

# Social and psychological aspects of communal hunting (*pieli*) among residents of Tamale Metropolis in the Northern Region of Ghana

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## Abstract

The practice of communal hunting (also referred to as “mob” hunting) has been the pastime of the people of the Northern Region of Ghana for as long as many may remember. It has recently come to the fore for all the wrong reasons primarily due to its perceived environmental impacts. While the generally held notion is that this form of hunting is essentially for the acquisition of meat, little has been done to establish other factors that continue to entice people to engage in this activity. Through a combination of participant observation and administration of structured interviews to hunters in the Tamale Metropolis, this paper brings out the social characteristics of participants, as well as the motivations for engaging in this activity. It is suggested that the practice should be modified to include the strict observance of hunting rules, issuance of licenses, and designation of areas for hunting. This could be the genesis of controlled recreational hunting in the region.

**Key Words:** Hunting, Animals, Motivation, Recreation, Tamale

## Introduction

Hunting and gathering of wild animals has been and continues to be an important aspect of life in many societies, especially rural African ones. In the past, hunting provided the main source of animal protein, a fact which may have contributed to professional hunters occupying highly respected places in the society. Even in modern day Africa, some groups such as the Bushmen in South Africa depend almost entirely on hunting and gathering to obtain essential protein and cash income, while many other groups supplement their livelihoods considerably through hunting (Asibey, 1974; Tutu, Ntiamoa-Baidu, and Asuming-Brempong, 1993). Surprisingly, hunters in most hunter-gatherer societies

only manage to kill few large game animals (over 10kg) per year (Hawkes, O’Connell and Jones, 1980).

Hunting still forms an integral part of life for many Ghanaians, primarily as a way of looking or searching thoroughly for animals to serve as food for the family/household. It is practiced all over the country in various forms. In the southern part, hunting is done almost all year round either individually or in small groups. This departs from the practice in the northern parts where hunting activity is confined to only the dry season months (from November to April). Communal hunting is what is predominantly practiced in the northern sector, where people (men) or communities organize themselves in groups and travel long distances in trucks into the

wild to hunt for meat and for other reasons. It is often assumed that those that engage in this type of hunting are mostly illiterate farmers who only go to gain meat for the family. This, however, may not entirely be the case.

The idea of hunting tourism (or hunting for other reasons beside food) however, is still generally a little known sector and is therefore also an untapped resource for rural and regional development. This is especially true of the Northern Region which is rich in different kinds of game population due to a large uninhabited wilderness and diversity of natural habitats. Hunting tourism could provide a realistic source of livelihood based on the special strengths of the remote rural areas (Matilainen, 2010).

### **Definition of terms**

**Hunting:** is one of the oldest ways of using natural resources (Lovelock, 2008). It basically refers to trying to find, seek, obtain, pursue, or diligently search for game. Hunting also includes chasing, pursuing, worrying, following after or being on the trail of or searching for or lying in wait for wildlife whether or not the wildlife is then or later captured, injured or killed (Department of Environment and Conservation, 2010). The European Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity (2007) states that hunting is the pursuit and/ or take of wild game species by all methods permitted by law within signatory countries and the motivations for this activity include consumption (use of meat, hides, fur and/ or trophies), recreation, and/ or management of game population.

**Foraging:** refers to subsistence based on hunting of wild animals, gathering of wild plant foods, and fishing, with no domestication of plants, and no domesticated animals except the dog (Lee *et al.*, 1986). Professional hunters depend on their stalking skills, experience and knowledge of the behavior of wild animals as well as a thorough knowledge of the hunting grounds within which they operate.

However, hunters may adopt a number of strategies involving the use of 'magic', which is believed to either increase hunting success or offer protection for the hunter (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2007).

### **Types of hunting and hunting units**

Hunting may be done individually, often assisted by a helper, or in groups (communal). Individual hunting may take place during the day or at night in the forest or in secondary growth around farms. A professional hunter would leave his home in the morning for a day's hunting expedition, returning only in the evening. Many farmer-hunters share their day time between farm work and hunting or trapping. Dogs are commonly used to sniff out the wild animals (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2007).

Group hunting or communal hunting is normally done during the day in groups of four or five to as many as 60-100. Three main forms of communal hunting are common in Africa:

- 1) Seasonal group hunting using guns
- 2) Combing of vegetation to drive out animals which are then killed with clubs and cutlasses
- 3) Use of fire to smoke out animals.

Traditionally, the seasonal group hunt is carried out at specific times of the year or as part of the celebrations associated with a particular cultural event and commonly involves most of the able-bodied males in the community. Among the Ashanti living in forest areas of Ghana, the seasonal group hunting is a highly organized event. A meeting is held several days before the hunt to decide on the hunting grounds, divide people into ranks and share out responsibilities.

A hunting party may consist of solely males, females or mixed. Hunting with guns and bows is predominantly a male activity, but women and children also play a significant role in the hunting and collection of wild resources to feed the household. In south-

eastern Gabon, women and children set traps for small mammals and birds in plantations (Lahm, 1993). Women of the Luvale and Shaba tribes of Zaire also trap rodents and, in West Africa, snail collection is predominantly done by women and children (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2007).

Membership of a hunting unit is optional and open to all interested persons. According to Sharp (1976) membership in a hunting unit is obtained in one of four ways:

- (1) by birth into the unit
- (2) by marriage to one of the hunting unit's members
- (3) by founding a new hunting unit
- (4) by being the parent of a female member of a hunting unit (Sharp, 1976).

People start hunting as children (Weckel, Rockwell and Wincorn, 2010) and at the youthful stage when they are strong but stop hunting as they grow older (Folkman, 1963).

