



Erasmus
Mundus

FORMAL FOSTER CARE IN GHANA: THE EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF FOSTER CHILDREN AND FOSTER PARENTS

TABITHA NAA AKUYEA ADDY

Erasmus Mundus Master's Programme in Social Work with Families and Children

Supervisor- Monica Nordenfors (PhD)

University of Gothenburg, June 2020

Word Count 32,583



With the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union



Title: Formal Foster Care in Ghana; The Experiences and Perceptions of Foster Children and Foster Parents.

Author: Tabitha Naa Akuyea Addy

Supervisor: Monica Nordenfors (PhD)

Keywords: Formal Foster Care, Belonging, Foster Care Agency, Ghana

Abstract

This paper reports on an exploratory qualitative study of seven (7) foster children and four (4) foster parents in formal foster care in Ghana using in depth semi structured- interviews. The sample was selected purposively from placements by a foster care agency and the Department of Social Welfare in Ghana. Formal foster care in Ghana is an under researched area and the experiences of children in formal foster care is unknown. The research explored how foster children *experience* foster care and how they locate themselves across their biological families and foster families as well as ascertain the extent to which foster children feel connected and supported in their placements. Also, the *perceptions* of foster parents on foster children's experiences and challenges of both foster parents and foster children were examined. Thematic findings from the research indicate that foster children have better standards in care, foster children feel a sense of belongingness to their foster families regarding their wellbeing and foster children have limited biological family contact. With regards to foster parents, they are able to achieve their personal parenting goals, they feel entitled to foster children and they perceive foster children as having a sense of belongingness in their placements. However, there is a conflict regarding foster children's belongingness. Children feel happy about their foster placements and have a good sense of connectedness to their placements but certain practices such as corporal punishment as a parenting strategy becomes coercive and affects the participation of foster children and stability of these placements.

Acronyms

GDHS- Ghana Demographic Health Survey

CRI- Care Reform Initiative

DSW- Department of Social Welfare

UNCRC- United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child

UNICEF- United Nations Children Fund

GLSS- Ghana Living Standards Survey

MICS- Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey

NGO- Non -Governmental Organisation

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to first thank the Almighty God for his wisdom and strength and for making a way where the seemed to be no way. When I least expected it, He granted me the opportunity to be part of this life changing master's program and for that I will always be grateful.

To the European Union through the Erasmus+ program for funding my education, travel and stay in Europe for 2 years

A special thanks to the foster care agency and the Department of Social Welfare Ghana for linking me to the field. Also, to the Foster children and parents who shared their stories with me without holding back to successfully write this thesis

To my research supervisor who has ordered my footsteps and shaped my thoughts in completing this project, Monica Nordenfors; Thanks for being truly incredible. You were always available for me whenever I needed you and promptly and meticulously read my texts to the latter. Your smiles, laughter and warmth in cheering me on to finish this project is truly and sincerely appreciated.

A big thank you to the coordinators of the Program Elisabeth Enoksen, Karina Tallman, Evelyn Khoo and Ingrid Hojer for your immense support throughout this journey

And, to my classmates the MFamily 6th Cohort for being amazing throughout this whole experience. We have cried together, laughed together and accomplished great things together. Thank you for being great minds and challenging me to be a better person. Although it breaks my heart that we did not get the chance to say proper goodbyes, due to COVID-19 it reminds me of how valuable every moment with you has been.

Special thanks to friends who have become family.

A big thank you to Cyril Annoh Mensah. I don't know what I would have done without your push. You saw so much strength in me and believed that I had so much to offer the world. What can I say! I bless God for your life.

To Rita Parry and James Kutu Obeng thanks for been my cheering squad.

Also, to Kwabena Frimpong – Manso, Efua Mantey, Isaac Agyei Yeboah and Queensley Idans for your immeasurable support throughout this process.

To my helpers, Mr. Emmanuel Kwame Mensah, Mr. Thomas Amoah, Aunty Kuukua Williams, Mr Philip Agbasa. God bless you for being a blessing in my life

And to my spiritual helpers Very Rev Doris Saah and Prophet Gabriel Odei Boateng thanks for holding me up in prayers.

To God be the Glory

DEDICATIONS

I dedicate this work to the memory of my late father Mr. Ransben Addy who made me believe that I could achieve whatever I desired so long as I work hard at it.

To my loving mother Maa Eunice Addy who has always prayed and supported me wherever I find myself.

To my siblings Agatha, Stanley, Theophilus, Martin and Ransben Junior who struggled hard to see me through university and supported me in pursuing this Masters.

To my amazing Sister-In-Laws who kept cheering me on and checking up on me during these moments abroad Joana, Suzzy and Amynta.

To my nieces and nephews who inspire me to keep working hard so they can have a good aunty to emulate Cheryl, Cherita, Charlotte, Eunice, Theresa, Oswaldal-Eliana, Daphne, Yolanda, Alexandra Zoe and Deifilia.

To my nephews Dominic, David & Papa Addy

This is the doing of the Lord and it is marvellous in our sight.

Psalm 118:23

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1	9
INTRODUCTION	9
1.1 Background	10
1.2 Fostering in Ghana	10
1.3 Problem Statement.....	12
1.4 Relevance of the Study.....	13
1.5 Aims of the study.....	13
1.5.1 Research Questions	13
1.5.2 Research Focus	13
1.6 Child Protection in Ghana	14
1.7 Child Welfare Policy Framework in Ghana.....	15
1.8 Overview of current trends in foster care in Ghana.....	16
1.9 Definition of terms	17
CHAPTER 2	18
LITERATURE REVIEW	18
2.1 Research with children	18
2.2 Belongingness of foster children in care	18
2.3 Children’s experiences on relationships in care.....	21
2.4 Positive effects of foster care	23
2.5 Challenges of children and foster parents in foster Care.....	23
2.6 Participation of children in alternative care.....	25
CHAPTER 3	27
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPTS	27
3.1 The new sociology of childhood	27
3.2 Participation theory	28
3.3 Children’s Personal Lives; (The Sociology of Personal life theory)	31
3.4 The Concept of Belonging	32
3.5 Concepts of Family Display and Doing Family (Finch,2007).....	33
CHAPTER 4	35
METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY	35
4.1 Methodological Choice	35
4.2 Sampling Technique	36
4.3 Sample Selection.....	37
4.3.1 Access to Organization	37
4.3.2 Access to participants.....	38
4.4 Description of Participants of the Study	38
4.5 Data collection procedures	39

4.6 Data collection tools	40
4.6.1 Audio recorded walks	40
4.6.2 Visual methods (Draw and say)	40
4.6.3 Network Chart.....	41
4.7 Data Analysis Procedure	42
4.7.1 Transcription of Data	42
4.7.2 Thematic Analysis.....	42
4.8 Trustworthiness.....	44
4.8.1 Credibility	45
4.8.2 Transferability.....	45
4.8.3 Dependability	45
4.8.4 Confirmability.....	46
4.8.5 Authenticity.....	46
4.9 Literature Search and Keywords	46
4.10 Ethical Considerations.....	47
4.11 Reflections and Limitations of Study	50
4.11a. Ethical Dilemma.....	50
4.11b. Limitations	51
CHAPTER 5	52
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS.....	52
5.0 Description of Foster Households.....	52
5.1 The Rewards of Foster Care	52
5.1.1 Better standards in care for children	53
5.1.1a. Access to education and food.....	53
5.1.1b. A sense of physical safety (“I feel happy and I feel safe”)	54
5.1.2 Satisfaction of personal parenting goals	55
5.1.3 Importance of training and Foster Care Agency as a co-parent.....	56
5.2 Complexities of Family life in Foster Care	57
5.2.1 The use of corporal punishment as a parenting strategy	57
5.2.2 Foster parents’ feelings of entitlement to children.....	63
5.2.3 Undisclosed Foster Entrance Narratives	64
5.2.4 Lack of financial support for foster parents	66
5.3 Relationships of children in foster care.....	68
5.3.1 Relationships between foster families and foster children; “It is like a family we are all like a family”).	68
5.3.1a Positive relations with foster siblings.....	69
5.3.1b Difficulties with foster siblings and other foster family relations.....	71
5.3.2 Limited biological family contact	72

5.3.4 Foster children’s ambivalent emotions	74
5.3.5 Friendships as a meaningful relationship to foster children.....	74
5.4 Foster Children’s Sense of Belongingness in Care.....	76
5.4.1 Family Rituals building sense of connectedness.....	76
5.4.2 Family Identity as a vital component in belongingness of foster children.....	78
5.4.3 Family Culture enhancing children’s sense of belongingness	81
5.4.4 Family Solidarity influencing belongingness of foster children	83
CHAPTER 6	85
CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS	85
6.1 How foster children describe their relationships and belongingness.	85
6.2 Benefits of fostering for foster children and foster parents.....	86
6.3 Perceptions of foster parents on children’s experiences	87
6.4 Challenges of foster children and foster parents	87
6.5 Areas for further research.	89
6.6 Implications for policy and practice.....	89
6.7 Final Conclusions	90
REFERENCES	92
APPENDICES	100
Appendix 1: Interview Guide.....	100
Appendix 2: Guardian consent form.....	102
Appendix 3: Participant consent form	103
Appendix 4: Information Guide	104

LIST OF TABLES & FIGURES

TABLE 1: Sample Thematic Analysis of Foster Children and Foster Parents.....	43-44
FIGURE 1: Adult children Engagement in Participation.....	30
FIGURE 2: A Completed Network Chart of a Foster Child.....	41
FIGURE 3: Violent Discipline: Age Patterns.....	61
FIGURE 4: Attitudes of Physical Punishment in Ghana.....	62
FIGURE 5: A drawing of a foster child describing a loving relationship between a foster child & foster sibling.....	70

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Children will always need a safe space where they can be nurtured to grow, when their biological parents for some reasons are unable to provide this care. Article 20 of the UNCRC stipulates that State Parties are responsible for ensuring alternative care in situations where children are “temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment” (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Foster care is one of such options that provides alternative care for children, to grow in family like settings. Foster care is widely recognised as the most suitable alternative care for various children who for one reason or the other are unable to live with their families of origin (*Foster Care Operational Manual*, 2018; Höjer, 2004). In many countries across the world, protection of children has been documented in child rights legislations. The UNCRC which has been ratified by all countries except the USA calls on all state parties to protect children, to ensure their survival and development and to uphold their best interest at all times (United Nations General Assembly, 1989)

Foster care has different variations and types. In the western societies foster care typologies include kinship care, formal foster care, network care among others. Researchers have written extensively on these typologies making foster care literature broad and cutting across various disciplines. However, there is somewhat scant literature in African countries on the experiences of children in formal foster care. This is largely because African countries have been more attuned to kinship care which is predominant in many African settings (Insiugo-Abanihe, 1983; Kuyini et al., 2009). Formal foster care is a recent introduction to alternative care provision and hence there is little known about it in these contexts especially Ghana (*Foster Care Operational Manual*, 2018). How children and foster parents experience foster care and the outcomes are important to understand how best their interest can be safeguarded. More so, the relationships of foster children with foster parents, their settling in and what happens in these foster placements has enormous implications on the stability of the foster placement and care outcomes (Maaskant et al., 2016; Hedin et al., 2011; Schofield, 2002). For this reason, this study seeks to understand foster children and foster parents ‘experiences in formal foster care in Ghana and how foster children perceive their relationships and belongingness as well as how foster parents perceive children’s experiences.

1.1 Background

Foster care has provided children with an alternative care arrangement that helps their development and provides the emotional and physical needs of children in a relatively stable family like setting (Rittner et al., 2011). One of the goals of foster care in Ghana is reunification back to the family although, in certain cases this does not happen and the child will have to live in foster care for longer periods (*Foster Care Operational Manual*, 2018). In some western countries there is enormous pressure on the foster care system with children in need of care exceeding the number of foster carers. (Shuker, Sebba and Höjer, 2019; Twigg and Swan, 2007).

Attitudes towards foster care in many parts of Europe is generally positive (Christiansen et al., 2013). Different countries have various definitions of what they consider a success in foster care placements. In the US, when children stay for a few years in the foster care system and are adopted it is considered as an achievement in child welfare (Lindsey and Shlonsky, 2008, p. 95). In Australia, a majority of children placed in foster care are ultimately reunited back with their families (Fernandez, 2009). In Sweden just like in Australia, the main objective of child welfare is reunification with parents. In Sweden adoption is rare, it is however common to find a change of custody to foster parents, irrespective of the conditions of biological parents when a child has stayed in foster care for three years. This is to ensure stability and a sense of belonging for the child (Wissö, Johansson & Höjer, 2019). After a change of custody, a foster parent can make pertinent decisions about a foster child without necessarily consulting birth parents, decisions that could not be previously made without consent of birth parents.

1.2 Fostering in Ghana

Fostering in Ghana has different connotations. Fostering can be used to denote the exchange of children between families for the purposes of children being cared for by other family members to provide these children with education or in exchange for provision of services (Grant and Yeatman, 2012; Hampshire et al., 2015). These services provided by children include provision of domestic labour and performing of house chores. Demographers in Ghana and many other African countries have consistently reported high rates of child fostering although these do not necessarily have state interventions or regulations (Isiugo- Abanihe, 1983; Owusu and Adjei, 2009). Ghana has had a long-standing tradition of kinship fostering since pre independence era (Frimpong-Manso, 2014). Informal fostering has been a common phenomenon in Ghana and across West Africa until recent times where the trends are shifting

due to, migration, social change, industrialization and economic pressures. The Ghana Demographic Health Survey (2014 p.21-23) describes foster children as “children under age 18 living in households with neither their mother nor their father present”. According to this survey “16 percent of all households in Ghana have foster children, of which 16 percent are in urban households and 17 percent in rural households. Informal foster care is often a buffer for children in poor families to be rescued from the shackles of poverty by other well to do members of the family (*Child and Family Welfare Policy*, 2015; Grant and Yeatman, 2012)

The major form of alternative care provision for vulnerable children from the early 90s to date in Ghana is residential care (Frimpong-Manso, 2014; Frimpong-Manso et al.,2019; Mawutor, 2015). Often children who have been placed in foster care would have passed through the residential care system (Mawutor,2015). Research has shown how institutionalization of children affects the child’s wellbeing (Petrowski et al., 2017). In 2007, Ghana embarked on a reform of its care system dubbed the Care Reform Initiative (CRI). CRI was aimed at addressing the excesses in the residential care system in Ghana and to provide children who needed alternative care a more stable and loving family. By concentrating on integrated family and community systems. CRI in restructuring the alternative care system for children focused on deinstitutionalization like many other countries in line with the United Nation Guidelines for Alternative Care of Children herein called the ‘UN guidelines’ and the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UN guidelines call on all state parties to limit the use of residential facilities. Where large residential care facilities exist alternatives should be provided whilst putting into due consideration the best interest of the child and expediting actions in eliminating these facilities (UNICEF, 2017).

In Ghana formal foster care is underutilized and a report on findings from 10 priority districts of foster care indicated that thirty-two (32) children were in formal foster care placement as at 2014 with ninety-eight (98) approved registered foster parents across the country. (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, 2018). The Ghanaian culture places so much importance on family and preservation of family ties. In Ghana a child is seen as a product of the society and is raised by the larger society and extended family rather than just the nuclear family. Due to this, in cases where the immediate family lacks the capacity to cater for the child members of the extended family and sometimes the community at large steps in to help with the upbringing of the child (Imoh, 2012; Frimpong-Manso, 2014; Hickmann and Adams, 2018) without necessarily resorting to any formal procedures in protecting the child. Most often in situations where children have been harmed community structures are resorted to and in these

situations, emphasis is on restoration of peace in these homes rather than upholding the rights of the child (*Child and Family Welfare Policy*, 2015).

