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*Article*

# A Comparative Study of the Influence of Culture on Family Dynamics between Ghana and Latvia: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

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**Abstract:** Drawing from literature and Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions, this study delves into the impact of cultural factors on family structures, roles, and relationships. Ghana and Latvia have different cultural and social orientations that influence family dynamics. Through a comparative lens, this paper will contribute to understanding how a country's culture influences family dynamics, highlighting the influence of Power Dynamics of parenting style and Individualism vs. Collectivism on interaction levels within the family.

**Keywords:** family; culture; family dynamics; hofstede's cultural dimensions

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## Introduction

The family has for a long time been considered to be the basic unit of society. However, what constitutes the family can be challenging to define. This is because it varies from one society to the other and from one country to the other (Tonah, 2022, p.17)

In the Ghanaian context, family is defined by strong kinship ties and marriages, emphasizing lineage significantly (Agie, 2021). According to (Dzramedo et al., 2018, p. 45), the family is one of Ghana's oldest and most important social institutions. Its structure can either be a small family size (nuclear family structure) or a much broader family size (extended family structure). Traditionally, Ghanaians tend to revere and arrange their lives around the extended family line whose membership includes, spouses and their children together with other relations of common descent such as grandparents, uncles, aunties, nephews, nieces, and cousins. Ghanaian collectivistic society focuses on the family, which drives social interactions through these close kinship bonds. A family's reputation and honor are very important, and any loss of either will have an impact on the entire family and reflect their culture as a whole (Agie, 2021). To preserve healthy relationships and save others from being embarrassed, people act with respect.

The traditional definition of family in Latvia emphasizes the family structure as a group of people biologically connected and feeling kinship. This typically refers to the nuclear family of a mother, father, and children (Millere, 2021). However, the concept of family in modern Latvian society has become more diverse, with an increase in single-parent families and families formed through cohabitation rather than marriage.

According to (Latvian Public Broadcasting, 2021), the Latvian Constitution currently does not provide a strict definition of family, with the Constitutional Court ruling that the family is not limited to just marriage-based unions. This has led to political debate, with some parties like the National Alliance proposing to amend the Constitution to define family strictly as a union between a man and a woman, along with their children (Engīzers, 2021). Culturally, the traditional understanding of family based on marriage between a man and a woman and their children is still prevalent in Latvian society (Koroļeva et al., 2023). However, there is also increasing recognition and acceptance of more diverse family structures, including single-parent families and same-sex partnerships (Millere, 2021). According to the Culture Factor (2023), the idea of a nuclear family has always been strong in Latvia. This focus on the immediate family unit encourages close relationships and mutual support among

family members. The emphasis on the nuclear family allows for more personal space and autonomy within the family structure, reflecting the broader cultural value placed on individualism.

The concept of family in Ghana and Latvia differs in many ways. Given the definitions above it can be deduced that the family dynamics of both countries differ due to their distinct cultures. Family dynamics are the interactions, bonds, and behaviors that exist inside a family and have an important impact on each member's mental health and general well-being. They are shaped by many elements, such as personal experiences, social norms, individual personalities, and cultural values (Applebury, 2018). Harkonen et al., (2018) state that these dynamics show complexity and are in constant flux as families develop. A child's general development and well-being are greatly influenced by the nature of their family, with aspects like warmth, support, clear communication, and efficient conflict resolution having a major influence. Healthy family dynamics are characterized by individuation, mutuality, flexibility, stability, clear communication, and role reciprocity. In contrast, unhealthy family dynamics are characterized by enmeshment, isolation, rigidity, disorganization, unclear communication, and role conflict (National Center for Biotechnology Information, 2023).

Cultural values and social norms significantly impact family dynamics by setting the foundation for how family members interact, communicate, and behave within the family unit and in society at large. These norms, which are the spoken and unspoken rules of cultures, are reinforced over time and operate as invisible constraints on family members' behavior. They dictate standards for dress, speech, and actions, as well as what is considered permissible or impermissible under various circumstances. These norms guide family members in their daily lives, both within the home and in public, providing a framework for living that is deeply ingrained in their cultural identity (Council of Foundations, n.d.).