### **Hunting techniques and methods**

There are several hunting techniques that are employed by hunters which include individuals and group hunting. Some of these techniques are trapping, encounter, ambush, approaching and pursuit. In the above mentioned techniques, there are six methods of hunting for wildlife. (Asibey, 1974). These methods are the use of guns, chemicals, fire, dogs and traps but only guns and traps are legally approved by L1 685 of 1971 (Wildlife Division, 2000) for hunting wild animals. Techniques may vary depending on government regulations, a hunter's personal ethics, local custom, hunting-equipment, and the animal being hunted. Often, a hunter will use a combination of more than one technique. The success of the different types of hunting methods vary, as does the sex and species

composition of the catch. For instance Lahm (1993) reports that trapping and night hunting had the greatest success rates for hunters in a village in north-eastern Gabon, and small nocturnal prey such as porcupine were the most easily caught by snares.

Hunting by combing of vegetation involves few people, perhaps a party of four or five. They encircle a patch of vegetation known to harbor animals and work towards the centre, beating and slashing the bushes. Signs used to determine whether or not a patch of vegetation is likely to contain animals include presence of animal droppings and food remains. The method is popular for hunting rodents, especially the grasscutter in West Africa. Animals emerging from the vegetation are either chased and caught by dogs or killed with clubs and cutlasses (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2007).

The use of fire in group hunting is more common in the grassland savannah areas. Members of the group are positioned strategically around a patch of grassland known to contain wild animals. The area is then set on fire and animals are killed with cutlasses and clubs as they run out of the area to escape the fire. Within the forest areas fire is regularly used to smoke out rodents such as the giant rat *Cricetomys gambianus* from their burrows. A group of rat hunters would search for rat holes and set fire at the entrance using palm branches and dry leaves. The smoke penetrates the burrow and forces the rat to come out. In the mean time, members of the group would be waiting at strategic points around the burrow ready to kill the rat as soon as it comes out. Often the animal dies in the burrow out of suffocation from the smoke, in which case, it is dug out (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2007)

### **Motivations to hunt**

People do not engage in wildlife hunting for its sake but are motivated to do so. The term "motivation" is defined by Manfredo, Fix, Teel, Smeltzer and Kahn (2004) as a

specific force directing an individual's behavior in order to satisfy a goal. For hunters, these motivational goals may be to harvest an animal for meat, to spend time outdoors, or to spend time with friends and family. People participate in hunting in order to harvest animals, usually for food (Hendee, 1974). Decker and Connelly (1989) proposed three categories of motivations for hunting; achievement-oriented, affiliation-oriented, and appreciation-oriented.

- 1 Achievement-oriented hunters are motivated by the attainment of a particular goal, which may be harvesting an animal for meat, a trophy. The said achievement could also be the display of skill.
- 2 Affiliation-oriented hunters participate in hunting with the primary purpose of fostering personal relationships with friends, family or hunting companions.
- 3 Appreciation-oriented hunters are motivated by a desire to be outdoors, to escape everyday stress, or to relax.

An individual hunter's main motivation may change; hunters are often achievement-oriented when they begin hunting, but become more affiliation or appreciation-oriented as they get older (Wetz and Seng, 2000). Gigliotti (2000) defined seven categories of hunter motivations, which split achievement motivation into meat and trophy motivations; appreciative motivation into nature and solitude motivations; retained affiliation as social motivation, and added exercise and the physiological effects of excitement (e.g. increased heart rate). Others go into hunting because it is their way of life.

Gidlow, Cushman and Espiner (2009) came out with the following motivations of North Canterbury New Zealand Deerstalker's Association hunters;

1. Being in the wild
2. Catching food
3. Experiencing new places
4. Spending quality time with mates
5. Observing nature
6. Demonstrating hunting skill
7. Obtaining trophies
8. Leave work behind (leisure)/Taking a break from work
9. Seeking solitude and quiet, and so on.

### **Research objectives and methodology**

The main objective of the study was to identify the social, organizational and motivational factors behind communal hunting in the Tamale Metropolis. It sought to establish three things:

1. To identify the organization, preparations and the activities involved before and during communal hunting.
2. To identify the categories of people that engage in the group hunting.
3. To establish the motivations of hunters engaged in communal hunting in the metropolis.

Purposive sampling was used to identify the hunting groups largely because they are specifically located in some parts of the metropolis. Simple random sampling was then used to select hunters within the groups for interviews. Four (4) hunting groups were selected with a maximum of three hundred (300) hunters in each group. In all four hundred (400) hunters were interviewed by selecting 100 hunters from each group selected. Structured interview was used to obtain the categories of people engaged in the hunting (age, occupation, motivation, gun ownership, educational level, group formation among others). Participant observation was also employed to elicit data on the organization, preparations, and the activities involved before and during the group hunting.

## **Results**

The researcher used participant observation in the research by going on hunting expedition with two separate groups on two separate occasions to establish how hunting is organized, the preparations that take place before hunting, and the activities that typify the communal hunt.

### **Group Formation and Membership**

From observation and interaction, it was established that a hunting group is formed by a hunter or hunters within a locality provided they have the hunting experience and/or own a truck. The groups are named for the locality from which the group originated.

For instance, there are the Choggu, Tishiggu, Kapolhini, Vittin, Kamvilli hunting groups. Memberships of a hunting groups is optional and open to all interested persons provided applicants are fit and can hunt or membership in some instances is mandatory as is often the case when one happens to be the son of a group hunting leader.

To be a member, you have to be introduced by an existing member to the group leaders. The new member is briefed about the rules by the one introducing him.