1.3 Problem Statement

The area of fostering this research seeks to explore is formal foster care in Ghana. Formal foster care “is a statutory placement requiring the involvement of the Department of Social Welfare and refers to the provision of planned, time-limited, temporary, substitute family care for a child when his/her birth family cannot provide care either temporarily or permanently”(Foster Care Operational Manual, 2018, p. 15).

Formal foster care in Ghana is not an engrained practice and has not been really explored (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, 2018). Correspondingly, few people are aware of formal foster care in Ghana (Mawutor,2015). Formal foster care is only practiced in a few districts in Ghana and mostly executed through NGO’s which are classified as Foster Care Agencies here in called the Agency interchangeably. The two main NGO’s facilitating this process in Ghana is the Bethany Christian Services and Orphaned Aid Africa. (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, 2018).

Ghana has been working since 2007 to deinstitutionalize, this requires that alternative care like family-based care; foster care and kinship care need to be strengthened and standardized to make deinstitutionalization operational. In 2018, for the first time, the DSW created a unit for the coordination of foster care and another unit for coordination of residential care (Mawutor, 2015). Children will always need an option when their biological families lack the capacity to cater for their needs. This calls for research into foster care to better understand what works in the Ghanaian context. Since this has to do with the wellbeing of children, it is important that children can make a say on issues that affect their wellbeing. Children are undoubtedly an invaluable resource and major stakeholders on decisions affecting their own lives and wellbeing (Corsaro, 2015). There has been the exclusion of the voices of children in foster care research largely because of their vulnerability and other ethical considerations (Fox and Berrick, 2007; Mitchell, Kuczynski, Tubbs and Ross ,2010). There is little research on views of children in alternative care (Fox and Berrick, 2007). What happens in the foster care placement, how children feel connected, the relationships between foster children and foster parents, the experiences of foster parents collectively have implications for the stability and care outcomes. Currently, there is no research on the experiences of children in formal foster care in Ghana. Most research on alternative care in Ghana have focused on other stakeholders

but for children themselves or on young adults who have left care. Research has showed that examining people's lives in retrospective can sieve out relevant information. Hence, the need to study foster children and their foster parents to understand the happenings in formal foster families.

1.4 Relevance of the Study

Hammersley (1992) proposes relevance as a criterion in measuring how good a qualitative study is. According to Bryman (2012) Relevance of a study is measured by how important a research topic is within its field or the contribution it makes to what is already known in that area. This research is relevant because, with formal foster care still at its developmental stages in Ghana and the scant literature in this field, my research will contribute to providing knowledge to the field of foster care. This will bridge the research gap in this area and provide perspectives on how children and foster parents experience and perceive foster care and opportunities to be navigated in this field in line with the best interest of children. This research is also timely as it provides knowledge that could feed into policies and practices in this phase of restructuring the care system in Ghana. This research as an exploratory study gives room for possibility of conducting a future longitudinal study.

1.5 Aims of the study

The aim of this research is to explore how foster children *experience* foster care and how they locate themselves across their biological families and foster families as well as ascertain the extent to which foster children feel connected and supported in their placements. Also, the *perceptions* of foster parents on foster children's experiences and challenges of both foster parents and foster children are of interest in this study.

1.5.1 Research Questions

1. How does the foster child and foster parent benefit from foster care placement?
2. How do foster children define their relationships and belongingness in their foster families and birth families?
3. What are foster parents' perceptions of children's experiences in care?
4. What are the challenges of fostering for both foster children and foster parents?

1.5.2 Research Focus

The study focuses mainly on children and foster parents who are currently in formal foster care in Ghana and placed by a foster care agency or DSW in Ghana. This means that the placement

of the children has a statutory backing. The initial model of this foster care agency in placing children in care was a model called the *foster to adopt*; where children were placed in care with the intention of building a more stable and permanent relationship with the foster family for adoption by the family.

1.6 Child Protection in Ghana

Ghana was the first country to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child globally in 1990 indicating the interest to advance the rights of children (OHCHR, 2015). However, due to child protection been modelled under Anglo Saxon traditions, for decades child protection has been ineffective and uncoordinated mainly because they do not conform to the values and believes of the Ghanaian people and context (*Child and Family Welfare Policy*, 2015). Child protection actors include children and youth, families, communities, civil society and private organisations. At the community level child protection recognises community structures and family structures such as traditional authorities, family heads, chiefs, ' leaders of faith-based organisations, queen mothers and elders who play an important role in child protection (*Child and Family Welfare Policy*, 2015). Ghanaian families are largely communal. In rural areas for example, adults who are not necessarily biological parents of a child can correct and train a child when they feel that the child is wrong (Imoh, 2012). The Ghanaian family system is however moving in the direction of nucleation due to rural urban migration and other economic factors. Nucleation has to do with the shifting construction of household living arrangements, from extended to a more private single-family household which consists of a husband and wife and their children (Annim, Awusabo-Asare and Amo-Adjei, 2015). Although the family system is moving from extended to nuclear in recent times, the extended family still persists, and their role is vital in children upbringing. Families are often a first point of contact when a child needs care and protection and these are organised on informal basis.

Ghana resorts to a risk approach in child protection rather than a family service centered approach, where a child has to be in real harm before there is an intervention from the state. This also means that there are little preventative early support programs provided for new parents in raising their children. The major reasons accounting for children in need of state care in Ghana include factors like poverty, HIV and AIDS and archaic and harmful traditional practices (Frimpong-Manso, 2014). These factors often lead to stigmatization of children who

may be known to be in care ((Frimpong-Manso, 2014). Regardless of the numerous children who need care and protection in Ghana, just a few of them enter the care system due to the use of community structures which can sometimes be detrimental to the safety and wellbeing of the child (*Child and Family Welfare Policy*, 2015). When a child is abused, it is more likely to have the issue dealt with at the community and family levels unless that abuse is highly incriminating to the offender. Most often emphasis is placed on reconciliation among family members to the detriment of the child. Research has indicated that the number of children who are physically and sexually abused as well as children who go through various forms of violence both at home and in school outnumber the cases reported to the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police service or the DSW (*Child and Family Welfare Policy*, 2015). These two agencies are the major route through which children get into the care system and in most cases these children must have gone through severe forms of abuse before cases are reported (*Child and Family Welfare Policy*, 2015).

1.7 Child Welfare Policy Framework in Ghana

Ghana has numerous national laws and has acceded to international laws that promotes the best interest of children and their welfare. As part of efforts to promote the welfare of children, Ghana ratified the UNCRC in 1990. Other major international instruments that Ghana accedes to in the area of child protection are the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (2005). The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, The Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and The International Labour Organisation Convention No.182 on the worst forms of child Labour (UNICEF n.d).

The 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution of Ghana stipulates the rights of children and provides a basis for the enactment of laws to protect the rights of children. Legislations by the government to meet the provisions of the constitution includes, the Children's Act, 1998 (560) which provides for the rights of the child and covers issues of parental duties and responsibilities, maintenance, adoption and fosterage. In 2016 there was an amendment bill passed on the fostering and adoption section to conform to International standards. The Children's Amendment, 2016 (Act 937), provides a framework for fostering and adoption in sub section 62,66,79 and 81 which have been further translated into legal instruments. In September 2016, Ghana acceded to the Hague Convention of 29th May 1993 on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. Other national laws on children include; Criminal and other Offences Act 1960 (Act 29), Intestate Succession Act

1985 (PNDCL111), the Human Trafficking Act 2005 (Act 694), the Domestic Violence Act 2007 (Act 732) among many others.

There are also different child related policies to address the specific areas of child welfare. These policies have been enacted with the help of International NGOs like UNICEF, USAID and ILO. Considering how comprehensive these policies are to protect children, it is evident that issues of child protection in Ghana are due to a disconnect between law and practice. As well as, communication between community structures and formal structures in child welfare.

1.8 Overview of current trends in foster care in Ghana

The Children's Amendment Act 2016 (Act 937) provides clear guidelines on foster care and adoption in Ghana. A major goal of foster care in Ghana is family reunification (*Foster Care Operational Manual*, 2018). According to Section 62 of the Act, poverty (financial and material) should not be the basis for a child's placement in foster care. In Ghana a person with a high moral integrity, who is above the ages of 21, can be a foster parent. Notwithstanding a person can foster a child if he/ she is at least 18 years and a relative of the child, or at least 21 years when he/she is not related to the child (Children's Amendment Act, 2016).

Currently, there are two types of foster care arrangements that can be provided by a family in Ghana. These are either short term (6 months or less) or long term (over 6 months up to a year or more) depending on each child's unique situation. Foster children are entitled to have all the rights of children who live with their biological families. Foster care placements must consider the preservation of family ties and non-discrimination. Every child in need of care and protection can be put into foster care regardless of disabilities. Foster parents cannot foster more than 7 children including their own biological children (*Foster Care Operational Manual*, 2018).

At present, there is no official data indicating the number of foster children in Ghana. However, unpublished reports from the foster care services unit of the DSW indicate that as at May 2020 the number of children placed in foster care is 115 with 213 certified foster carers. Another set of 260 foster parents were yet to be certified at the time this study was conducted. The recruitment of foster carers involves awareness creation through community-based groups and talks at religious centres, which leads to the screening and scrutiny of interested prospective foster parents. After this process prospective carers are provided a pre-service training before children are subsequently placed. (Mawutor, 2015)

DSW does not provide direct financial support to foster parents but may provide in-kind support' and additional expenses foster parents may incur in discharging their role (*Foster Care Operational Manual*, 2018). Sections 72 and 75 of the Children's Amendment Act states the establishment of a foster care fund which will be used to support children in foster care especially those with special needs (Children's Amendment Act, 2016). Some foster care agencies, however, have been noted to provide some financial support to foster parents although this support comes with various challenges and is inadequate (Mawutor, 2015).

1.9 Definition of terms

Department of Social Welfare (DSW)- is the national body responsible for the general welfare of children among other responsibilities. All foster agencies in Ghana work in partnership with this department to provide for the needs of vulnerable children who need foster care.

Foster Care Agency – In this study it means the Agency that partners with the DSW to place children in foster care. It also implies “A private agency which trains foster parents, supervises and monitors foster care placements” (*Foster Care Operational Manual*, 2018p. 9)

Care Reform Initiative – A reform of the care system in Ghana that focuses on a shift from institutional care as a care alternative to family and community-based care services for children who need substitute care as a result of parent's inability to care for them (Department of Social Welfare, 2015)

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on foster care is broad and cuts across various disciplines. This literature review focuses on foster care literature directly related to foster children and foster parents' experiences in care, perceptions on belonging and foster children's relationships with both foster families and birth families. Literature reviewed cuts across other disciplines such as anthropology, nursing, demographic studies and communication studies. Literature include longitudinal follow up studies. Most studies done in this field have explored quantitative, qualitative as well as mixed methods.

2.1 Research with children

Research with children in general has been a difficult area for researchers bearing in mind the various protocols, methodological and ethical challenges one has to consider in engaging children in research (Christensen and James, 2017). Smart, Neale and Wade (2001) submits that there is often an ethical concern on engaging with children in the family setting, with the perception that children might reveal the intricacies of the family life and hence undermine the integrity of the family. Perhaps to avoid these challenges, research in foster care regarding the experiences of children have focused on young people who have left care or other stakeholders in the field like foster parents, social workers among others and not the children themselves (Christiansen et al., 2013; McCrystal, 2008). According to Gardner (2004), information from other stake holders may not necessarily capture the perspectives of foster children. Elden (2013 p. 8) states that "new developments in both childhood and family studies have stimulated studies on children's own experiences of family life and related areas". Thus, research on the need to incorporate the voices of children in research and practice has since been on a rise. (Gilligan, 2000). Some foster care research that advances the voices of children are studies on children's belongingness, relationships, participation and others.

2.2 Belongingness of foster children in care

Researchers have written broadly on how the movements of children from one foster home to the other or from foster parents back to birth parents has implications on children's perceptions of who they consider as family and where they belong (Biehal, 2014; Chapman, Wall & Barth 2004; Christiansen et al., 2013; Schofield, 2002).

Studies indicate that children who are treated like biological children of foster carers develop a great sense of belongingness. Storer et al. (2014) assert that the features of supportive foster homes comprise the provision of a sense of belonging, structure and guidance. In a longitudinal follow up study in Norway with 43 children who had stayed in their foster placement for at least four years, Christiansen et al. (2013) report that when foster children are treated like the biological children of foster carers, it plays a critical role in the adolescents conceptualization of belonging to the foster family. This study indicates that when contact was extensive with biological family, adolescents described their belongingness as ‘here and there’. Social workers described this as having conflicting loyalties. Overall, almost all young persons in the interview identified with their birth families in terms of belonging and accounted for their inability in completely being a part of their foster family (Christiansen et al., 2013)

Drawing on qualitative data from a national research project on Australian foster carers, on how foster families creates sense of belonging , Riggs, Augoustinos and Delfabbro (2009), assert that when foster carers show commitment of being there constantly for foster children, and provide a space where children feel that someone is there to listen to them, it plays an important role in mending children’s previous negative experiences. They also submit that caring in the most insignificant forms from foster carers can also create a sense of belonging. Caring also enforces the fact that children are valued and have a place in the foster family. Furthermore, when foster carers show interest in the overall welfare of children including previous experiences with their birth family as well as encourage the hobbies of foster children it may help children develop a sense of connection with the family culture (Riggs et al. 2009). “Foster families can be considered as playing a role in providing a ‘therapeutic space’ where children may witness models of parenting that are supportive, and which offer the opportunity to belong” (Riggs et al. 2009 p.172).

Generally, children are satisfied with their foster care experiences (Biehal, 2014; Kuyini et al., 2009; Chapman et al., 2004), although this may not be representative of the general picture of children in foster care. In a study to identify factors that predict satisfaction with out-of-home care, Chapman et al. (2004) analysed data from a sample of 727 children as part of the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being. The study involved children in family foster care, kinship care, and group homes. Ninety percent of the children in out-of-home care who were interviewed “liked” their foster homes and felt a part of their foster families. One third expressed a desire to be adopted by their foster families, however, the majority had a sense of

connectedness to their biological parents with 43% expressing a desire to live with them. Variations existed in children's experiences based on placement type. Regarding family contact, children living in foster or kinship care were less likely to see their biological parents on a regular basis.

In a study of 13 children placed in a long-term foster care in the UK, Biehal (2014) found that the children perceived their sense of belonging to their foster families based on different factors. When foster parents felt 'a strong entitlement to be parents rather than just care for, children in placement became more attached to their foster parents. Foster children then relate to them 'as if they were their parents' however, these groups of children had not been in contact with their birth families for many years. According to Biehal (2014) it seemed to be more of quasi-adoption. Other sets of children in this study had a connectedness to both foster parents and biological parents and considered both as families. This was primarily linked to children been treated like the biological children of the foster carers (Christiansen et al., 2013). The third group in this category had more ambivalent emotions because they still had some hatred and anger towards their biological parents. This was influenced by their parent's lack of contact with them. For these children 'Biehal asserts that they had a 'qualified belonging'. The fourth group in this study was an individual with an imminent placement breakdown. His qualification of belongingness to the foster family was described by Biehal as 'provisional'. According to Biehal this was influenced by his constant move from one placement to the other and therefore did not consider any foster parent or home as stable. He adjusted to the times and seasons.

