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‘Unsustained’ Mining (Galamsey) in Ghana: A Test of the Lucifer Effect

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Abstract

Galamsey, illegal small-scale mining in Ghana, organised outside Ghana’s mining regulatory framework, has surged in popularity, largely due to poverty, unemployment, and its seemingly attractive prospect. The glaring impact of galamsey is not only on the economy but the environment, communities, and future generations. This study explores the application of Philip Zimbardo’s "Lucifer Effect" to understand behaviors fueling Galamsey, or illegal small-scale mining, in Ghana. The Lucifer Effect suggests that ordinary individuals may engage in harmful or unethical actions when exposed to environments that foster moral erosion. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, about 210 respondents were surveyed from key mining communities such as Anyinam, Asamang Tamfoe, and Osino. Findings revealed that economic pressures, weak institutional controls, and the normalization of Galamsey within communities are significant drivers of participation, with over 60% of respondents indicating financial incentives or “get-rich-quick” motives as primary motivators. The study highlights Galamsey's adverse impacts on environmental sustainability, economic stability, and social equity, which impede progress toward Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) like Clean Water (SDG 6), Climate Action (SDG 13), and Life on Land (SDG 15). By illustrating how situational and systemic pressures lead to moral disengagement, this research provides critical insights into the socio-economic and psychological dynamics sustaining Galamsey, offering policymakers valuable recommendations for addressing illegal mining and its detrimental impact on Ghana’s communities and environment.

Keywords: Lucifer effect, mining, moral, sustainable, unethical