There is no fee or initiation ritual, it is absolutely free. Leaders are chosen based on their experience in hunting and the age of the hunter. Normally, the older males are chosen to be leaders. The leaders are:

1. "*Mogorikpema*" (group leader) and his assistant
2. "*Peili gungon nmera*" (drummer) and the assistant.

Members from a different group can join another group for hunting when their group is not embarking on an expedition that very day.

## **Preparation**

The hunting season starts in the dry season, between November and April but most hunting groups hunt between February and April. The reason being that, by that time, all farm produce would have been harvested, which precludes the danger of the hunters destroying any cultivated crops. The hunting is done on Saturdays, Sundays and Wednesdays, in the day time (from morning up to about 5pm). The weekends (Saturdays and Sundays) are included to enable formal sector workers take part. Before a group starts, the leaders in the group meet to fix a date to start the hunt and the areas/hunting grounds where the group will be hunting. The date set for the hunt is communicated to members through phone calls and by word of mouth.

The sites chosen for the hunt are selected based on water availability in the area and its proximity to a farming area. These criteria are used for the simple reason that animals feed on the farm produce and are most likely to be found around water bodies. All vehicles or trucks for the hunting period are arranged by the leaders. The Friday prior to the start of the hunt, a mass prayer is held and prayers are said for the hunters for a successful season by the *Imam* and the *Mallams* in the locality after the Friday Afternoon Moslem Prayers.

The rules governing the group hunting activities are echoed for new members or anybody interested in joining the group to take note.

### **Rules and Regulations**

The following rules and regulations are observed during hunting;

1. No burning of bushes except small grasses where animals might be hiding.
2. No stealing of farm produce to the house but the produce can be used

in the bush. Example, roasting of yam and drinking of farmers' water.

3. No stealing of farmers' traps or animals caught in those traps.
4. No gun shooting when an animal is being chased and other hunters are present in the area. Shooting can only be done when an animal is lying down and other hunters are not around or have been warned that a firearm is about to be used.
5. The right forelimb thigh of any four-legged animal killed is reserved for the drummer. Also, in case the ownership of a killed animal is in dispute, either because the hunters cannot agree over who killed the animal, or whose dog caught the animal, the animal is awarded to the drummer.
6. Every hunter must be attentive to the sound of the drum in the bush to avoid getting lost.
7. When a hunter without a gun sees an animal lying and calls others around to help kill the animal, the killed animal becomes his no matter who killed the animal.
8. A hunter is to give the animal killed by a dog when the owner of the dog is not around to the owner of the dog. Any animal killed by a dog belongs to the owner of the dog. Even if the owner of the dog is not present to retrieve the kill, other hunters must hand over the kill to the owner of the dog.
9. Any hunter who sees a water source must inform the rest.

### **Activities on Hunting Days**

Early in the morning, the drummer gets to the assembling ground and drums to inform

the hunters or anybody interested that there will be a hunt that day. The hunters then assemble with their dogs and tools such as, clubs, guns or knives. Most importantly they come equipped with their most important provision; filled water bottle(s). They are then conveyed to the bush by a truck. There is intermittent drumming throughout the journey. On average, three hundred hunters are present in any one group. A group may use more than one truck for a hunting trip and other members can use their own means of transport such as motorbikes and private cars are utilised. Even though hunting is done in the metropolis, they sometimes move to other districts as well.

On reaching the hunting grounds, the leaders form a human barrier to collect the truck fare from all hunters. The fare charged is based on the distance and the number of hunters in the truck. Currently, the fare is between GhC1 and GhC2. In fact, great level of honesty and trust is demonstrated with regards to the paying of the fares and the observation of the rules and regulations.

The hunters fan out into the bush as soon as they finish paying their charge. There is running, shooting and shouting all over, while following the rules and regulations of course. The drummer drums throughout the whole period to direct the hunters as to where they are going and to prevent any hunter from losing his way.

The hunters will have the chance to assemble in the bush when they come across a water source. At this point, the Muslims amongst them take the chance to pray, and also rest for a while. Averagely, seven hours is spent in the bush. They hunt through the bush to the roadside where they are conveyed back to their locality in the evening.

Some hunters take the chance to dress the animals they have killed at the roadside using fire while waiting to be conveyed back to their locality.

**Results of the structured interview administered.**

The data below shows the composition of a hunting group from the 400 questionnaires administered.