The role of foster parents in influencing children's sense of belongingness is enormous. This includes providing warmth for children, involving children in family rituals and treating foster children as though they were one's own biological children. Maaskant et al. (2016) in their study assert that youths interviewed reported their sense of loyalty and bonding to both their foster and biological parents, although in relation to their wellbeing it was more connected to the relationship with their foster parent. More so, Chapman et al., (2004) emphasizes that although children are satisfied in out-of-home care there is also a sense of ambivalence. That is, they like and relate well with their caregivers and at the same time children have soft spots for their biological parents. This is exhibited through the emotions of happiness when they come into contact with their biological parents during visits and desiring the possibility of living with them if they could decide. According to Fernandez (2006) children still desire to belong to their birth family despite strong attachment and belonging with their foster families.

Age at entry and children's perception of their interpersonal skills influenced their cohesion with birth families.

The theme of ambivalence is common in research investigating foster children's sense of belonging (Biehal, 2014; Chapman et al., 2004). Biehal (2014) suggests that children in long term foster families can consider their foster homes as a 'a home' and simultaneously feel associated with their birth families. Because for such children how they define a home is not just a particular place but based on different characteristics that provides them with a sense of connectedness in a particular moment.

2.3 Children's experiences on relationships in care

Various studies have indicated that majority of children in foster care are happy and feel that they have a place in their foster homes (Chapman et al., 2004; Andersson, 2009; Delgado et al., 2019). Delgado et al. (2019) in their findings of a study in Portugal indicate that irrespective of the kinds of placements of children in foster care, these children do not intend to run away from their placements, and they have a somewhat positive relationship with their foster families. Concurrently these same children are happy when they visit their birth families in so long as there is a supporting relationship between foster and biological families.

Foster care literature suggests that there are two contrasting debates on how children's relationships with their foster families and birth families affects them in foster care. One side of the argument posits that when children have too much contact with birth families it could lead to problems in forming secured relationships with foster families and conflicting loyalties which can subsequently lead to other behavioural problems (Chapman et al., 2004; Delgado et al., 2019) The other side of the debate is that when children are taken into care they are moved from their familiar environments and family who they may have some emotional bonds with and hence could affect their wellbeing hence the need to have more contact with birth families (Maaskant et al., 2016). This creates a conundrum for case workers in dealing with cases where they are torn between allowing more contacts with birth families or limiting contact to have a more stable relationships in their foster homes to prevent the breakdown of the foster care placement. As Delgado et al. (2019) found out in their interviews with professionals, that contact with birth family could be beneficial for the child but after wards caregivers think it has negative impacts on the child because the child is unable to handle the emotions after contact. Moyers, Farmer and Lipscombe (2005) suggest that positive contact with biological family is a vital source of stability and continuity and can salvage disturbing relationships with birth parents. However, they propose that contact arrangements should be designed to meet the

unique situation of adolescents and should take full account and the whole care situation into perspective. With full restrictions given to contacts that have negative impacts on the wellbeing of young people.

Maaskant et al. (2016), found that foster youths in their sample were more attached to their foster parents than their birth parents because, they could count more on their foster parents and that their foster parents were psychologically available for them. The children in the study trusted their parents less than foster parents considering that their birth parents were more vulnerable. These authors assert that focus can be placed on enhancing relationships between the child and foster parents without necessarily having a strict devotion towards enhancing the relationship with birth parents to avoid having a competing effect on the child.

In Dunn, Culhane, and Taussig (2010) study on children's appraisals of their experiences in out-of-home care in USA, they collected data from 180 children with ages between nine to eleven-year olds who were in out of home care. Qualitative findings showed that over one-third of children they interviewed reported that missing their biological mothers was the hardest thing about being in out-of-home care. Children also reported “missing family” and “adapting and transitioning to a new home.”

Hedin et al. (2011) emphasize that basic things such as doing things together, e.g. going to the restaurant together, playing cards together and family interactions like light teasing, humorous jokes and laughing is a way of creating warmth in the family and has a role to play in the social bonds of adolescents. This also aids foster children on settling into a new home. Children in numerous researches indicate that they want parents who are not judgemental, create a safe space where they can share their problems and to treat them like any other member of the family (Skoog, Khoo & Nygren, 2015). When young people have caregivers with whom they trust enough to share their past experiences and troubling family relationships, their placements are more likely to have better outcomes and less disruptions (Moyers et al., 2005). Research on care provider experiences indicate that commitment levels of caregivers and their motivations to care plays a significant role on the success of foster placement.

On foster siblings' relationship to foster children in foster placements, Andersson (2009) elucidates that foster siblings play a vital role in improving the care experiences of foster children. Other researches highlight the need for foster children to be collectively seen as resources that help the foster relationship dynamics (Nordenfors, 2016; Twigg and Swan,

2007). Overall, foster children's relationship with members of the foster family is considered vital to the outcomes of care (Schofield 2002; Chapman et al. 2004).

The studies on relationships show that, research that emphasize on children being happy in foster care at the same time identifies scores of children who would rather be with their families (Delgado et al., 2019). This has to do mostly with the kinds of relationship that exists between the foster family and birth families Chapman et al. (2004) and how often children are in contact with their birth families when in care. Professionals in various studies have indicated how too much contact with birth families can have implications for the stability of the child's emotions Delgado et al. (2019), causing what some researchers have described as conflicting loyalties.

2.4 Positive effects of foster care

Although children have to adapt to different life altering circumstances when they are put in care most view their experiences in foster care positively (Chapman et al., 2004). Delgado et al. (2019), in a pilot qualitative study in Portugal reports that foster care gives children the opportunity to receive counselling and support to overcome challenging situations giving children an overall sense of protection. Children in care in this study also reported to being able to make new friends and to meet new people (Delgado et al, 2019). Meeting new people can also expand the network base of foster children and give them access to community door openers. In a study on traditional kinship foster care in Ghana, foster children report that they like living in foster care because of access to basic needs and the opportunity to attend school (Kuyini et al., 2009). Conclusively, research has shown that children often have better opportunities in care.

Dunn et al (2010), reports that the most helpful thing children said about being in out-of-home care although varied responses were recorded, that one-third of children reported that having better opportunities such as supports, services, needs, structure and safety were the most helpful things.

Foster children's view on their neighbourhoods and new setting show that foster children identify enhancement in their neighbourhoods compared to their former neighbourhoods and more friendly people (Chapman et al., 2004).

2.5 Challenges of children and foster parents in foster Care

International literature on foster care shows an increase prevalence in behavioural and developmental problems of children in care (Lawrence, Carlson and Egeland, 2006; Maaskant

et al., 2016). Undoubtedly most children that come into care have prior challenges due to difficult conditions they might have been removed from.

In a quantitative study to examine the relationship between foster care placement and the development of behavioural problems with a baseline of child adaptation prior to placement, Lawrence et al. (2006) found that foster care may lead to an increase in behaviour problems. The authors identified that children who experienced foster care displayed higher levels of behaviour problems immediately following release from care compared to children who received adequate parental care within disadvantaged home environments (Lawrence et al., 2006).

Other challenges have to do more with being treated differently in the foster home (Festinger, 1983). For example, In an exploratory qualitative study on traditional kinship foster care in Northern Ghana: the experiences and views of children, carers and adults in Tamale. 74 participants were interviewed by Kuyini et al. (2009), who found that, children report not being treated like the biological children of foster carers and are afraid of asking for basic things from foster carers. Owing to the likelihood of foster children facing some sort of punishment which includes beating or being insulted by the foster carers. (Kuyini et al,2009).

Corporal Punishment in foster care has been reported in some studies for example, McFadden and Ryan (1991). Research has subsequently showed the effects of the use of corporal punishment on children (Gershoff, 2013). Simons and Wurtele (2010) suggest that there is a correlation between parents' use of corporal punishment and their children consequently using violence on other children. They assert that it becomes a cycle of 'intergenerational violence' and children tend to use spanking on their children as adults and in their childhood, they tend to resolve conflicts with violence due to the use of spanking from their parents.

Foster parents also experience varied forms of challenges in catering for the needs of foster children. Studies suggest that often the primary care giver in foster care is the female who might either be married or single (Grimm and Darwall, 2005; Rodger et al.,2006; Siminski et al., 2005). In an Australian qualitative study informed by feminist perspectives, of 20 mothers on challenges of mothering in foster care, Blythe et al. (2013) found that mothering in the foster care system revealed struggles to achieve good mother ideal. Some of the struggles mothers faced with the system was broken promises from agencies who promise to support mothers, but they do not get these supports. These foster mothers did not receive support that was promised to them before opting to foster and that reality on the ground was far different from

what they had hoped for. In developing countries some other challenges are unemployment and low income of carers (Frimpong-Manso et al., 2020; Kuyini et al., 2009).

Cavazzi, Guilfoyle and Sims (2010) indicate in their research that one of the negative effects of fostering for foster parents includes negative influence of biological parents on the lives of foster children which culminates in the display of negative behaviours. Studies show that parting between foster children is worse for foster parents who have the expectation of adopting the child that is in their temporary care or those who see themselves as parents rather than people providing a service (Blythe et al., 2012; Schofield et al., 2013). Blythe et al., (2012) found that negative stereotypes and stigma from the wider community led to foster parents concealing their label of foster carers subsequently concealing foster children's label unless they had no other choice. Other negative experiences of foster carers include loss of friendships, social isolation due foster children's problematic behaviours and feeling disempowered within the foster care structure, that is, feelings of powerlessness over major decisions concerning children (Blythe et al., 2012)

2.6 Participation of children in alternative care

The participation of children in matters affecting their lives is very crucial. Höjer, Sebba and Luke (2013) report that several studies have revealed that children's participation in decision to foster is very important. In a Danish research on children in out-of-home care, Hestbæk, (2018) submits that caseworkers must involve the child before taking any decision that affects the child. The research found that in out-of-home care, children's participation in matters affecting them is low: 35% of the children interviewed acknowledged being consulted before decisions were taken but 55% affirm neither being involved nor consulted (Hestbæk,2018). Children want their right to participation respected: they want to be listened to, have the choices they make respected especially in matters affecting them (Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010). These authors submit that children identified participation to include being granted access to information to enable them to make informed decisions.

Nordenfors (2016 p. 861) in her research with birth children of foster carers reveals that participation of especially the birth children of the foster carers increased with age at 39%. Young people between the ages of 16 to 20 affirmed being consulted by someone from social service before the placement, while only 19% of the children between ages 6 to 10 years confirmed being asked (Nordenfors,2016). In a review of 14 different studies on biological

children of foster carers, foster carers own children explained that they wanted to be part of the decision-making process in placing children, and that social workers should acknowledge and appreciate their role in the caregiving process (Twigg and Swan, 2007). Children's opinions should thus be essential when considering the factors of which relationships should be the central focus for support in the family relationship goals in care (Maaskant et al., 2016, p. 391). In her research with young people, Cashmore (2011) found that when children are given the opportunity to participate in decisions, they are very likely to be happy with the arrangements and likely also to be more compliant. Participation which does not help information sharing, may inhibit children's adjustment to changes in family structure (McCredie and Horrox, 1995). The ability to involve children in the decision-making process of choosing their foster families helps in the settling down of children in foster homes (Hedin, Hojer and Brunnberg, 2011).

To conclude, reviewed literature in this study indicate that, regarding foster children's belongingness, studies show that children have a strong sense of connectedness to their placement. More so, contact with biological parents does not necessarily affects children's sense of connectedness to foster family (Biehal, 2014) but also how these relationships are handled. The theme of ambivalence is shown in children's relationships in care and the outcome of family contact is neither here nor there but depending on each unique situation. Family contact may result in both positive and detrimental outcomes for children in placement, foster parents and other children in the foster families. Furthermore, foster parents have various challenges which includes limited support and failed promises from foster care agencies. Foster children and children in numerous researches emphasize on the need to be involved in placement when it comes to their participation.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPTS

This session begins with the theoretical frameworks and concepts upon which this research is pinned. In understanding relationships and belongingness of children in foster care it is beneficial to understand the sociological theories that provide a perspective on the foundations of childhood and how they intersect to provide rich meanings to the experiences of children. Theories of new sociology of childhood, participatory theories, sociology of personal life, concept of belonging, and the concept of doing and display of families are the theoretical and conceptual lens used in discussing the findings of this study. The various focal points this research seeks to explore are quite broad and have previously been studied independently. This accounts for the varied theories and concepts used in this study.

3.1 The new sociology of childhood

Research in childhood studies has shown that children were not seen as individuals who were capable and had rights in themselves a few centuries ago, neither were they seen as active agents who were capable of participating in society but rather, they were seen as people who were to be modelled to meet the standards of the society (Corsaro, 2015). Issues of children were discussed by linking them to women (Corsaro, 2015; Mayall, 2001). Conventional childhood studies focused on hearing children's voices, the agency of children and differences in childhood experiences based on context (Davies, 2015). The new wave of childhood studies captures the totality of all the aspects of children lives including family relationships as well as friendships and peer relations (Davies, 2015).

Socialization theory is one of the traditional theories in theorizing childhood. It explains how children adapt and are shaped by the society. According to Corsaro (2015), early theorists of socialization theories proposed two models thus the Deterministic model and Constructivist model. The Determinist model sees children as passive people who do not have much to give society but people who have to be trained to prevent them from deviating from the norms of the society. One of such proponents was the sociologist Talcott Parsons who considered children as threats unless they were socialized. This model emphasizes on appropriating the child to conforming to the standards of society to fit in. "Appropriation means the child is taken over by the society; he is trained to become eventually a competent and contributing member"

(Corsaro, 2015 p.7). The determinist model had two schools of thought; Functionalist and Reproductive model. Functionalist model stipulates the essence of training children to fit into the structures designed by society. Reproductive model considers inequalities in society emphasising on the variations in access to resources in society. Socialization theories used by early sociologists were behaviour focused. And the emphasis on child development was one sided where adults use reinforcements and punishments to shape the child.

Interpretive reproductions; a concept by William Corsaro (2015) departs from weaknesses on traditional theories of childhood mainly theories of socialization and developmental theories. In his interpretive reproductions he sees children as capable agents who are able to contribute to the reproduction of childhood as well as participate in adult societies. By forming their own peer cultures and creating their own realities. By Interpretive he highlights the unique way of children's participation in society. He argues how children ingeniously create their own cultures by using information gained from the adult world as well as internalize society (Corsaro,2015). By reproduction emphasis is on how children are dynamically contributing to culture and change (ibid). This theory brings to bare the foster child's agency to be able to take initiatives and creates meanings in their varying experiences.