To understand why these two countries, Ghana and Latvia may differ in their family dynamics, this research, using a cultural lens, aims to adopt Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions to compare the cultural influence on family dynamics between Ghana and Latvia. Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions framework, identifies "overarching cultural patterns or dimensions which influence people's behavior in significant ways" (Arasaratnam, 2011, p. 45).

## Method

To understand the influence of culture on family dynamics, this study is based on secondary data from published articles, books, and journals, as well as information on Hofstede's cultural dimensions. According to Bryman (2012), secondary data are records gathered by another party for a different reason but are subsequently utilized by researchers for their analyses. This category of data is pre-existing and can be found in published articles, government reports, surveys, and historical records.

The literature for this study was found using internet databases including Hofstede Insights, Google Scholar, Scopus, Sage Journals, and Pro-quest. Additionally, the literature has been evaluated to ensure it is relevant to the study. By replicating, reanalyzing, and reinterpreting previous research, secondary data analysis offers a multitude of avenues for additional research. According to Bowen (2009), this allows the researcher to take part in projects that test novel ideas, theories, and structural models.

### *Family Dynamics and Culture: Ghana and Latvia*

Ghanaian and Latvian family dynamics show different cultural and social factors that impact how family members interact and behave in their various societies. There are significant differences in the family structures, values, and customs of the two countries, although they share certain similarities, such as the importance of family in their respective cultures.

**Ghanaian Family Dynamics:** In Ghana, family dynamics are deeply rooted in traditional African culture and are characterized by strong social bonds and a sense of community (Stubbs & Talpade, 2020). The extended family is often the norm, with multiple generations living together under one roof. This structure is influenced by the country's cultural heritage, where family ties are seen as essential for social support, economic stability, and emotional well-being. Ghanaian families

also emphasize education, with parents often making significant sacrifices to ensure their children receive a quality education.

**Latvian Family Dynamics:** In Latvia, family dynamics are shaped by the country's history and cultural heritage, which have been influenced by both European and Soviet traditions (Grosa, 2022). Latvian families tend to be smaller in size compared to Ghanaian families, with a more nuclear family structure being the norm. This is partly due to the country's historical experience of war and occupation, which has led to a more individualistic and self-reliant society (Millere, 2021). Latvian families also emphasize education, but this is often seen as a means to achieve personal success rather than as a way to support the family as a whole.

While both Ghanaian and Latvian families value education and place importance on family, there are significant differences in their family structures and cultural practices. Ghanaian families tend to be larger and more collectivist, with a strong emphasis on community and social support. Latvian families, on the other hand, are smaller and more individualistic, with a greater focus on personal achievement. These differences are reflective of the unique cultural, historical, and societal contexts of each country.