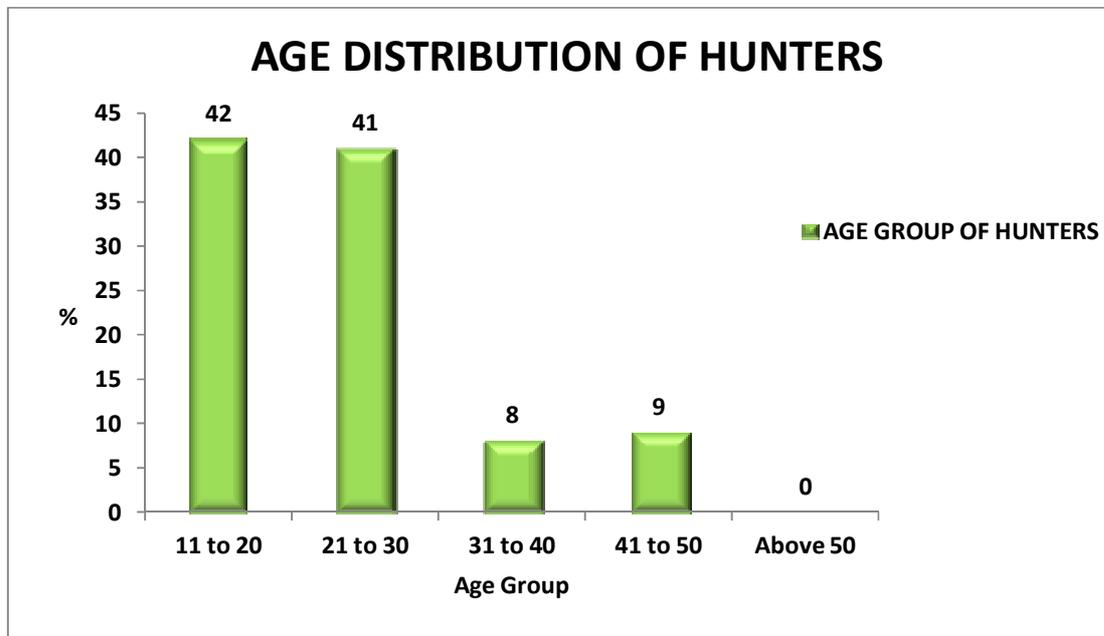


Figure 1.0 Age Distribution of 400 Sampled Hunters (expressed in percentages). Source: Field Survey (2012).

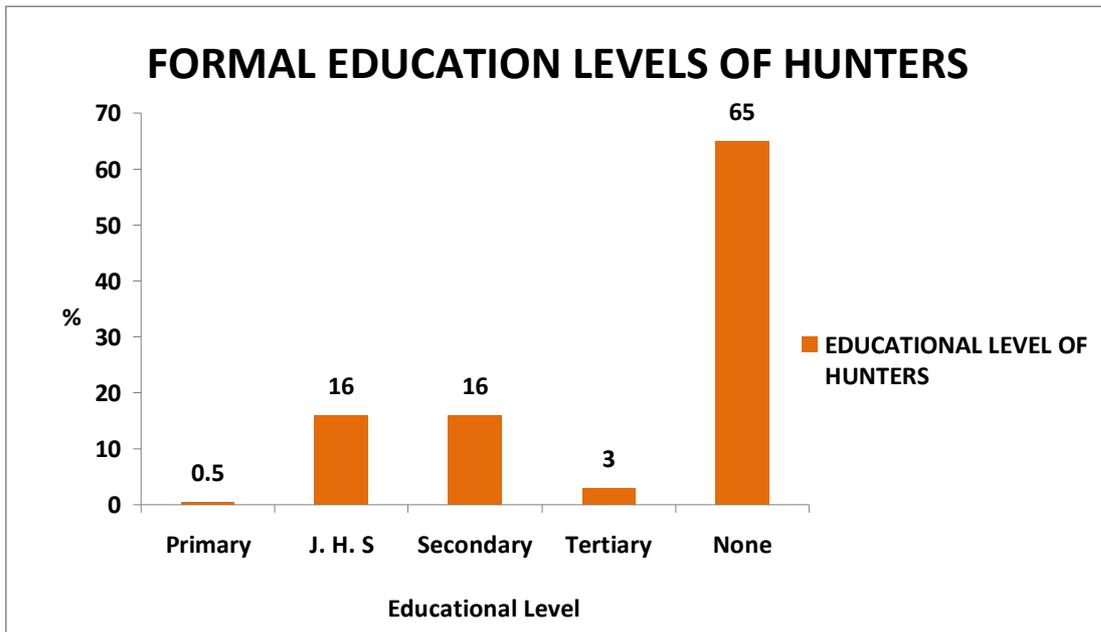


Figure 1.1. Educational Level of Hunters (expressed in percentages). Source: Field Survey (2012).

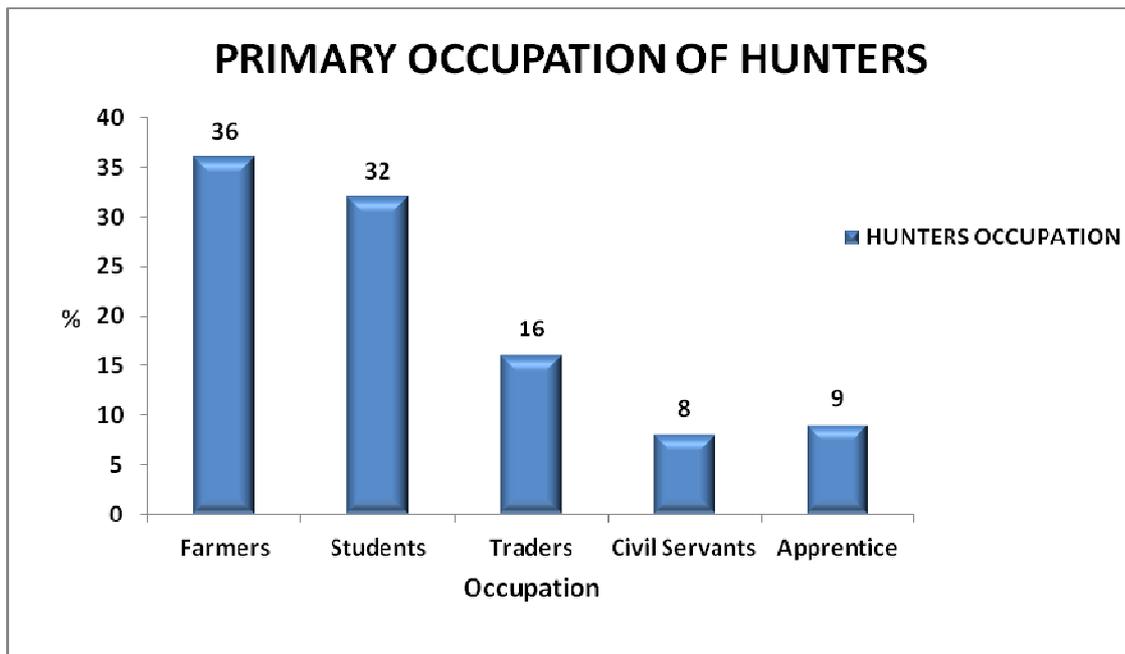


Figure 1.2. Primary Occupation of Hunters (expressed in parentages). Source: Field Survey (2012).