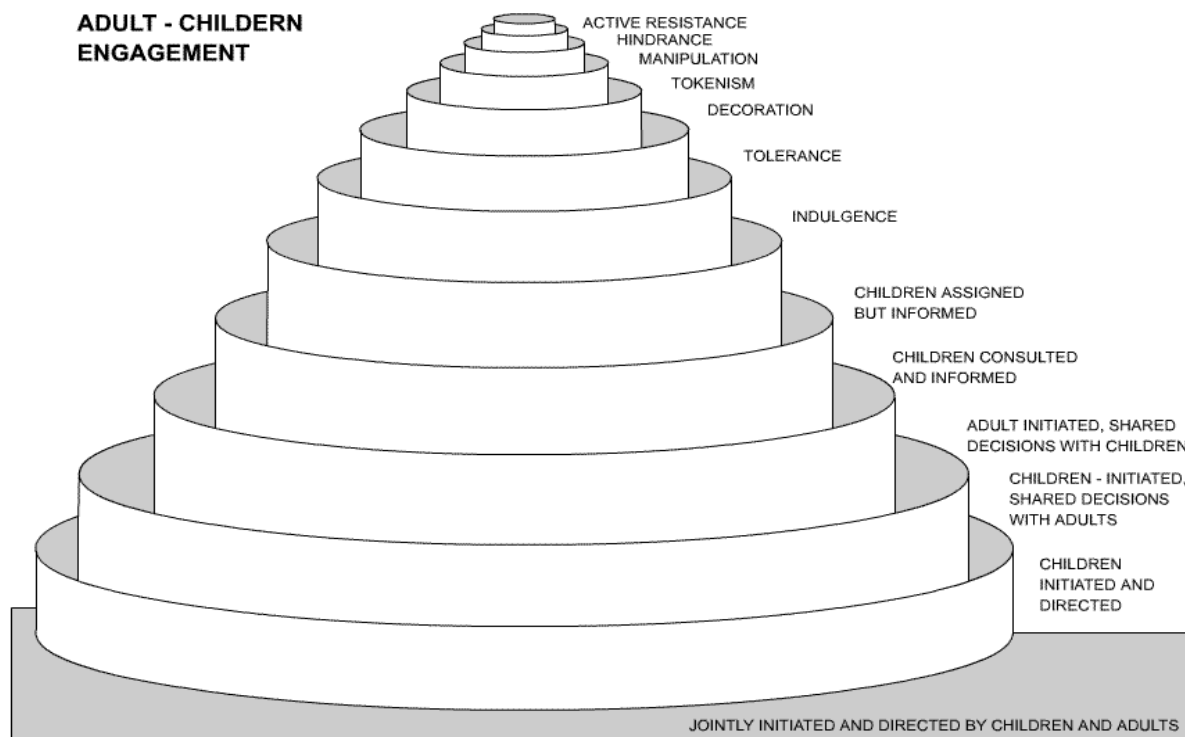
Research on children has been mainly research on children as objects of study (Christensen and James, 2017). My study intends to shift from this paradigm of seeing children as objects and realign with the sociology of childhood in seeing foster children as capable agents of creating their own realities as having rights in themselves and as unique and capable active contributing members of a society (James and Prout, 1997). This study on formal fostering in Ghana sees foster children as active agents who can contribute to the discourse on issues that have importance for their childhood and their wellbeing. Using this theory as a bedrock provides understandings on how foster children can be seen as children who have rights in themselves and children who have a voice that can be projected on matters that concerns them. Their experiences when gathered will provide a concrete basis to feed into policy especially in the Ghanaian context. Corsaro's Interpretive Reproductions approach asserts that children are collective actors together with adults in shaping society and emphasizes the need to take children seriously.

3.2 Participation theory

Closely linked to the children having agency is the Participatory ethos. Participatory approach has gained much prominence in child protection discourses in several countries (Healy, 1998).

Different scholars have espoused models of children's participation. Hart was one of the earliest scholars to provide a model to stimulate discussions in this field. Hart's ladder of child participation identifies eight processes for children's participation (Hart, 2008). "The ladder is primarily about the degree to which adults and institutions afford or enable children to participate" (Hart 2008 p 23). At the bottom of this ladder is the forms of non-participation thus manipulation, decoration and tokenism; where children could be consulted but nothing is done about their inputs (Hart, 1992). The top five degrees of participation ranges from *'assigned and informed, consulted and informed, Adult initiated shared decisions with children, child initiated and directed child initiated shared decisions with adults* (ibid). Harts Ladder of participation is inclined towards formal forms of children's participation (Hart, 2008). This ladder has received various critiques. Prominent among these critiques is Reddy and Ratna (2002), who assert that the ladder situates participation as a level by level process of children's participation which might be misleading. They further emphasize that Hart's ladder does not show children's level of participation but rather the varying levels of "control and influence" adults have over children's participation. The authors further add other categorisations and provides a spiral to Harts ladder. These forms of participation in relation to adults' relationships viz a viz children will be used as a lens in analysing foster children's experiences in care in Ghana. The diagram below shows these additions.

FIGURE 1- Adult Children Engagement in Participation



Note: Adult children engagement in participation. Adapted from *Journey in Children's Participation by the Concerned for Working Children* (p.30), edited by N. Reddy and K. Ratna ,2002, Vimanapura.

Landsdown (2010), also approaches participation from the political angle and identifies 3 ways in which children can be made to participate. *Consultative Participation* is when children are for example seen as experts and consulted to make input in policy. *Collaborative Participation* is children working in partnership with adults and *child-led participation*, when children take charge of the decision-making processes. Young et al. (2014) provides four pillars for child participation. They emphasized on the need to give children a space to express themselves, a voice by guiding the process for children to express such views, and to give children audience so that children are not only heard but listened to. And, influence so that their views are acted upon in the decision-making process whilst looking out for their best interest.

The ambivalence of power as 'both dangerous and full of promise', 'both a means of control and means of resistances' can be useful in conceptualizing participation of children (Gallagher, 2008, p. 396). He argues that decision making as a feature of participation involves power. The concept of power from a Foucauldian perspective is essential in understanding ways in which power is exercised through network relations. Drawing from Foucault's work on governmentality he conceptualizes power in understanding children's participation. He further

articulates that participation should not be thought of as a process where adults having power devolve power and give some to children but rather how power is used in the interactions of the people involved. Power is relative based on the varying circumstances and characteristics of persons in this relationship. The nature of power exercised depends on the kind of relationship and resources available within such relationships. Understanding foster children's experiences on how they are involved in important decisions that concerns their wellbeing is critical. This could be decisions that takes place at the level of the home such as what chores one needs to perform, the rules that guides daily interactions and so on.

This study is reflexive on the conceptualizations of participation detailed by the various authors in this chapter. Participatory lens is used to understand foster children's experiences and provides a basis for understanding the power dynamics in the relationships of foster children and foster parents. The research process will involve participatory methods by creating a space for children to share their knowledge in this field, children will be given the centre stage in sharing of the experiences. Their voices will not only be heard but also be listened to. The UNCRC emphasizes on the right of the child to participation. Article 12 and 13 of the UNCRC stipulates the need to respect the views of children and their freedom of expression. This convention encourages adults to listen to children as well as make children participate in decisions that would affect them and give those decisions weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child on inputs, they make concerning their lives (United Nations General Assembly, 1989).

3.3 Children's Personal Lives; (The Sociology of Personal life theory)

Sociology of personal life is a concept posited by Carol Smart (2007). This concept is informed by interactionist perspectives and it asserts that in order to understand families there is the need to view families from the perspectives of those it concerns and meanings they give to their relationships (Smart, 2007). The personal life perspective brings into focus other relationships that people find meaningful which may not be biologically considered a family but provides the individual with a sense of connectedness.

Davies (2015) uses this theory to propose a discourse in understanding the personal lives of children. Studying the personal life is a holistic approach of looking at the various relationships that characterizes the lives of children. These relationships stretch beyond just familial relationships and brings into perspective meanings that children ascribe to relationships that they define as 'family' or 'like family' that has redefined the concept of family (Davies, 2015).

According to Davies (2015) one importance of studying the personal life of a child for a childhood researcher is the ability of the researcher to examine the various aspects of a child's relationship being it peer relationships, friendships, family, kin relationships and all those other contacts that the child interacts with on a daily basis which has implications on the child. Examining children's personal lives draws from a broad range of conceptual approaches that will enable one to have a rich meaning of relationships of children and understand children's experiences. A personal life approach in studying foster children would enable the researcher to zoom in on relationships that foster children find meaningful in both their foster setting and relationships that exists between foster children and their biological families. In the personal life framework, how individuals are connected to each other is of importance. Understanding the relatedness of children in a wider framework of relationships outside just the family is important in explaining for example why children may exhibit certain behaviours.

Knowing how foster children define their foster families and other relations is imperative in putting mechanisms in place to ensure children have more meaningful relationships in care and throughout their life course.

3.4 The Concept of Belonging

Families are more fluid than often acknowledged (Davies, 2015). With the increased 'fluidity' Morgan (1996) in families, belonging is important as this comes into question when one reflects on how family reconstructions can change one's original relationships. In the case of foster children constant change of placements can redefine their belongingness. The concept of belonging is an innate desire that characterizes every human. Every human irrespective of age, class, culture, status, race, wants to feel that they are in the right place and that they fit in. The concept of belonging touches on who feels included or excluded. Who constitutes a family and who is seen as a family relation? How does one fit into these webs of family constellations? As Biehal (2004) asserts, the quality of children's care experiences and sense of belonging in biological and foster family can be an indicator of children's wellbeing. Foster children are increasingly on the move and how they situate themselves in these relationships is important to their wellbeing. Belonging constitutes "Living in a family where one feels at home, together with people one feels close to, whom one trusts and turns to for support" (Hedin, 2014, p. 166). Belonging brings into focus children's connectedness and who they consider as family and how they perceive belonging in these family reconstructions. Belonging is crucial because this can either inhibit initiative of foster children or enhance self-confidence (Collins, 2005).

The belongingness of children in foster placements in my study will be discussed from the lens of Schofield's (2002) study of forty adults in retrospective of their long-term fostering experiences. In her study she provides a model based on the attachment and resilience theories. The model demonstrates the complex web of relationships between attachment, resilience and development by identifying four interrelated classification namely; To Love (secure base), To Act (self-efficacy), To Think (reflective function) To Belong (real family). The perfect interrelations between the four leads to resilience in children and for future adult life and this is termed To Hope (resilience) (Schofield,2002). Importance is placed on 'To Belong' in my study. Belonging has five interconnected parts which are family solidarity, family rituals, family identity, family relationships and family culture (Schofield,2002). Using these concepts of Schofield's belonging as a lens, I shall exemplify how these concepts illuminates foster children's sense of belonging in this current study of foster children in Ghana.

3.5 Concepts of Family Display and Doing Family (Finch,2007)

Who constitutes family has been a major discourse in family studies in sociology in recent times? The boundaries of family have been stretched beyond Murdock's (1949) definition of a family as constituting "common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction". There has been a move away of seeing the family as an institution towards a focus on the practices of families (Morgan,2011). What people do in their family life and the importance of emotions in these practices is of interest in this discourse (Easthope et al., 2017). "Display is the process by which individuals and groups of individuals convey to each other and to relevant audiences that certain of their actions do constitute doing family things and thereby confirm that these relationships are family relationships" (Finch, 2007 p. 67).

Contemporary families are diverse and ever changing as compared to former families which could be classified by habitation and close kin ties. Biological family relationships are not enough in defining contemporary families as today's family has been broadened to cover such relationships as friendships amongst others. In the words of Finch (2007), contemporary families are defined more by doing families things rather than by being a family thus modern families are characterized by flux and fluidity. In contemporary families, there is the element of choosing one's family as well. "From this perspective, relational configurations are defined as webs built upon personal choice or, perhaps more precisely, upon elective affinities no longer cemented by institutional criteria for defining families or close relationships" (Aboim, Vasconcelos and Wall, 2013 p.4)

Foster families are classic examples of contemporary families that consists of reconstitution of households and members of the 'family'. In order to understand whether Ghanaian foster family relationships are family like relationships and are working relationships the concept of family display' and 'family practices' as concepts will be used in understanding the family dynamics between foster children and foster parents in Ghana. And to explore the daily taken for granted activities that constitute family display and how foster families 'do' family. How do foster children consider their positions in these families?

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This chapter begins with the motivation for the methodological choices used in this study and the epistemological position. Also discussed in this chapter is the sampling process and technique, methods of data collection and how the data is analysed. A general description of participants in the study is highlighted. The chapter concludes with ethics and reflections and limitations of the study.

4.1 Methodological Choice

Research methods designed for children does not necessarily have to be different with that of adults since children can participate in most activities that adult do in research (Christensen and James, 2017). Albeit some techniques may be more suitable for children than others and research techniques need to consider the research context (Christensen and James, 2017).

The research questions for this study are;

1. How does the foster child and foster parent benefit from foster care placement?
2. How do foster children define their relationships and belongingness in their foster families and birth families?
3. What are foster parents' perceptions of children's experiences in care?
4. What are the challenges of fostering for both foster children and foster parents?

The study design for this research is explorative. According to Stebbins (2001 p. 3) "*Social science exploration* is a broad-ranging, purposive, systematic, prearranged undertaking designed to maximize the discovery of generalizations leading to description and understanding of an area of social or psychological life". The field of formal foster care and experiences of foster children and foster parents is under researched in Ghana. This study chose an exploratory design to provide insights to this area and to explore areas for further research.

A point of interest in this study is how children construct meanings out of their daily experiences in care and this can be ascertained with a Qualitative research strategy. This research strategy usually highlights descriptive meanings and words rather than figures (Bryman, 2012). The study seeks to understand the realities as well as ‘see through the eyes’ of children and foster parents from their perspective. Additionally, I want to have an in-depth understanding of participant’s experiences and how it shapes their relationship with significant others in their lives. As well as to become aware and to give room to things that I did not anticipate but can directly impact on my research findings.

My epistemological position is interpretivist; “the stress is on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants” (Bryman, 2012 p.401). My ontological approach is constructionism. The focus is on understanding the constructions foster children and foster parents give to their world, with the hindsight that they are not the absolute versions of the experiences of all children in foster care in Ghana and that there could be other possible representations.

Using a qualitative approach gave me the opportunity to have the children and the foster carers express themselves and give me in depth discussions without constrains about issues that make meanings to them in their day to day experiences. It helped to understand the interpretations of the meaning children in foster care give to their experiences.

4.2 Sampling Technique

The sampling technique employed a non-probability sampling. This is a sampling process that does not subject itself to the rigours of probability that is everyone in the sample frame having an equal chance of being selected (Bryman,2012). Purposive sampling as a type of non-probability sampling was used based on my research goals so that I could use the specific unit and population who could help in answering the research questions (Bryman,2012). I used this sampling procedure due to the easy access of children and parents placed by the foster care agency and DSW. The foster care agency is one of the most vibrant and active in the field of foster care in Ghana. The inclusion criteria for foster children were children who had experienced both long term and short-term foster care in Ghana. For foster parents, the inclusion criteria were parents who had at least 2 years’ experience in fostering children. Children and parents selected to participate were the ones who were willing and consented to participate and had been placed by DSW and the Agency. Purposive sampling, however, leads to some sort of sampling bias because other foster children who are not placed by the foster care agency or DSW did not have a fair chance of being selected to participate in this research.

According to Bryman (2012) using a nonprobability sample could lead to the influence of human judgement in the selection process. Reasons being that, emphasis will be on the researcher considering how convenient it will be to interview those who are available, and this could also affect the representativeness of the sample. Nevertheless, this was the best possible way of working with the population in question considering the fact that there are only few children in foster care in the Ghanaian context. Besides, working with this population has a lot of methodological challenges and ethical considerations. To limit the level of bias, I did a pilot study with a similar population to see if the answers were in the same direction. Also, since this area is not very much researched in Ghana, doing this research using a purposive sampling technique was useful in light of an exploratory research to do further advanced and more representative research using a bigger sample size in the future from different agencies.

4.3 Sample Selection

Sample selection mainly discusses how the organization for the study was accessed as well as the participants in the study.

4.3.1 Access to Organization

Prior research into the foster care domain in Ghana indicated the main actors and Non-Governmental Agencies involved in placing children in foster care. Telephone calls were made with subsequent emails to ask for approval from a foster care agency that had placed a number of children in formal foster care to link the researcher to the field. Since this Agency worked together with DSW, a meeting was scheduled with the Deputy Director of the DSW where the research proposal, Introductory letter from the university, a personal letter for approval of research, Information guide as well as participant and guardian consent forms were presented. After a thorough assessments of the these documents the research was later approved after some deliberations explaining the purpose and intent of the research. The deputy director wrote back to the Agency to assist with all the needed support in reaching children who had been placed.

The Agency received the above documents and consented to the research and introduction to the field. I personally met the country director and two social workers during this process at the foster care agency where I explained the purpose of the research. The social workers in the Agency also agreed verbally to provide counselling support to children in the event of children who may experience re-traumatization in the research process.