#### *Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions; Where Each Country Lies*

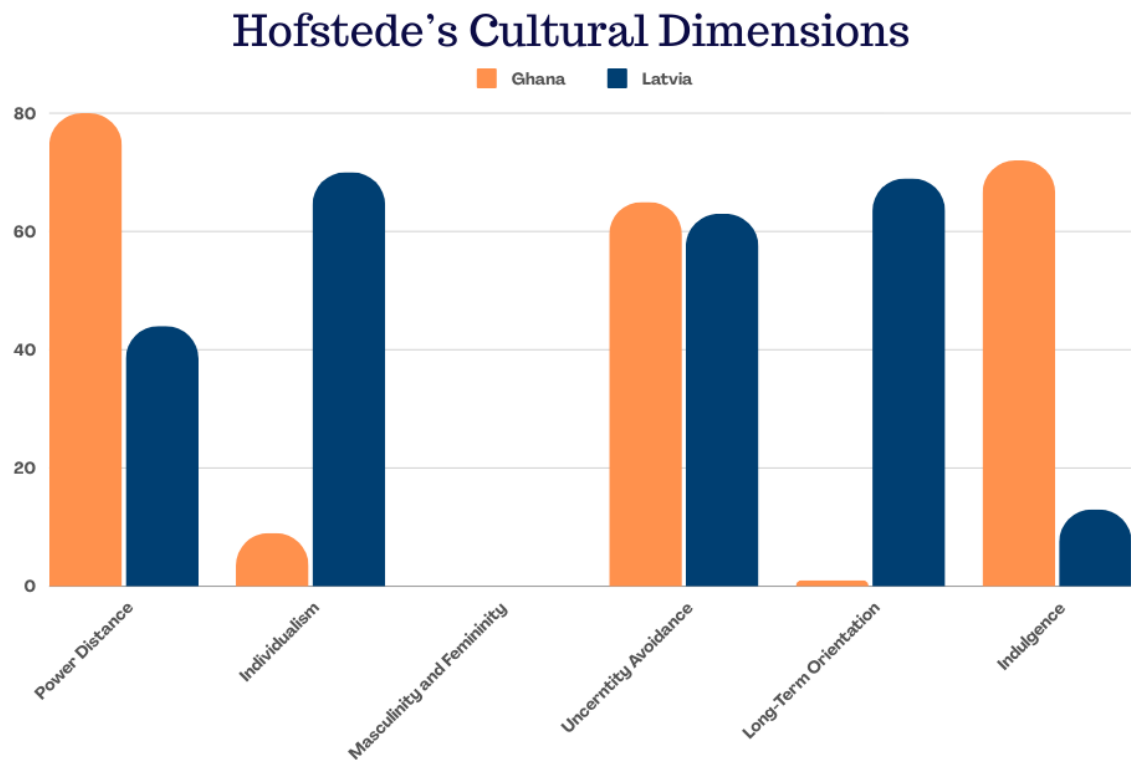
According to Agodzo (2015), the development of the cultural dimensions framework is largely attributed to the work of Dutch scholar and researcher Geert Hofstede. With later contributions from his son Gert Jan Hofstede. The cultural dimensions were first presented in Hofstede's 1980 book *Culture's Consequences*. It is also referred to as the 6-D model or the dimensional paradigm. Four aspects were included in Hofstede's first model for assessing and understanding national cultures, but two more dimensions were added due to further study (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Currently, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, masculinity, long-term orientation, and indulgence are the six aspects that comprise Hofstede's framework. Among Hofstede's six (6) cultural dimensions, emphasis will be placed on the Power Distance Index and Individualism vs. Collectivism for this study. Comparing the cultures of Ghana and Latvia through Hofstede's dimensions reveals significant differences and similarities in their cultural orientations:

#### *Power Distance Index (PDI)*

- **Ghana:** Scores 80, indicating a high acceptance of a hierarchical order where everyone has a place, reflecting inherent inequalities. Centralization is popular, and subordinates expect to be told what to do, with the ideal boss being a benevolent autocrat.
- **Latvia:** Scores 44, showing a preference for equality and decentralization of power and decision-making. There's a sense of loyalty and deference towards authority among the older generation but a preference for teamwork and open management styles among the younger generation.

#### *Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV)*

- **Ghana:** Scores 9, indicating a collectivistic society with a strong emphasis on long-term commitment to the group, loyalty, and responsibility for fellow members. Offense leads to shame and loss of face, and employer-employee relationships are perceived in moral terms.
- **Latvia:** Scores 70, showing a high degree of individualism. The idea of a nuclear family is strong, and there's a focus on personal responsibility and performance. There has been an increase in individualism since independence, with a shift towards personal achievements and less dependency on traditional structures.



**Figure 1.** Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions. **Data Source:** The Culture Factor: Hofstede Insights (2023), Country Comparison Tool.

*Analysis of Family Dynamics and Cultural Dimensions: Ghana and Latvia*

Hofstede's framework provides six key pillars: Power Distance (PDI), Individualism (IDV) vs. Collectivism (COL), Masculinity (MAS) vs. Femininity (FEM), Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), Long-Term Orientation (LTO) vs. Short-Term Orientation (STO), and Indulgence (IND) vs. Restraint (RES) (The Culture Factor, 2023).

Families in Ghana have a strong collectivist (COL) history, which is evident in their high Power Distance (PDI). Respect for elders and hierarchical structures form the bedrock of family life. Decisions are often made with the involvement of extended family members, emphasizing collective well-being over individual desires (Tonah, 2022). This emphasis on family extends to child-rearing, where grandparents and aunts/uncles play a crucial role (Agie, 2021). Furthermore, a feminine (FEM) orientation fosters cooperation and interdependence within the Ghanaian family unit.