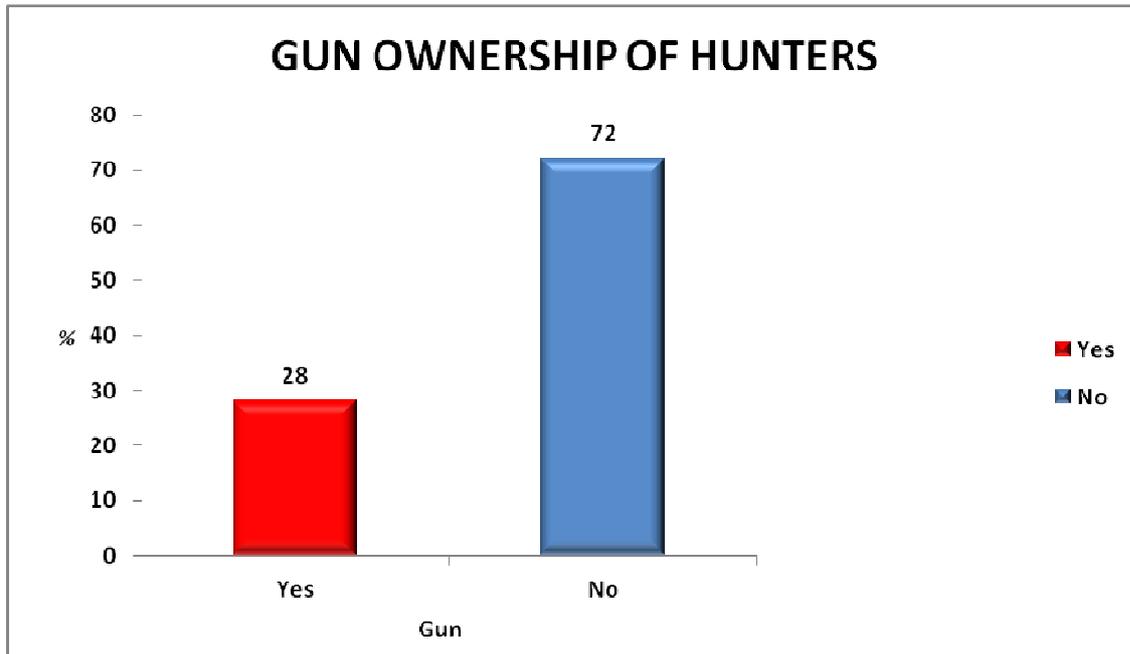


Figure 1.3. Gun Ownership of Hunters (expressed in percentages). Source: Field Survey (2012).

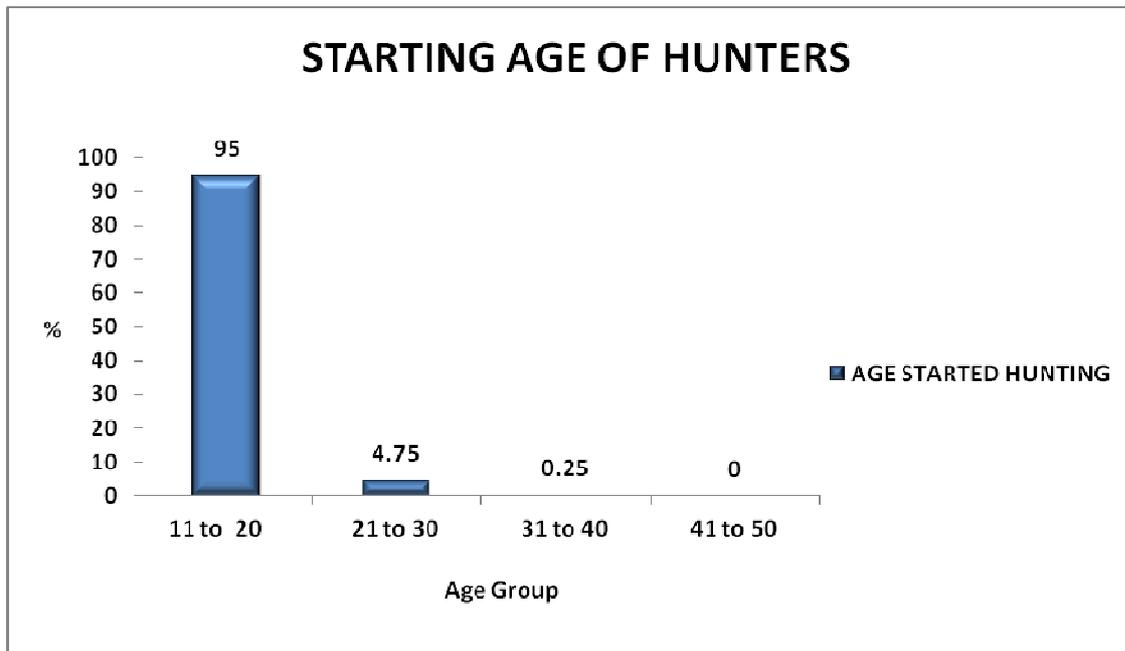


Figure 1.4 Age at which Hunters Joined the group hunting (expressed in %). Source: Field Survey (2012).

