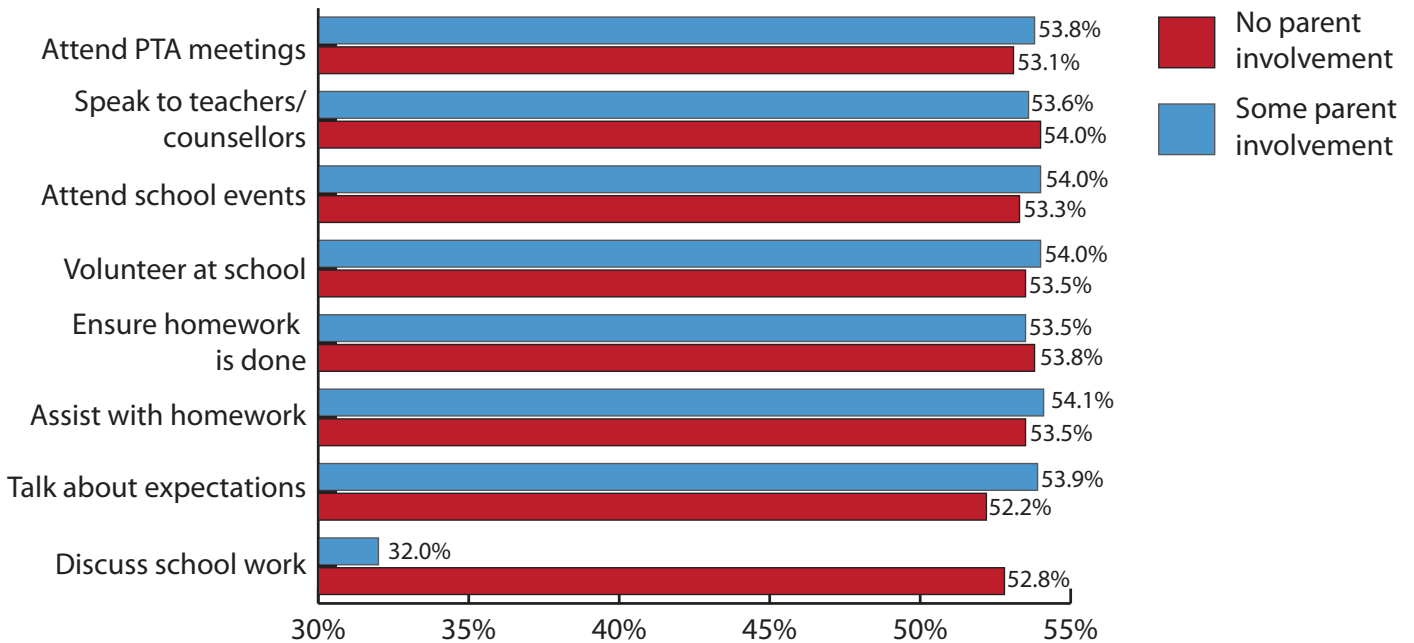


Figure 15: Parental Involvement and English Grade



Conclusion

This research brief sheds light on the nature of Ghanaian parents' engagement in their children's education and socio-demographic factors (e.g., marital status, educational level, child's gender, parent's gender) that affect involvement. More Ghanaian parents are somewhat involved than absolutely detached from their children's education, but the extent of involvement is low overall. This finding supports Nyarko (2011) and Pryor and Ampiah's (2003a) finding that parental involvement

is still generally low but becoming more prevalent, especially regarding engagement within the school environment.

Married individuals may be able to share the burden of engaging with their child, but Donkor (2010) cautions that this relationship is complex and depends on whether they are the child's biological parents and whether the child belongs to a polygamous family. Non-biological and polygamous parents may have divided attention and be less likely to be involved in the child's schooling.

Findings from this study also reveal that only one measure of parental involvement—talking to children about what they learn in school—is significantly and positively associated with academic performance. Prior studies have found similarly mixed results in the relationship between parental involvement and academic performance. In some cases, children’s academic performance is better when parents are uninvolved. It is possible that behavioral factors not controlled for in this analysis mediate the association between parental involvement and performance in school. Izzo and colleagues (1999) speculate that non-significant and sometimes negative results could be caused by parents becoming more involved when children are not performing well in school.

Knowing the level of parental involvement at baseline will allow researchers to understand better the dynamics of YSA take-up and use. Are parents who already are more involved in education at baseline also more receptive and supportive of YSA take-up? What impact could increased involvement of parents have on the use of YSAs? These questions might be answered when we link data regarding parental involvement to youth savings at endpoint.

We know from previous research that parental involvement is predictive of children’s educational outcomes (Nyarko & Vorgelegt, 2007; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010). Thus, knowing the extent of parental involvement at baseline will allow researchers to determine the independent impact of YSAs on youth educational performance after accounting for factors already known to improve educational outcomes. Similarly, insight into the level of parental involvement at baseline also allows researchers to assess how take-up and use of YSAs influences parental support of and involvement in their children’s education.

Endnote

1. By Ghana Education Service’s standards, a 50% score is average performance.

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Acknowledgments

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