In contrast, according to the Culture Factor (2023), Latvian families lean towards a more individualistic (IDV) approach. An environment with a lower PDI is more equitable and likely to have nuclear families. Individual autonomy may be prioritized in decision-making since personal achievement and independence are highly regarded. When assertiveness is valued in the family, this can indicate male (MAS) influence. Additionally, Latvians have a high Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI), indicating a preference for defined duties and expectations in the family.

With emphasis on the Power Distance Index and Individualism vs. Collectivism of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, an analysis will be made of how these dimensions influence family dynamics in two distinct countries, Ghana and Latvia.

*Power Distance Index (PDI)*

**Ghana:** The father is the ultimate authority role and there are stringent rules in Ghanaian homes. Children are expected to obey their parents' authority, and it is frequently considered disrespectful to question authority. Beyond childhood into adulthood, this hierarchical structure persists, with extended family members participating in personal decision-making. The acceptance of physical discipline, such as beatings, reflects a high degree of power distance where people blindly accept



authority officials. Stubbs and Talpade (2020) argue that there are well-defined traditional roles in families, with males expected to be the primary breadwinners and women to take care of the home and children. The power dynamics within the family are reinforced by this division of labor, with males having a higher status due to their financial contributions. To ensure a stable family life, women are expected to marry and have children at a young age, which increases pressure and solidifies the power dynamics.

**Latvia:** In Latvia, families often place a high importance on parental and child equality. A reduced power distance index is shown in the increased acceptance of children challenging authority people or "talking back" to them. Instead of decisions being made solely by authority figures, this environment encourages a more participatory approach to decision-making inside the family, where perspectives from all members are taken into consideration (Millere, 2021). Latvia's low power distance index indicates a higher degree of democracy in family interactions. There is a stronger emphasis on open communication and mutual respect, and parents are less likely to demand obligatory obedience from their children. This democratic approach to family life helps children become more independent and critical thinkers, preparing them for adulthood in a culture that values participation and individualism (Koroļeva et al., 2023).

#### *Individualism vs. Collectivism*

**Ghana:** Collectivism in Ghana emphasizes strong family ties and mutual support among family members. Families in Ghana are typically large, with extended family members living together or nearby. This close-knit structure ensures that family members support each other in need, share resources, and work together to achieve common goals. The importance of family cohesion is deeply ingrained in Ghanaian culture, influencing how families interact and support one another (Oppong, 1977). Decisions within families in Ghana are often made collectively, reflecting the collectivist nature of the society. This means that important family decisions, such as marriage, education, and career choices, are usually discussed and decided upon by the entire family, including elders and extended family members. The collective decision-making process ensures that the interests of the family as a whole are considered, rather than individual desires.

**Latvia:** Close family members in Latvia are usually regularly in touch while also respecting each other's space. This balance between closeness and personal freedom is a hallmark of individualistic societies, where individuals are encouraged to pursue their interests and live according to their values and beliefs. According to Engizers (2021), at a young age, children in Latvia are seen as young adults and are encouraged to accept responsibility for their acts. Latvia's individualistic beliefs are reflected in this early emphasis on independence and personal accountability, which prepares children for a day when they would be expected to handle their own lives and jobs.

#### **Conclusions**

The comparative analysis of cultural influences on family dynamics between Ghana and Latvia reveals distinct patterns shaped by their respective cultural dimensions. Ghana has a strong sense of family, makes decisions as a group, and has hierarchical structures within families, as seen by its high collectivism and power distance ratings. This cultural orientation fosters a sense of community, mutual support, and adherence to traditional roles, emphasizing the importance of the group and social harmony. Conversely, Latvia, characterized by high individualism and a moderate power distance, prioritizes the nuclear family, personal space, and individual achievements. This cultural factor encourages early independence, personal responsibility, and a focus on individual performance, reflecting a society that values personal freedom and self-determination.

The diverse cultural landscapes of both countries provide insightful information about how several cultural factors might influence family dynamics, emphasizing the significance of understanding cultural differences concerning family interactions and structures. By understanding cultures, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the multifaceted nature of families across the globe. It is needed that further research, such as in-depth interviews and historical analysis is conducted to provide more understanding of these dynamics. Exploring the impact of globalization and

modernization on family structures in both countries is another avenue for future exploration. After all, even if it is made up of various cultural elements, families are dynamic and ever-evolving in response to the changing global landscape.

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