### Motivation and Recreation

The study also revealed the following motivations as pushing/pulling hunters to participate.

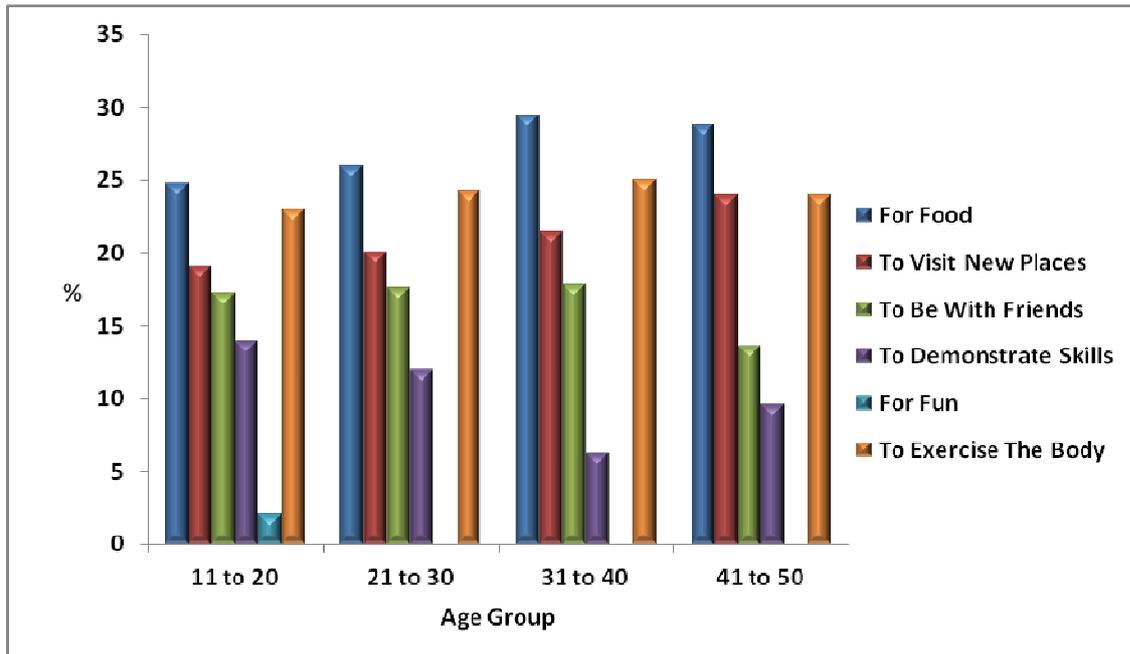


Figure 1.5. Age Groups and their Motivations (Percentages). Source: Field Survey (2012).

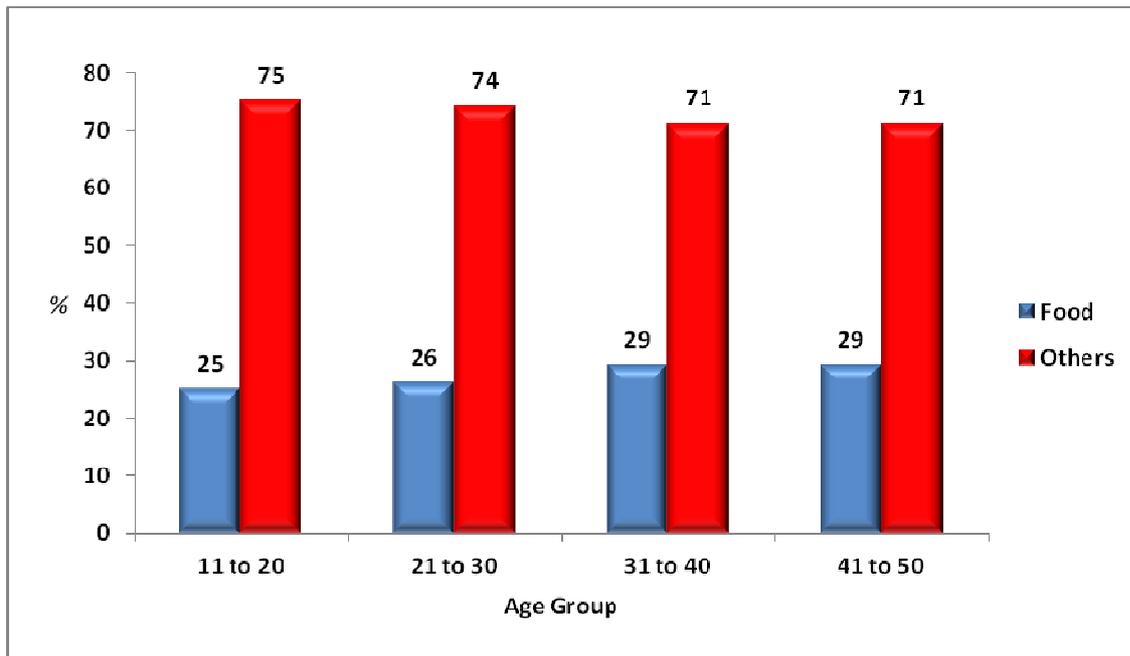


Figure 1.6. Age Groups and Primary Motivations for Hunting (expressed in %). Source: Field Survey (2012).