4.3.2 Access to participants

All participants were recruited through DSW and the Agency. The foster care agency provided me with a database of 10 foster families after they had reached out to them and they had agreed to participate. Calls were made to the foster parents explaining the research purpose and aims in more detail. Eight foster parents in six families consented to interviews with their foster children. When foster parents agreed a formal meet up was arranged to meet parents and children to discuss more details of the research project on issues of privacy, consent, confidentiality and how their data would be handled. Initial contacts were made with children to build rapport and interviews followed a few days after rapport had been established. Children who had spent at least 4 months in care were interviewed. In all seven (7) children agreed to be interviewed after foster parents had consented to their participation in the study. Four foster parents out of the eight also agreed to be part of the study. One foster parent refused contact with a child because according to her she had gotten a prior negative experience with another researcher and hence did not want her child to participate in the study. She however did not want to explain those negative experiences. Although there was a possibility to sample other participants in other regions placed by DSW, travel restrictions as a result of the outbreak of the COVID-19 made this difficult.

4.4 Description of Participants of the Study

For the purposes of confidentiality this study has decided to eliminate all personal identifying characteristics that can easily point to participants due to the small sample size. Specific information on the profiles of the children have therefore not been included in this study. Participants of the study comprised of 7 children and 4 foster parents. Children interviewed were between the age group of 7 and 17 years made up of three females and four males. The individual ages of children were fairly distributed across this age range. I chose this age group based on availability of these participants and their willingness to participate. With these variations in ages, the findings were richly informed, and it was interesting to note that some children who had lower ages in fact shared experiences in more detail and were very enthusiastic than previously considered by the researcher. Irrespective of the ages foster children in this study reported similar experiences in their placements. In broad descriptions, children in the study had lived in care for at least four months and at most eight years at the time of the study. Children were selected from three regions in Ghana. Two regions were urban, and one was rural. Foster parents were aged between 30 to 60 years and had an average of 5 years' experience in fostering. None of the foster parents were biologically related to children

in this sample. Some foster children in the study lived in care with their biological siblings. The research initially was centered on children as participants of the study and sought to engage just children. However, a total of four parents were also interviewed as a result of interacting with the children who guided the research focus on the need to speak to foster parents. During this process separate research questions were formulated for foster parents.

4.5 Data collection procedures

Data collection procedure was done by using semi structured interviews and unstructured interviews (see Appendix1 p.74). These two interview methods in qualitative research can either be called ‘qualitative interview’ or ‘in- depth interviews’ (Bryman, 2012). Corsaro (2015 p.49) asserts that formal and Informal methods such as interviews as a micro methodology in research is useful when researching children because it helps the researcher understand the meanings children give to their world and their process of social reproduction. Semi structured interviews with open ended question were used for children. In this way children were not limited in sharing their experiences due to the flexibility of the questions. In-depth conversational interviews were used with foster parents. Foster parents were asked broad interview questions that enabled them to narrate and tell stories in a detailed form without restrictions (Atkinson ,1998). Semi structured interviews helped the data to be collected with much flexibility and gave the participants the opportunity to bend and talk about things that had meaning for them. Due to the fact that children were the main participants using unstructured interviews was important to help understand the world of the children by asking the interview questions in the form of conversations to aid the free flow of information. Children had to sometimes be given prompts in responding to questions. Using unstructured interviews also gave children the power to inform the direction of the interview. Information was elicited through mixed qualitative methods such as, audio recorded walks, visual methods like draw and say and the use of network charts to describe various relationships. Also, field notes were taken after daily interviews to understand the various settings and to provide a basis for analysis. The researcher was advantaged in the data collection process due to the familiarity with the environment and the common language shared with participants. Having prior experience working with young children and teenagers in the research context was an advantage to the researcher. As an insider the researcher was familiar with the terrain and was able to relate well with children in the different age groups. Also, foster parents easily trusted the researcher with their foster children and their unique stories.

All interviews were done by the researcher with hindsight of the theoretical direction, research questions, aims and objectives. The focus of this research was to project the voices of children and so the study started with interviews with children. Two Interviews were done on a day with children to ensure that the researcher had enough time to engage with the children whilst building rapport so that children do not feel pressured with time constraints. Interviews with foster parents and foster children were done separately. Interviews with children lasted between thirty (30) to forty (40) minutes and foster parents interviews lasted for about 45 minutes. Reflexivity was incorporated throughout the entire data collection process and the researcher was sensitive to the research environment.

4.6 Data collection tools

4.6.1 Audio recorded walks

How children express themselves vary among cultures and context. In engaging the children to give them a sense of safety and privacy the researcher opted for an audio recorded walk in eliciting information. These walks mainly used unstructured interviews whilst focusing on the main ideas in the interview guide and the goal for the research. Interviews took a form of taking strolls in the neighbourhood with children pointing out the homes of their friends, their playgrounds, showing things that they like doing with their friends , where they attended church services and other things they considered as relevant to their day to day experiences in foster care. All these discourses were audio recorded and pictures of places pointed out by the children were not taken. This methodology was used in the last 3 interviews with children after it was realised that parents often wanted to listen to what children were saying in their interviews. This made children timid and it was observed by the researcher that most often when foster parents walked in impromptu to interview rooms some children were scared to proceed with their thoughts. Children as well as foster parents consented to having short walks around the neighbourhood. This method was however an adaptation of video- recorded walks discussed in the chapter 'Using visual and digital research methods with young children (Yamada-Rice, 2017, p. 80) in Pia Christensen and Allison James's *Research with Children; Perspectives and Practices*.

4.6.2 Visual methods (Draw and say)

At the start of every interview to break the ice, children were asked to draw things that made meanings for them and later talk about them. Some of these pictures highlighted the

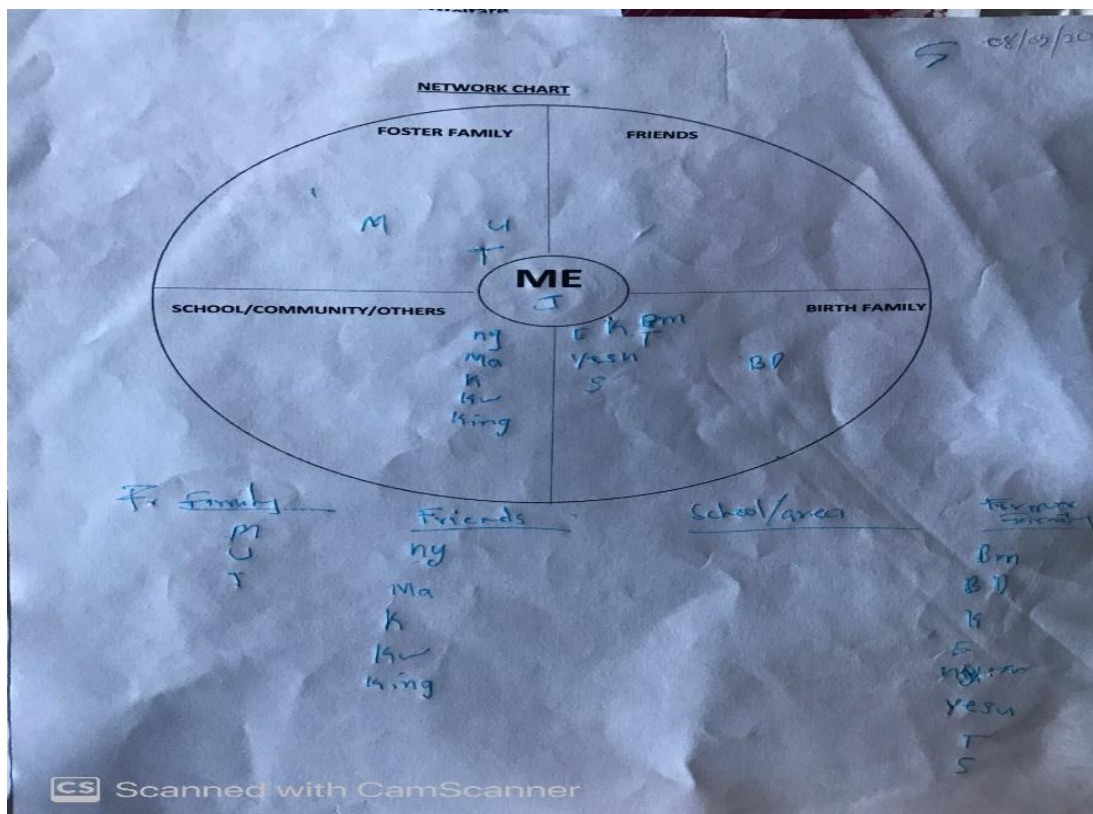
relationships of children in care and others were some pictures the children found meaningful but did not necessarily have any implication for the data collection.

4.6.3 Network Chart

This was a tool used to elicit data from children. Network charts have been used in diverse qualitative studies. See for example (Hedin, 2014). This was mainly used when children had to talk about how close they were to either their biological families or their foster families.

Children on these pre- designed network charts illustrated the relationships they had with their birth parents, their foster parents and their neighbourhoods at the time of the study. Whereas some children found it interesting to show these relationships on the network chart others preferred to vocalize these relationships as well as make hand gestures in describing the relationships with the significant others in their lives. They were free to write the names of people that they considered important to them at the time of the study on the network chart. In the chart below the child describes the relationships between relevant members and how connected they are using coded alphabets. The part of friendships is empty because this child chose to locate his friends as part of his community and school.

FIGURE 2 - An example of a completed network chart



4.7 Data Analysis Procedure

4.7.1 Transcription of Data

Interviews were conducted independently by the researcher. Interviews were conducted in a mixture of English and the local languages of the children and foster parents mostly Asante - Twi (a widely spoken Ghanaian language). Twi although not the mother tongue of the researcher is spoken fluently by the researcher. The researcher can also read and write Twi. The data was first translated directly into English during the transcription process. The data was transcribed by modifying or re- wording the words used by the children and parents in the closest forms to make meanings to the reader whilst maintaining the meaning of the sentence used. For example, this transcription is the original version of a parent *“When it’s too severe ho! I cane them a little but it’s not something that would give them wounds somewhere or deprive a child from eating or maybe television or maybe denying him whatever he needs in school no”*. This was modified to, “I correct them by talking don’t do this do that. When it’s too severe I cane the child a little, but it is not something that would give them wounds somewhere. I do not deprive a child from eating or prevent a child from watching television or maybe deny him whatever he needs in school”. In this regard the third part of the sentence has been modified but the essential meaning of the text is there to make it clearer for the reader. The transcription was edited to take out stutters and word repetitions, a process Oliver, Serovich and Mason (2005), describe as ‘denaturalism’ where distinctive elements of speech are removed.

4.7.2 Thematic Analysis

The analysis process incorporated thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This was appropriate for this study because of how easy and flexible it is. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis can be used across various theoretical points and due to its flexibility, it can provide a detailed as well as complex account of data. Thematic analysis involves the identification, analysis and extraction of themes from a data (Braun and Clarke, 2006 pg. 79). This process reduces and provides a rich description of data. By this one can easily generate themes by thoroughly reading the transcript multiple times (Bryman, 2012). Coding procedures included highlighting keywords and extracting emerging themes on the data using Microsoft office tools and making comments on the side of the transcripts. The thematic analysis used a contextual method which identified how foster children make meanings of their experiences and how consequently social structure affects these interpretations. The transcribed data was

coded manually. Coding was done to reduce the size of the texts and to develop a pattern (Saldaña, 2009).

The study was a back and forth between inductive and deductive approach. The researcher started off without immersing herself in earlier literature. The data was collected, and field notes were taken and revised on a daily basis after data collection, to think of new ways to enhance the field study and data collection based on the findings. Also, patterns were identified to inform theories to be used in the data interpretation. Although the study started inductively deductive thinking guided the analysis process (Creswell, 2014 p.234). On deduction, data collection analysis was driven by preconceived concepts like the concept of belonging (Family rituals, Family, identity, family solidarity and family culture) a part of a psychosocial model by Schofield (2002). This further guided the analysis on the aspects of foster children’s belonging in care. The analysis and coding were done with the guidance of the major concepts, theories and the research questions of the study. The transcript was read multiple times to make the researcher familiar with the empirical data. After, all data was collected and transcribed, two separate tables were drawn to present the codes and themes of parents and children. The table had four horizontal parts that inserted, the codes, the generated themes and the corresponding quotation from parents or children from the empirical data. Initial emerging codes were revised and grouped into various categories which were subsequently translated into themes. eight themes were generated and later reduced to four with about 12 sub themes which were revised, dropped and re-categorised during the analysis at different stages.

Table 1- Sample Thematic Analysis of Children and Foster Parents

Codes	Subthemes	Theme	Quotations
Pray Religion Church service	Family Rituals (Schofield,2002)	Belonging	R3 -We pray together on Tuesdays and Fridays and we read the bible and learn Gods word. We also pray every morning and evening,

			sometimes we also do exercises
Feeding Provision of needs Sense of safety	Access to Food Access to Education	Rewards of Fostering	R6- I feel better staying here because the things we need she provides for us...
Assuming ownership and total responsibility Investment in health, education, clothing etc Acknowledging parenthood	Entitlement to Children	Complexities of Family life	Foster Parent - As for the dad it's tricky, there is no way I will let my child help him because he was educated yet refused to take responsibility of the child, but the mum was ill I can understand if he wants to go back to his mum but not his dad

4.8 Trustworthiness

Researchers have emphasized the need to be able to judge qualitative research distinctively from quantitative research (Bryman,2012). Trustworthiness and authenticity are terminologies by Guba and Lincoln (1994) that can be used in evaluating the quality of qualitative research. Trust worthiness has four elements which includes credibility which is analogous to internal validity of quantitative research, transferability which equals external

validity, dependability which parallels reliability and confirmability which equals objectivity in quantitative research (Bryman, 2012).

4.8.1 Credibility

Credibility connotes how likely your findings are to be believed and the extent to which standard procedures were used in the data collection processes (Bryman,2012). An essential element of credibility is respondent validation, this means validating your findings to the researched to ascertain if it corresponds to what they discussed. Respondent validation could not be realised in this study due to time constraints. Regarding good practices this study was reflexive of the research context and sensitive to the research environment and participants. Where issues were overly sensitive, the researcher did not probe further to retraumatize children. Interviews were recorded with a mobile phone of the researcher which had a password, finger unlock and facial recognition protection. Interviews were then secured on an external drive with a lock for safety reasons corresponding to standards of Data Protection Act 1998. The recording and audio recorded walks were done with the permission and consent of both guardians and children.

4.8.2 Transferability

This study corroborates other research findings in Australia and other parts of Europe in many aspects except for some happenings that are very much contextual. The researcher was not necessarily bent on unearthing stories that could be replicated in other settings but rather to explore the unique and in-depth stories of the Ghanaian child in foster care. However, if this study is conducted in other situations there is the possibility of similar responses. The small sample size could, however, affect the transferability of this findings. Nonetheless it is a good start to understand the peculiar happenings of some children in foster care in Ghana giving room for further research with a larger sample.

4.8.3 Dependability

Dependability means “how can one determine whether the findings of an inquiry would be consistently repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) subjects (respondents) in the same (or similar) context?” (Guba ,1981 p.80) In other words how likely are the findings of the study applicable in other times (Bryman,2012). The methods and research design used in this study are clearly defined and could show similar results in the same contexts. However, the field of social sciences is ever changing and not static. Foster children and parents’ experiences at a different time or in a different context can vary.

4.8.4 Confirmability

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), Confirmability necessitates the accurate keeping of research materials which can be accessed at all times. Such as, audios, drawing, transcripts among others. To ensure confirmability of my data, transparent processes were incorporated by clearly highlighting quotes from participants that support my discussions of data collected on the field. More so the research has been transparent in showing how themes were generated. However, due to the unstructured nature of qualitative data itself, interpretations could have been influenced by the bias of the researcher and what was considered to be important which could affect the confirmability of the findings (Bryman, 2012).

