'They call it a slum, we call it home': Coping With and Adapting to Deprivations in Urban Slums In Ghana

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INTRODUCTION
Although slums are found in almost every city globally, their increased proliferation and deplorable nature in developing world cityscapes is a major policy concern. Despite the growing amount of literature on slums, the social construction of vulnerability and adaptation of slum dwellers has received little attention in the developing world, where the slum population is expected to double by 2030. Drawing insights from the relative deprivation theory, and based on empirical research from two slum settlements in Ghana, this study examines the infrastructure and service deprivation in slum, and the coping and adaptation strategies slum dwellers employ.

AIMS / OBJECTIVES
- To understand the lived experiences of slum dwellers amid infrastructure and service deprivation
- Document the everyday coping strategies of slum dwellers

METHODS
Research Design
Mixed methods
- Quantitative methods (household survey with slum dwellers)
- Qualitative In-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussion to explore the lived experiences of slum dwellers
- Field observation and field photographs

Sampling and Data Collection
- 300 slum households were randomly sampled.
- 4 Focus group discussions — sample population segregated into males and females.
- The ages of all participants ranged from 18-75.

STUDY CONTEXT
Two slums — Akwatia-line and Dagomba-line in the Ashanti region
These slums are ranked among the most populated and rapidly growing informal settlements in the Kumasi metropolis
Both settlements share similar residential and livelihood features and are situated along deserted railways

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS
Factors that influence movement to slums.
- Urban squeeze and hardship push some urban dwellers into informal spaces
- Breaking out of the rural poverty bubble
- The urban greener pasture syndrome
- Escaping the dangers of socio-cultural ethnic disputes

Lived experiences of slum dwellers
- Infrastructure and service deprivation
- Exploitation by private service providers
- Poverty traps: escaping poverty into new poverties.
- Social separation from distant rural families
- Must learn to live in crowded environments

Coping and Adaptation strategies
- Working long hours in exploitative informal work arrangements
- Food rationing: The 1:0:1/0:0:1/1:0:0 feeding strategy
- Relying on social support from relatives
- Involving whole household including children in everyday hustling

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION
Towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) of making cities habitable for ‘all’ by 2030, this study recommends the following:
- Tackling underlying poverty in both rural and urban areas
- Strengthening welfare schemes for the urban poor particularly housing
- A move towards integrating slums in urban planning rather than the usual demolishing approach

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT
This research has extensively contributed to my understanding of the complexity of slums

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