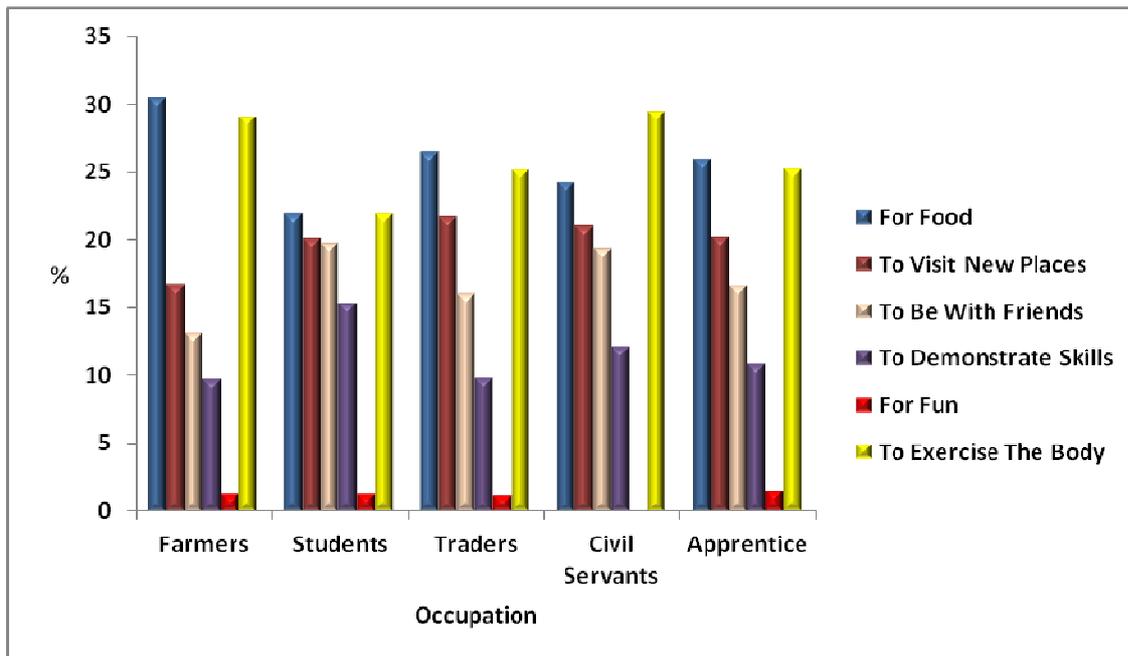


Figure 1.7. Occupation and Motivations (Percentages). Source: Field Survey (2012).

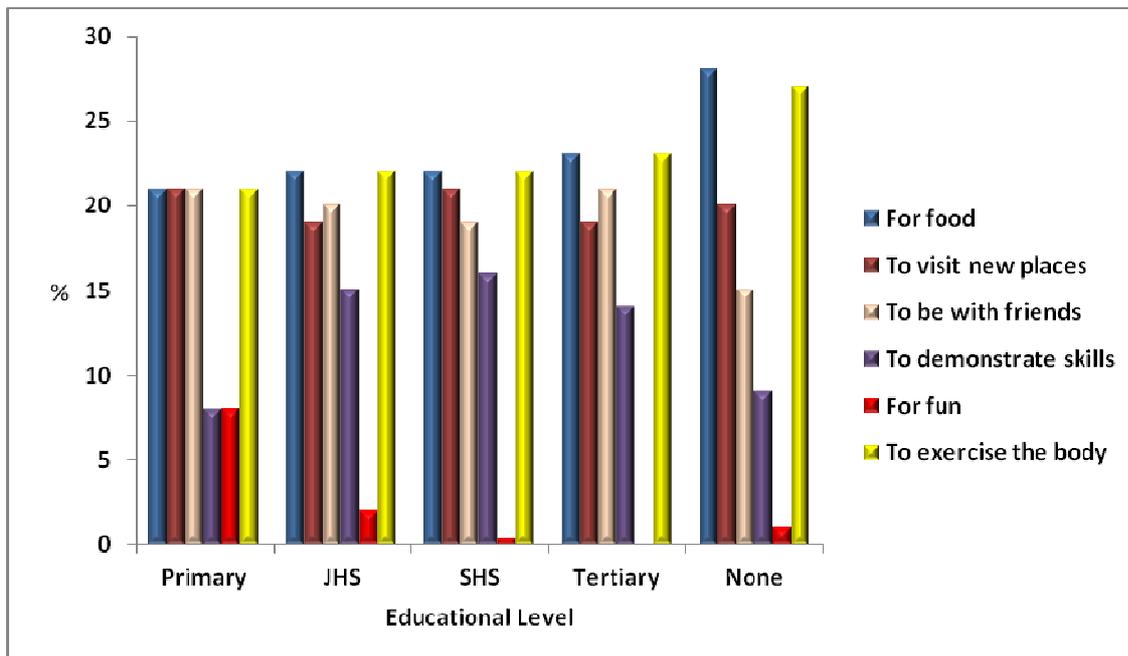


Figure 1. 8. Educational level and primary motivation for hunting (in percentages). Source: Field Survey (2012).