4.8.5 Authenticity

Authenticity as suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1994) includes fairness. Fairness is an element in determining quality of a research, it also ascertains whether the research captures various viewpoints in the study (Bryman, 2012). This study analysed various issues in context with how the Ghanaian society perceives certain practices as well as presenting the authors point of view, hence representing various perspectives and limiting bias of the researcher. Analysis situated the research in context making this study authentic.

4.9 Literature Search and Keywords

The Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) through the University of Gothenburg library was an online database I searched to retrieve articles for review. Some of the search terms included *minors, families, care dependents and these were alternatives used for children. Under Foster carers the alternative words used for the search included guardianship, protection, fostering and foster parents.* The above key words were typed in the search engine by incorporating the article ‘OR’ and ‘AND’ to retrieve literature. The search terms generated results of which were sorted out and with the limits of articles that had been peer reviewed reducing the number of articles. Out of reduced texts, I read through current texts and then referred to the bibliography where I found other relevant literature. Other electronic databases used included Google scholar where I found numerous articles. I then inserted the keywords of interest into the Scopus to verify if they were peer reviewed. Scopus was used to check the number of times an article had been cited and this database was relevant in providing much recent articles in my area of interest. “Scopus describes itself as the largest abstract and citation database of research literature and quality web sources” (Bryman, 2012, p. 115).

4.10 Ethical Considerations

At the core of the social work profession lies professional ethics. “Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work” (IFSW, 2018). In recent times ethics have been an issue of grave importance to universities and the academic community (Munro, 2005). Interviewing children for example can have more ethical issues as compared to interviewing adults on same subjects. Ethical considerations require that a researcher maintains a balance between the quest to find out about a particular issue and the sort of harm seeking that information could bring to participants. A good researcher always places precedence on harm to participant over the quest to know. According to Bryman (2012), scholars have argued that researchers often approach ethical issues from the point of view of universalists and situationist. Universalists believe that ethics should be upheld no matter what and situationists believe that upholding ethics depends on the situation at hand and one needs to decide whether to break some ethical principles or not. Other researchers also argue about the inherent nature of research that involves elements that are ethically questionable and that if a researcher should put all the cards on the table, a participant may not be honest in responding to questions. Then there are the views of deontologists and consequentialists. Deontologists sees certain acts as good or bad in themselves whilst consequentialist consider the consequences of an action to determine whether an action is good or bad (Bryman, 2012 pp133-134). This study was approached from the point of deontologists. Considering and applying reflexivity in all actions connected to working with children and foster parents.

This study was ethically approved by the Department of Social Work at the University of Gothenburg in line with standard procedures and due processes by the University. In addition, approval was received from the Department of Social Welfare in Ghana in line with standard procedures on accessing and researching children in Ghana.

Ethical considerations are an ongoing process throughout the research process and hence this study considered ethics prior to data collection, during the data collection process and after the study. Research with children have serious ethical issues especially if these groups of children are considered vulnerable. Research ethics on involving children in research revolves around protecting children and informed consent (McCrystal, 2008). Informed consent requires that children are told the parameters of their participation and the ability to withdraw at any given point. Other interesting ethical points of reflection include power,

confidentiality and trust and risk to researcher.

Some reflections before the data collection included the issue of power and how it can be devolved. Children in foster care are considered a vulnerable group and their participation is dependent on their adult carers. This implies a power play and consent issues where adults such as the social workers responsible for recruiting participants have a lot of power compared to the children. Power imbalance is a complex dynamic between the researcher and participants as well as between gatekeepers and children in care and has huge ethical consequences in research. Other studies have also reported the challenge of gatekeepers of children in care and the power differentials of gate keepers versus children in care (McCrystal, 2008; Munro, 2005). Before data collection it was important for the researcher to think of creative ways in devolving power to participants to have charge of the process. In order to devolve power, adults' carers were duly engaged to ensure that children consent to participate in the research by their free will and that they are not coerced in participating. The researcher informed the social workers of the foster care agency on the reasons for the study to have children who were interested to participate based on their understanding of the entire study. All materials in the study including the information guide and the consent forms were presented to the social workers and foster parents. Before initial contacts with the children consent was sought from their foster parents and information sheets were designed and explained to foster parents about the study. All due processes described by the researcher earlier was followed to the latter in requesting the participation of foster children by their free will in this project. The researcher did not use her privilege and position to coerce children to join the study. Children had a free will to participate and it was made clear to them initially by the social workers and their foster parents and reinforced also by the researcher after contact with them; that their refusal to participate did not have any implications on them. All these were stated in the information guide and consent forms as well.

On foster parents' approval of the study, foster parents provided dates and time when children will be available after consulting with their respective foster children. When children were finally contacted by the researcher, they were given an age appropriate description of the entire research project by explaining to them what a research is and how this study was going to be conducted. Regarding children's competency in providing

informed consent, consent forms were explained in basic and language appropriate terms and explained in the various language's children were comfortable with. Confidentiality was explained to children and they were informed about their decision to withdraw from the research process if they should feel uncomfortable at any point without any implications. The researcher provided foster children the opportunity to discuss what should happen in the likelihood that the researcher was worried about a child being at risk. Children were then informed about the need to break confidentiality should there be such situations. They were given the opportunity to ask questions and when the project became abundantly clear for the children, they were provided with consent forms to sign after all questions and their role as research participants had been clarified.

During the research process, in protecting the dignity of children and ensuring that children were not at risk all Ghanaian laws and global guidelines in relation to researching and interviewing children were adhered to. The ethical issue of likelihood to retraumatize behoves on the researcher to be circumspect in asking sensitive questions to participants. The researcher was sensitive to the context in which the research was held and did not probe further when participants showed little signs of discomfort and maintained high professional standards and ethics. Child friendly spaces were used during the research process. In most foster households, spaces allocated for interviews was just within earshot of the parents who frequently walked into the interview room. This made children nervous at some point when they were discussing sensitive issues. Elden (2013 p. 17) argues that, researchers have to adopt strategies in interviewing children on sensitive matters especially because children lack control of space, hence inhibiting their privacy. In order not to cause harm to any of the children, the researcher employed creative means of engaging with the children which included having consented audio recorded walks to leave the earshot of parents and drawing and saying activities. Coded languages like choosing alphabets to represent certain characters in the family were used and techniques like the network chart helped in doing activities that were descriptive on paper rather than vocalizing these relationships. Children were also immediately prompted when their foster parents were within earshot. For purposes of privacy of children, foster parents were assured of their own interview slot with the researcher.

Since foster parents were not initially part of the study, they were asked in person by the

researcher about their willingness to participate and they consented verbally. All due procedures on consent forms and information guide were explained to foster parents again. Because foster parents were added to the study at a latter part where some of the children had already been interviewed, it was very crucial that the researcher was circumspect and did not inadvertently discuss issues of children with the foster parents. This was meticulously followed using separate research questions (see Appendix 1 p. 75) and interviewing parents privately. The researcher made it clear to the foster children that interviews with foster parents had nothing to do with what was previously discussed with the children.

Confidentiality requires that the researcher protects the data collected. This was done by using passwords to protect recorded documents on computers. Also, there is the need for the researcher to protect the identity of participants in publishing of the findings in such a way that the participants will not be recognised in the future or in their communities where they are known (Pittaway, Bartolomei and Hugman 2010). The researcher was also reflexive on parents recognising children's narrative and hence did not include materials that could be easily recognisable by them. Interviews contained sensitive materials about the lives of foster children and foster parents. For this reason, children were all anonymized using the pronoun 'he' or 'the child' to represent all children in the study as well as tags like R1, R2 etc. Due to the small sample of foster parents been four (4), for purposes of confidentiality 'foster parent' is used to describe all parents in the study without necessarily adding a specific number or a pseudonym. I emphasize that the researcher should be trusted because excerpts of all four parents are used, but to protect the sensitivity of the material presented by parents this approach is used. Additionally, the foster care agency used in accessing the field in this study has also been anonymised in order to further reduce harm to participants.

4.11 Reflections and Limitations of Study

4.11a. Ethical Dilemma

During the course of the interviews with some children, it was identified that two out of the seven foster children in this study did not know that they were in care. This was one of the major surprises because both the foster care agency and DSW had listed these children as foster children and these families were accessed through these mediums. This disclosure of children's background did not come out during the process of seeking their consent because of the

language and culture. The process of seeking consent was done in the Twi language to explain the whole project to these particular children as they opted for the use of Twi. In the Twi language there is not an exact word to translate the term “foster parent”. Moreover, in Ghana elderly people who may not be your biological parents can be called “Maa (Mum) and Daa (Dad) respectively. The language coupled with the culture blurred out this all-important information. If the researcher had known at the beginning these two children would have been eliminated from the sample. Nonetheless, since this information came out during interviews with the children the researcher immediately revised the questions and asked about questions strictly linked to their daily experiences with their foster family without asking questions in the interview guide that will give them hints about their being in foster care. This is because the researcher believed that she did not have to be the person to inform children about this sensitive issue. It must be added that the researcher felt it will be unethical to immediately end the interview after discovery of this information because it would have implications and children might start thinking about reasons why the interview ended abruptly. Guided by the ethical principle of Integrity, respect and privacy for family life in the social work profession of the IFSW and IASSW (2004), it informed the researcher’s judgement and moral reasoning of continuing with the interviews. Subsequently, it became important to interview parents to have a full background to inform and to revise the kinds of questions to ask children in order not to harm and disturb children’s everyday functioning. Hence, the research incorporated views from foster parents to better understand and contextualize the experiences of children. The findings therefore integrate the responses of children and parents to give an understanding to the various contexts and does not compare the experiences of foster children and foster parents. In the presentations of the findings it will be obvious that there is an inclination towards children’s experiences.

4.11b. Limitations

The time frame for data collection was challenging due to the reason that the researcher had a limited time frame in collection of data amidst COVID-19 concerns and government declarations of social and physical distancing. Even though the research was conducted at a time when Ghana had only recorded few cases of COVID-19, the researcher believed that traveling on public transportation and moving to different places to interview children was unethical. Reasons being that there was the possibility of putting participants at risk by contraction and spreading of the virus. This also limited the potential of engaging other participants who had consented to the study.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the foster households. Four broad themes are discussed in this chapter and subthemes. The first thematic finding is the rewards of fostering for foster parents and foster children. The second theme presents the complexities of family life in foster care. Relationships of children in care is the third thematic findings. The last theme describes belongingness of children in care which is discussed from the perspective of Schofield (2002) on her concept of belongingness with focus on family solidarity, family identity, family culture and family rituals. Relevant quotations from foster children and foster parents' interviews are documented in this session. Also, connections to earlier literature and theoretical framework that guides this study are incorporated in the discussions of the findings.

The research set out to explore how foster children *experience* foster care and how they locate themselves across their biological families and foster families as well as ascertain the extent to which foster children feel connected and supported in their placements. Also, the *perceptions* of foster parents on foster children's experiences and challenges of both foster parents and foster children were examined.

5.0 Description of Foster Households

A total of seven children and four foster parents were interviewed. All children in the interview lived in homes where other extended family members of foster parents lived. For example, the parents or sibling of the foster parents. Children had constant daily interactions with other members of these foster families who could equally enforce disciplinary measures. Some foster parents were single parents and others cared for children with their partners.

5.1 The Rewards of Foster Care

Subthemes identified in this section are better standards of care for children. This includes access to education and food as well as physical safety. The second subtheme here also describes the satisfaction of personal goals of foster parents, which comprises of the joy of being considered a mother in the Ghanaian community. Finally, the last subtheme captures the importance of training for foster carers as not only beneficial in providing care for the foster children but also useful for parenting biological children.

5.1.1 Better standards in care for children

The findings from the study showed that foster children had better standards in their placements contrasting with their life before coming into care. Subthemes under better standards include access to education and access to food. The ability of foster children to be able to compare their experiences is in line with Corsaro (2015) Interpretive reproductions where children can contrast their experiences and make meanings out of the adult world in shaping their perspectives. This shows the agency of children to interpret their unique situations by comparing their old situations to their new situations (James and Prout, 1997).

5.1.1a. Access to education and food

Children interviewed in this study reports that generally being in foster care has ensured that they have ‘better’ education compared to living with their parents. They highlight opportunities such as having access to school, being dropped by a car to and from school and being given money as well as snacks to school. Based on my understandings of how the children expressed these opportunities, these better standards translate to the feeling of having a ‘normal life’ Andersson (2001) like other children. In summary, foster children shared that, educational opportunities were better in care than living with their parents.

Some of the children in this study were able to contrast their experiences with their experiences from before coming into care concerning access to school, acquisition of educational materials and their punctuality. Below are some of the quotes from children in this regard;

I wasn't going to school, at my grandma's place we were not going to school, [---] since we came here, we are now going to school - R2

Some of the respondents described their punctuality in going to school now, compared with the experience with their birth family. In the words of the respondent 3, he describes how they would often miss school, and how different the situation is now. “*Also, school was not easy, sometimes we go the next day, we might not go, but here we often go to school*” -R3.

Concerning access to educational materials, the use of transportation and using ‘better’ educational materials in school, R6 said;

The things that we take to school after school breaks, includes exercise books and maths set. The maths set (a tool kit for solving mathematics) we have at school no one has some so some of them (classmates) say they wish they will be in our house - R6.

R6 also talked about being given money to school. Children in regular families in Ghana are often given money to schools to buy lunch. This however depends on the family and the location of the family be it in the rural or urban areas. Non the less there are variations and only a ‘privileged’ few are given money to schools to buy lunch. The act of receiving money for school symbolizes a characteristic of a child in a regular family, this could explain why the child reflects on this experience. Describing this in his experience shows the recognition of better standards in care. “... *if we are going to school, they give us money, we also go to school with a car, if we are coming back home, we are picked up by a car*” -**R6**.

A number of children raised that they now had easy access to food compared to when they lived with their birth families.

*Our parents don't get much time to cook for us, sometimes we cook for ourselves [---]
In my parents' house food is not easy to get sometimes but here it's easy to get food -
R3*

*When we were living with our parents, we had no money [---] but here when we are going to school, they give us snacks they give us good clothes to wear so here is better than that place (biological parents place) - **R6***

This indicate that children were coming from difficult backgrounds and foster parents had provided them with opportunities they would not have gotten if they were still with their birth families. This is in line with research on fostering, which discusses foster care as a buffer to liberate children from poverty (Grant & Yeatman, 2012).

5.1.1b. A sense of physical safety (“I feel happy and I feel safe”)

Children also reported that their neighbourhoods were safer and had access to electricity and had a sense of safety in the foster placement. R3 responded to the safety question with

*Yes, (I feel safe) by not being harmed by anyone. In my former place there were armed robbers who would hold guns at night to make noise shooting around where we were staying. There was no light too where we were staying but here, we have lights, so I feel happy and do not hear the noise about armed robbery and I feel happy and I feel safe- **R3**.*

Better standards in care corroborates other international research on outcomes of children in care. See for example, Dunn et al. (2010), where about one third of the children in their study confirmed that having better opportunities and services among other things was the ‘most

helpful thing in care'. The findings however differ from research in kinship foster care in Ghana and other older studies on the experiences of children in kinship foster care (Kuyini et al., 2009). These authors for example found that, children in kinship care are less likely to go to school than the biological children of their carer's and children were afraid to ask for things from their carers for the fear of been beaten. The difference in my findings in this study could be an indication of the outcomes of careful selection and training provided by foster care agencies to prospective foster parent before recruitment. Research findings from earlier studies indicate that neighbourhoods of children placed in foster care are often safer. For example, Chapman et al. (2004) suggests that children's view on their neighbourhoods show that children have better neighbourhoods compared to their former areas and also meet more friendly people in placements. Delgado et al. (2019) also reports same findings which supports findings in my study. From my study however, it is interesting to note that there were huge disparities in standards of living in some foster placements compared to biological families of foster children based on the extracts of the children. This could have implications for family reunification when children are unable to adjust to the kind of life back home because of the different standards. The operational foster care manual stipulates that poverty should not be the only reason why a child is taken from care. There is the need to provide welfare support to families who have their children in care to ensure a successful reunification (*Foster Care Operational Manual*, 2018). This calls on providing services to liberate biological families of poverty to ensure successful reunification when children are sent back to their homes.