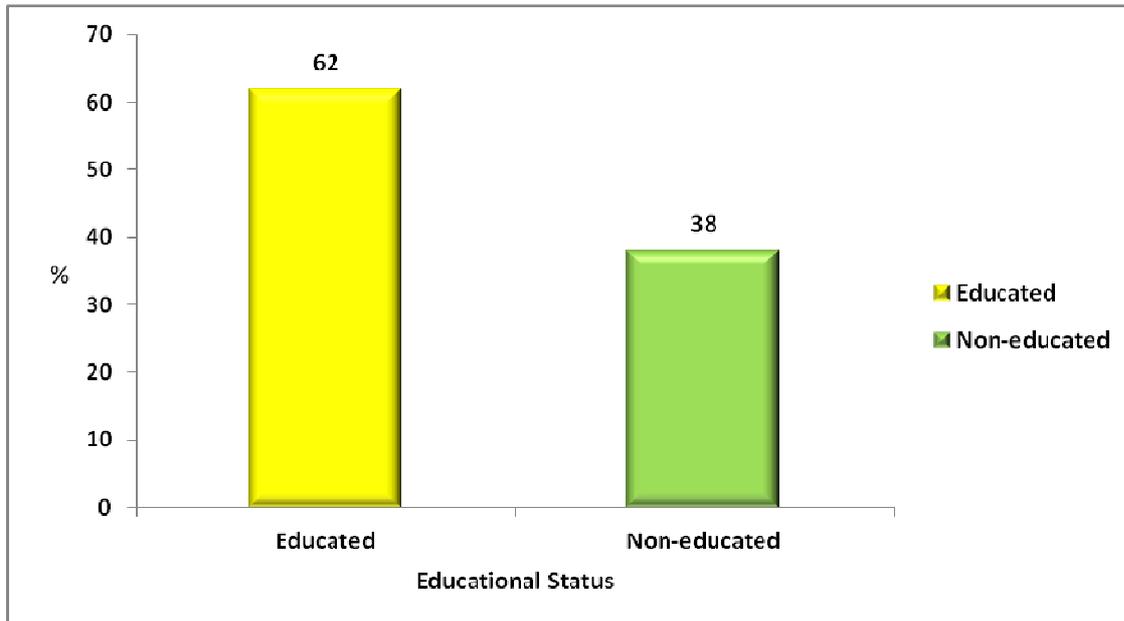


Figure 1.9 Shows Motivation (fun) of educated and non-educated respondents. Source: Field Survey (2012).

### Discussion, conclusions and recommendations

From the study, it was realized that there is limited restriction to the formation of a hunting group. Anyone can form a hunting group and this is especially true for the older males who have some hunting experience and are well known to be hunters. As indicated by Lahm (1993), hunting groups in the Tamale metropolis are characteristically only males, explained perhaps by the physical intensity of the activity. While Sharp (1976) seems to suggest that membership of hunting groups is mainly by marriage, birth, or formation of a new group, membership of hunting groups in the Tamale metropolis is mainly by choice even though being born to the head of a hunting group may compel one to be part of it. Marriage, however, has no influence on the formation or membership of a hunting group.

As captured by Weckel, Rockwell and Wincorn (2010) and revealed by figure 1.4., it is deduced that most people who engage

in group hunting start doing so from as early as age eleven (11) and will most likely retire from it by age fifty (50) as indicated by the age distribution of hunters in figure 1.0. The result of this may be that a hunter could probably hunt for up to 50 years. Fifty years therefore appears to be the retiring age for a hunter.

Hunting groups in the metropolis are composed of people of different classes and occupations; farmers, students, traders, civil servants, educated and the non-educated (no formal education). Perhaps this is in contrast to the popularly held notion that people engaged in group hunting are mostly farmers and people with very little or no formal education.

Farmers and those with no formal education do form the majority however, as shown in figure 1.1 and 1.2. The farmers dominate the groups as they use the hunting to engage themselves during the dry season as they have little or nothing to do on their farms. Interestingly, none of the farmers indicate hunting as their primary occupation,

which means that they engage in this activity when their main occupations allow them to.

There is low level of gun usage as a hunting tool during the group hunting activities as reflected in the gun ownership of hunters in figure 1.3 where 114 hunters possess a gun, representing 29% and 286 hunters without a gun, representing 71%, giving a clear indication of clubbing as the preferred method to use during the hunt. With the use of fire, it was realized that there is no mop up to control the spread of the fire.

This research also revealed the varying motivations that propel people to engage in this activity. Although many of those who engage in this activity do so to gain meat (achievement-oriented), as revealed by figure 1.5., many (as depicted by figure 1.6) also do so largely due to appreciation and affiliation-oriented reasons as suggested by Decker and Connelly (1989). Gidlow, B, Cushman, G., Espiner, S., (2009) suggest that most hunters do so to see new places, spend time with friends, observe nature, display skill and to find food. This has been revealed in this study which seems to suggest that people engaged in group hunting in the metropolis do so for varied reasons with food being just one of them.

This makes the group hunting more of a social event where people use to know new places, interact with friends, demonstrate their skill and also for fun. On the issue of fun as a motivation, it is realized from the study that the educated engage in the hunting more for fun than the non-educated as indicated in figure 1.9. The study revealed that the more educated hunters tended to cite the pursuit of fun as the reason for joining hunting parties; the non-educated did not cite this as a motivation to go on hunting expeditions. This is indicated in Figure 1.9.

Going forward, it is essential that the practice of group hunting in the metropolis be given a second look. In the first place, the practice is not necessarily an economic

activity, but largely a socio-cultural one. Therefore any solution to its negative impacts has to be examined from that perspective. While the practice is not legal under the laws of Ghana, in the Northern part of the country, perhaps a modification of the practice may yield far greater results than an outright criminalization. In order to keep species and to preserve wildlife, the issuance of licenses to various hunting groups and the policing of strict adherence to rules, together with designation of specific areas and periods in the year where this activity can take place is recommended. This could form the basis for controlled recreational hunting in the metropolis, which could serve as a tourist activity in itself.

The organized nature of the group hunt and the adherence to rules and regulations suggest that these are people with whom the Environmental Protection Agency and the Forestry Commission could work with in promoting bush fire prevention education.

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