5.1.2 Satisfaction of personal parenting goals

Interviews with parents showed all parents in this study were motivated to be in foster care due to adoption intentions. Interviews and informal interactions with parents pointed out that they had invested their emotions and resources in taking care of the children because of future adoption opportunity. This is not surprising since the foster care agency's model was a foster to adopt model. For these parents they got on board this fostering program because they had either been married for so many years without having children or they wanted to have the company of other children at home when their birth children were no longer around. Although the main purpose for fostering was to finally adopt, this was underlined by parents achieving their personal goals of being identified as mothers and fathers in their respective communities.

See examples of parents extracts;

You know, as for me I am filled with so much joy when I see my children and I bless God because I have children who call me mother -Foster Parent

I had been married for over 13 years and did not have the joy of being pregnant [---] at the time he came to me he was little, and I did not have a child of my own and people in my neighbourhood knew, I did not have a child. So, when I received my foster child people kept asking me where he was from and my response to them was that, God gave me a gift - Foster parent

Some of the benefits described by foster carers include the emotional rewards attached to being called a mother. The first parent in this section describes her joy on when she first received her child.

You know I did not even have a child in (year omitted) when I went for (the child), So, it was really an exciting moment when I received my foster child. We were really happy extremely happy [...] You should have seen the number of pictures we took. It was really a great feeling. I cannot even describe with words - Foster Parent

This statement indicates the emotional rewards of foster care by the parents in this study. In Ghana it is common knowledge that childbirth has an important place in marriage. For a woman to be married for over 10 years without a child has various implications. She could be stigmatized in her community among other negative outcomes. The fact that this foster parent was seen as a mother in public spheres was rewarding to her. This supports findings from (Andersson, 2001; Frimpong Manso et al., 2020) on the motives why parents foster.

5.1.3 Importance of training and Foster Care Agency as a co-parent

In Ghana, the family is the first point of contact in raising children. There is little formal support from the government given to parents when they give birth. The parents in this study talked about the importance of the training and how useful it had been. For them, it was not only beneficial in raising the foster children, but it also helped them in raising their own biological children.

The examples below reflect these statements.

The training is really good because we meet and share a lot of things. When your child is going through a particular stage and when your child starts exhibiting some of the behaviours shown it's easy to understand. The training has really helped me a lot in raising my own children - Foster parent.

The training is very useful. We are taught so many things at these trainings and we are told some of the things we should expect at different ages. From 0-6 we are taught something different and then 7- 12 also something different. When it gets to the teens, we (foster parents) need to provide more support and advise and also prayers [...]. Hopefully when it gets there it won't be too difficult for me or the (Agency) people -

Foster Parent.

It was equally evident in the interviews that parents counted on the foster care agency as a co-parent in taking certain family decisions. Parents indicated that they were appreciative of the support group of other parents who were raising foster children and saw it as an opportunity to learn from their experiences.

To conclude, this theme highlighted that foster care is both beneficial for the foster children and the foster parents. Support from the foster care agency was of immense importance to the foster parents as well as achieving their personal goals. According to Andersson (2001) foster care is an avenue where parents are able to meet their personal life goals such as becoming parents. Foster children also saw the placement as useful in many ways in this study. For foster children research has shown that the outcomes of foster care are mostly positive, especially if they have a positive relationship with their care givers (Chapman et al., 2004; Delgado et al., 2017; Dunn et al., 2010).

5.2 Complexities of Family life in Foster Care

This theme encapsulates experiences of foster children and foster parents and the complexities that surround the care giving process. The theme starts with the difficulties of children in care focusing mainly on the use of corporal punishment as a parenting strategy. The second subtheme presents the feelings of entitlement to children. Finally, I discuss the findings on the non-disclosure of children's 'foster entrance narratives' (Nelson & Horstman, 2017).

5.2.1 The use of corporal punishment as a parenting strategy

Majority of children in this study pointed out various challenges linked to different forms of corporal punishment and verbal reprimand in care. All children reported to having gone through some form of corporal punishment in the foster placement. The punishments children discussed included slapping, spanking and kneeling down on the bare floor. Parents also made mention of the use of ginger and pepper as a means of punishment. In the Ghanaian context, corporal punishment is still pervasive and has only been abolished in schools (Law and

Development Associate -LADA Group, 2018). Article 13(2) of the Children’s Act 560 of Ghana states that;

No correction of a child is justifiable which is unreasonable in kind or in degree according to the age, physical and mental condition of the child and no correction is justifiable if the child by reason of tender age or otherwise is incapable of understanding the purpose of the correction (Children’s Act,1998).

Section 41 of the Criminal Offences Act of Ghana also permits the use of a “blow or other force” on a child below the age of 16 years by a parent, guardian, the master of an apprentice, or any one that has custody of the child to correct the child for misconduct or disobedience. Sub section (d) of this Act also stipulates that the guardian or anyone acting as a guardian can delegate power to another adult to enforce this correction in so far as the force is reasonable in kind and degree (Criminal Offences Act, 1960). These Acts therefore allows “justifiable” and “reasonable” corporal punishment of a child. However, the parameters on how this force or blow should be administered is not clearly defined. Justifiable and reasonable punishment is ambiguous and can be interpreted differently by different actors. The current operational manual for foster care in Ghana emphasizes that , for a social welfare officer to approve a foster family for licensing, one of the requirements include the ability of foster parents to use “methods of positive discipline stressing praise and encouragement of good behaviour and refraining from physical punishment and verbal abuse of the child”(Foster Care Operational Manual, 2018, p. 33). Although, majority of children in this study were put in placements before the drawing of the manual, others went into care after these guidelines was established. Nevertheless, all children and foster parents in this study gave accounts on the use of corporal punishment in care.

In my understanding, some children in this study had normalized punishment and felt it was the best way for foster parents to deal with them when they did something wrong. Normalization of punishment here is the process where children have come to accept that it is okay to be beaten and its part of a process in ensuring that they become responsible adults. Some children did not discuss corporal punishment when asked about the problems they faced, although their foster carers mentioned that they punished these children. This could also be an indicator of normalizing punishment. When R6 was asked about punishment his response was “I feel that the punishment is good so we do not do that again so we will be more responsible in future” -R6

The normalization of the acts of punishment by children explains the understanding of how family practices are influenced by cultural contexts and the meanings given to them. For example, in a study reported by Davies (2015), children were hypothetically asked to comment on corporal punishment, their perception on what corporal punishment meant and who was responsible to punish them was contingent on their varied cultural background.

The following quotes below from my study shows some acts where children discussed cases of physical and verbal reprimands from relatives of foster parents, foster parent themselves as well as other members in the foster household.

*The problem I face here is when they beat me, and then I cry then my uncle¹ beat me again for crying. When they give me food, I use to throw it away [---] I throw the food away that is why they beat me - **R1**.*

*The insulting is too much. Sometimes, aunty (relative of foster mum) has been insulting me. Every little thing she insults you... sometimes she even insults my mum who is somewhere else - **R7**.*

All foster parents in this study considered corporal punishment as a requirement of good parenting and good child training. The findings show that foster parents consider caning, scolding and use of ginger as light punishment. According to the parents these punishments are meted out to children to prevent their moral degeneration. The following are extracts from parents on punishment.

*At the beginning we thought caning was good so we will beat them. But now we have been told that for example, if there is a TV program that your child likes to watch, you can deny the child from watching the program as punishment for behaving inappropriately. But for other misbehaviours some light punishment like a little caning is necessary. Sometimes I even insert pepper and ginger in the child's anal region. You know just three days ago I did that. It was raining and there was a storm, I couldn't find him, he had gone somewhere so when he came home, I inserted the pepper and ginger but just a little you know so he knows how to behave - **Foster Parent***

Another foster parent highlights that;

¹ In Ghana, an older person who is not related to you but has almost the same age as your parents could be called Maa or Daa (Mum or Dad) in the Akan language. Normally uncle or aunty can be used as a sign of respect to the elderly.

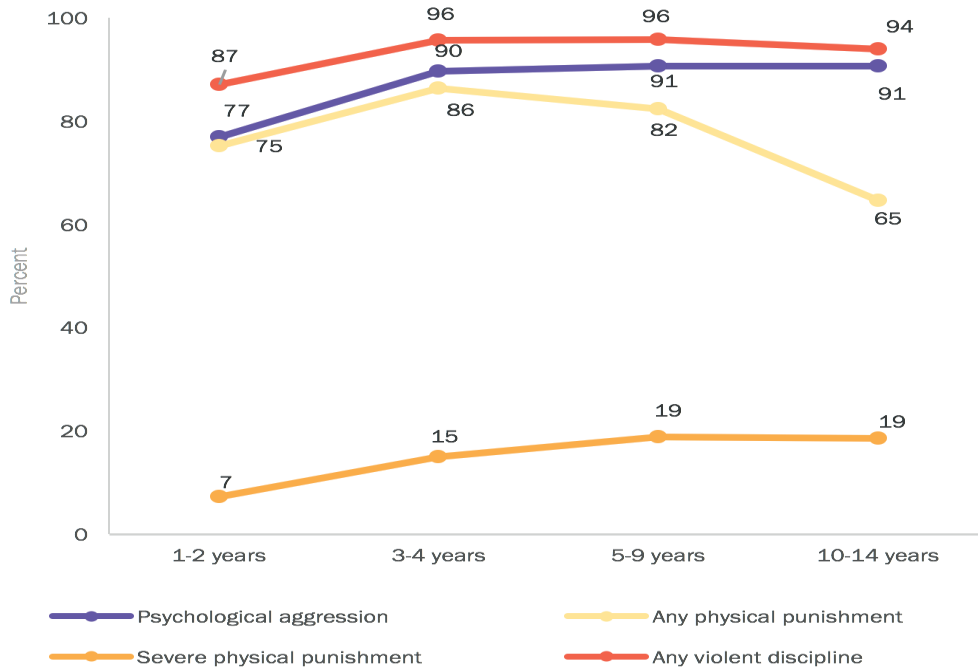
*I correct them by talking don't do this do that. When it's too severe I cane the child a little, but it is not something that would give them wounds somewhere. I do not deprive a child from eating or prevent a child from watching television or maybe deny him whatever he needs in school- **Foster Parent***

The third foster parent in this extract asserts that;

*Sometimes you don't use just the word of mouth to speak to the child. You know in Africa you cannot train a child without the cane. You see my son and my daughter they are really scared of the cane, when they see the cane, they stop whatever they are doing. When you tell them with only your mouth to stop misbehaving it's just a joke and you will definitely not bring them up well with word of mouth - **Foster Parent***

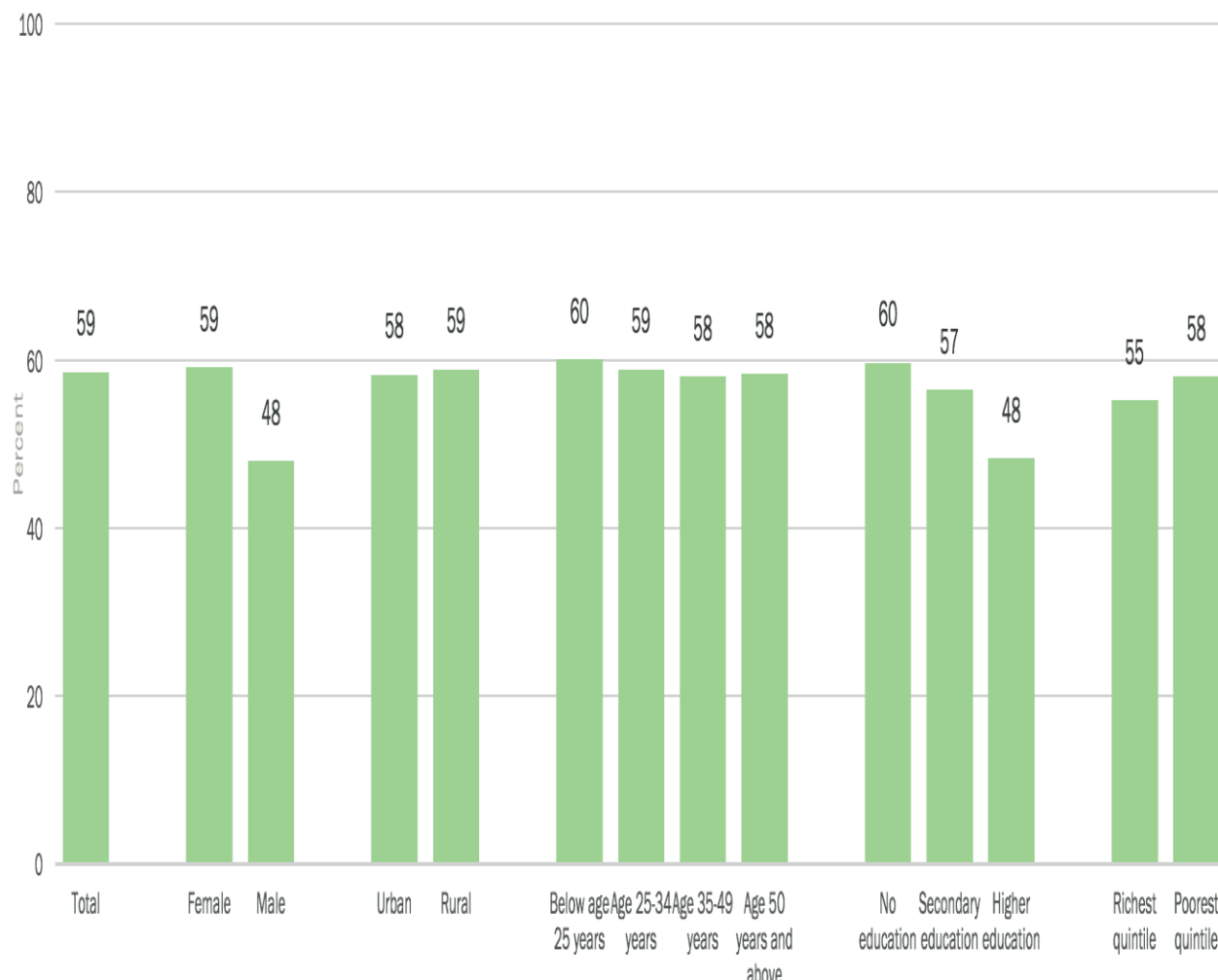
Although foster parenting training has provided parents with some information and other mechanisms in raising children, some still held on to outdated parenting practices that infringes on the rights of the children and perpetuating some of their experiences for being brought to care. From my perspective the extracts in this section shows an indication of non-participation on the parts of children. This reflects Harts level of 'decorations' where children seem to understand the purpose of discipline in this case punishment. However, these decisions on punishments are adult led and there appears to be no room for discussions on general rules and how children can have a say in these matters of discipline. Adults use their discretions in meting out punishments to children. This also accentuates sociological theories which focuses on the modelling the behaviour of the child to conform to societal standards (Corsaro,2015). The connotations of this findings show how children in foster care are being raised by appropriating them to fit the models and standards set by the society through the use of punishments to shape the behaviour of children (Corsaro,2015). Foster children have therefore become victims of the communities by virtue of been in a particular geographic area and cultures where corporal punishment is acceptable as a means of bringing a child to conformity. There are power differentials between the older generation and the younger generation in this case the foster children, who are even more at a vulnerable position because on their dependency on these families. Many families in various socio-cultural context approve of corporal punishment as ideal in child upbringing and Ghana is no different. The diagrams below show attitudes of the Ghanaian parents on discipline as well as the extent of violence discipline used.

FIGURE 3-Violent Discipline: Age Patterns



Note: Violent Discipline Age Patterns Adapted from “Snapshot of Key findings of Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 6)” by Ghana Statistical Service, 2017/2018, p. 49.

Figure 4 - Attitudes to Physical Punishment in Ghana



Note: Attitudes of Physical Punishment Adapted from “Snapshot of Key findings of Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 6)” by Ghana Statistical Service, 2017/2018, p. 49.

The graph shows Percentage of respondents who think that physical punishment is necessary to raise or educate children, by their background characteristics. Regarding attitudes to physical punishment, a highly educated person did not see the significance of punishment in child upbringing. More females feel that it is important to use physical punishment to raise children compared to men. However, there was no significant difference in relation to violent discipline and residences, wealth or education of mother or child (MICS 6, 2017/2018).

Research has shown the lasting impacts of corporal punishment on the lives of children (Gershoff, 2013). Spanking as a means of corporal punishment can lead to mental health problems in childhood and adulthood (Gershoff, 2002). It can also lead to delinquent behaviour in childhood and criminal behaviour in adulthood, negative parent-child relationships, and increased risk that children will be physically abused (ibid). In many instances corporal

punishment consequently leads to the child becoming an abuser in adult life or resorting to the use of abuse in peer relationships (Simons & Wurtele, 2010). The use of corporal punishment in foster care in Ghana therefore shows the complex dynamic of parenting in the caregiving process and the impacts on the outcomes of care.

5.2.2 Foster parents' feelings of entitlement to children

Different aspects of the interviews with foster parents in this study showed that 3 out of the 4 parents interviewed had strong feelings of entitlement to the children in their care. They asserted that they had made huge investments and sacrifices in areas of the child's health, education and other care responsibilities.

It is really a difficult issue, imagine spending so much and investing in a child and just because it is foster care you have to give the child back to the family, that is a no for me - Foster Parent.

Interviews with some foster parents indicated that they did not support family reunification. Mostly, because they were worried about the stability and wellbeing of children if they left their care and because of their investments in children. Foster parents feeling of entitlement also explains the change of names of foster children. The study found that four out of the seven children interviewed had been given new names in the foster placement. This will be further discussed in theme 4, subtheme of family identity. Interactions with some of the foster children shows these children were not consulted by foster parents in the name changing processes. This foster had even put foster child's name on some of her properties although custody of the child had not been transferred to the foster parents. The following are extracts from the empirical data indicating parents' sense of entitlement to children;

When the foster parent was asked about thoughts on family reunification, the response was,

As for me I told the social worker that it's not easy to raise a child. I have decided I will not agree for this child to be taken away unless they sign to give us some money in exchange. I remember telling the social workers raising the child here for all this while and even making properties in their names is quite worrisome. That the child will go back to a family where the child is not known and without a home. This can affect the foundation of the child if they ever take this decision, considering other circumstances like the identity of the child. I don't even think that at this point the biological family will even make the attempt to come for the child. Maybe white people can do it but for

blacks it is really not easy to raise a child (for so long omitted number of years) and they say its foster care. Although I have signed, I would not agree. Why can't an agreement be changed? [---] Now I have even changed the name. The child bears my surname and all my documents has the family name which makes the child automatically part of the family. If the child's biological family comes, we will definitely take this matter to the court - Foster Parent

On reunification, this foster parent indicates that;

As for the biological dad it's tricky, there is no way I will let my child help him because he was educated yet refused to take responsibility of the child, but the mum was ill I can understand if he wants to go back to the mum but not his dad -Foster Parent

Although foster parents raised legitimate concerns about stability of children in the event of removals from care, it was evident that their investments in the lives of children coupled with the many year's children had lived with them gave them a strong basis for entitlement to children. From my perspective, it was apparent that the culture of informal fostering where parents raise other people's children by themselves for long periods of time and claim them as their very own has also smuggled itself into the formal foster care system.

To the public family practices in this family displayed a relationship of biological families with children. In some settings, foster parents did not want outsiders to know that the children were in care and 'displayed' foster children to outsiders as their own biological children through the provision of their needs and nurturing the children. This is an example of family display by Finch (2007) where she articulates that, family display is showing to each other and relevant audiences that certain actions show that a certain group is a family and confirms their relationship to the audience. These findings on foster parents' sense of entitlement corresponds also to findings of other Australian studies that suggest that long term foster parents considered themselves as parental figures for foster children rather than paid carers (Blythe et al., 2012; Riggs et al., 2009). When foster parents assume the total care of foster children without any financial support it could become problematic for family reunification because of foster parents' financial investments of the children.

5.2.3 Undisclosed Foster Entrance Narratives

3 out of 4 foster parents interviewed had not disclosed children's foster entrance narratives and foster children were oblivious about their biological heritage. From my perspectives interviews

with parents indicated they were in doubts concerning children's ability in handling these foster entrance stories.

The following are some examples of statements made by parents to support this assertion'

*The reason why we do not tell them when they are young is that if for example the family does not show up and then the state gives the child to you as adoption, and you have already told the child that you are not the parent it might just destroy the love that already exists between the parent and the child. Then he will always give you pressure to help him find his mother, if this happens you would not know what to do that is why we do not tell the child- **Foster Parent***

When this foster parent was asked why the non-disclosure of children's foster entrance stories, she responded that

*Well the truth is one, I do not intend to tell the child because when you start telling them at this stage maybe it will be worrying. But you know children, this child might have second thoughts and if the child grows and someone tells him outside maybe just maybe I will tell him. [---] At this point he doesn't know anything about his parents. At this point I do not feel he is old enough (to know) - **Foster Parent***

Research shows that communication in adoptive/foster families change based on the child's development needs. Foster parents usually provide children with information on their families as they grow along with the developmental needs of the child and parents (Patrick & Galvin, 2012). Children's participation in this study comes into question with regards to non-disclosure of their biological roots. The act of non-disclosure also denies children the right to participate in decisions that concerns their wellbeing. These comments from parents in this study might be interpreted as, foster parents look upon children as incapable of making meanings of their reality and hence the non-disclosure which is deeply rooted in 'adulthood' (Flasher,1978). Where adults may use their special privileges and power over children or adults feeling they know what is best for children. These acts of non – participation reflects Reddy and Ratna (2002) "active resistance". According to these authors active resistance are adults who aggressively hinder children's participation. They assert that there are various categorizations of adults, with some adults feeling that children should not be fraught with the pressures of

participation. And other adults judge that children are incapable of participating and can therefore not make good choices which consequently leads to adult taking to robust positions and preventing children from participating. Parents in this study linked the non-disclosure to the fact that when they finally adopt children their ‘foster entrance narrative’ will not be necessary in the first place so why bother to tell foster children now. Alternatively, foster parents state that when children are 18 years and above their foster entrance narratives can be told to them then they can decide.

A major problem of child participation is when children are seen by the society as incapable due to their dependence on adults. When children are seen as inept it can lead to children’s exclusion in decisions that affects them (Nordenfors, 2016). Young et al's. (2014) four pillars for effective child participation asserts the need for children to be given a space to express themselves, a voice by guiding the process for children to express such views, and to give children audience so that children are not only heard but listened to. Decisions as keeping the identity of children from foster children may have negative implications on children as well as future reunification problems. Hart (1992) enunciates the need to assign and inform as an important premise in children’s active participation. When children have not been informed in the first place regarding their placements, it is evident that they have not been consulted and hence decisions are made on their behalf based on parents’ perspectives on what is considered to be in their best interest. Some parents in this study inadvertently felt that concealing children’s identity is in the best interest of children. On an issue as sensitive as this, where children have not been communicated to on the foster entrance narratives has implications for the development and wellbeing of the child. It is important to hear from the children themselves on what they think on such matters based on full consideration to their age and developmental capabilities. Communication is an important requisite in helping children to understand their family and to build relationships and their identity (Galvin, 2006). Telling children about their biological families may help children make meanings of their fostering experiences and birthparents relationship (see Nelson & Horstman, 2017) at an earlier time rather than later.

5.2.4 Lack of financial support for foster parents

Some foster parents reported having some financial challenges in catering for the needs of the children. Reflecting on responses of children in the study in the previous theme, it is evident

that foster parents are doing their best in providing for the needs of the foster children despite the financial setbacks.

This foster parent highlighted that it would be good to have support but also felt she was doing this for herself, according to her if this was her biological child there would be no help from anywhere.

As for me because its foster care if the agency decides to at least pay the fees for every term that will be useful. Last term I spent a lot on just books. The child's school fees are also expensive. The term is just three months and before you know it is another term for you to pay. You know in a way if it is your child you cannot ask anyone for her school fees. In a way you are doing something for yourself. But if you get someone to help that's okay for example uncles can support the upbringing of their nephews and nieces but if this support doesn't come who do you ask. Financial support will be really useful from the agency.

Another foster parent emphasized on the broken promises of the foster care agency in providing support.

*Let me ask you what kind of support is given in other countries. You know when we went for seminar, they told us if you are interested from time to time, they help you about 60-70% I'm not sure. But nothing has come out of it. [---] These children came with just a pair of clothes - **Foster Parent***

When this same parent was asked if she needed support her response was

*Yes, I think at least once a while because assuming these children have everything in their wardrobe wearing of this month and they have to stay for more months, you have to replace it. It is difficult sometimes. Both their education and Healthwise because taking care of another person's child is not easy - **Foster Parent***

Undoubtedly, foster parents expressed the importance on the need to be supported in providing care for foster children. This mirrors other research in Australia on foster parents cry for support and broken promises by authorities (Blythe et al. 2013). These findings further support research in Ghana in both formal and informal foster care (Mawutor, 2015; Frimpong Manso et al. 2020).

The theme on complexities of family life highlight the challenges faced by both foster children and foster parents and the various family dynamics that leads to difficult situations in the foster households.

5.3 Relationships of children in foster care

The theme describes the relationships that exists between children and their foster families as well as birth families. Andersson (2009) emphasizes that when foster families embrace the foster child's family it promotes continuity and a sense of security for the foster child. In cases of family reunification children are more able to embrace their backgrounds. Foster youths in long term placements who have a positive relationship and security in their foster placements tend to be adults who may be more adjusted to the demands of adult life and be more open in their relationships (Schofield and Beak, 2009). On the contrary when foster youth are unable to resolve their past negative experiences, coupled with the fact that relationships with caregivers are insecure, they may find it more difficult to adjust to the demands of adult life. Which culminates into being demanding, avoiding the expressing of emotions and avoiding relationships (Schofield and Beak, 2009).

The relationships in foster care in this study show that, majority of the children who had stayed in care for more than 4 years expressed that they were happy with their foster parents regardless of corporal punishment in the foster homes. Also foster children elucidates that, their relationship with foster parents and siblings are mostly positive whereas biological family relationships are almost non-existent due to limited family contact. Thoburn (1994) emphasizes on the need to maintain a balance between children's sense of permanence and identity for future stability in relationships and self-worth. Children also describe friendships as relationships they find meaningful in their foster care experiences. They also identify other relationships in their foster families that are stressful.

5.3.1 Relationships between foster families and foster children; "It is like a family we are all like a family")

This study found that foster children's relationships with foster parents indicated a helpful relationship and all children identified their foster placements as family. *We are all like family'* - **R6**. Relationships with foster parents were generally described by children as helpful and functional relationships. Majority of the children considered their relationships with their

foster parents good and homes as happy homes, although two of the children did not know they were in care and therefore related to their foster parents as their biological parents.

The children pointed out that they could count on their foster parents to provide them with various resources. Some children found their sense of endearment to their foster parents because of the provision of basic needs, foster parents providing a safe place for foster children to call home and foster parents constant showing of love and listening ears.

One of the children linked the closeness of his foster mother to his heart by the fact that she provides them with food when they go to school. *“In the house my mummy is very close to my heart. My mummy here (Foster mother) My mummy here because when we are going to school, she gives us food”* -**R2**. For this child access to food in the foster home was an important aspect for him in feeling connected to his foster parent.

When R7 was asked what he liked about living in the new family, his response was

How mummy makes us happy. If you ask her for something she always provide. If I need to buy something in school, she gives me money to buy it. If I need to pay for a contribution, she provides it -**R7**.

In describing his relationship and place in the family his response was *“It’s like a family we are all like a family. Yes, mummy she loves everyone in this house she caters for us when we do something wrong, she corrects us”* -**R6**.

For others they now had a family and all the foster siblings were simply a family and having a safe space to share their problems with their foster mum was something that meant a lot to them. *“I go to mummy to talk when something is going on and I come to her to share things. I also enjoy playing football with my family”* -**R7**.

5.3.1a Positive relations with foster siblings

Five out of the seven children interviewed reported they had good relationships with their foster siblings and related to them as biological siblings. Two children expressed concerns about their foster siblings and other relations which made the placement stressful

Children who had lived in care since early parts of their childhood, described their closeness and love with their foster siblings as normal and loving. They saw and treated their foster siblings like their biological siblings. In one of the drawing activities when one of the children

was asked to draw something of significant importance to him, he drew two images writing his name and that of the foster sibling's name under it. The names are blotted out for purposes of confidentiality. When asked to talk about the images he said *"This is me and this is my (foster sibling), I drew the two of us because I love my (foster sibling) very much"*-R4

FIGURE 5: A drawing of a foster child depicting a loving relationship between a foster child & foster sibling



In a whole it appears that children value and have very good relationships with foster parents who provide them with basic needs as well as providing a safe space for children to call homes and people to call family. This supports Maaskant et al. (2016) findings of children feeling more connected to their foster parents based on issues of their wellbeing. For all of the five children who knew they were in care and knew about their birth parents, they still felt a strong connection to their foster parents and related to them as if they were their biological parents which shows the functional and positive relationships with their foster parents. All children interviewed were already calling their foster parents mum and dad and there was an atmosphere of settling down in the foster placement. For the children it felt like a 'normal' home. For the other children who did not know that they were in care, they had settled well and lived their lives like the biological children of the foster parents. They did not see any difference between themselves and their foster siblings. From the perspective of personal life Smart's (2007), it appears that the meanings foster children ascribe to their relationships in the foster placement is a family like relationship. They considered their foster family as a family. Extracts from the study show that their constructions of family for the long term had their foster families. As

Christiansen et al. (2013) suggests, children with an affiliation to two families are often seen as experiencing conflicts of loyalty. Social workers can come to terms that foster children can identify both foster families as well as birth family as family without necessarily having conflicting loyalties. Biehal (2014) concludes that it is vital for social workers and other stakeholders to support foster families if they want to ‘display their families’ like any other family in a way that represents their relationships with foster children if that is the desire of the foster children. Whilst assisting children make sense of their place within these two-family constructions and encouraging their belongingness to both families simultaneously.

5.3.1b Difficulties with foster siblings and other foster family relations

Although children had a good relationship with their foster parents and some foster siblings, other relatives of foster parents and some foster siblings sometimes made the relationships of foster children stressful. In homes where children reported not being beaten by the foster parent, they simultaneously reported corporal punishments and verbal reprimands from other foster relations which affected their relationships and stability in the placements. All members in the foster household could equally enforce disciplinary measures on children. In some cases, these children felt that they considered leaving the foster placements because of these treatments.

I like living here but I don't like my uncle. Every day, I don't even know what I am going to say [---] My uncle will take the cane to follow me to go and wash the plates when I don't wash it well, he will take cane and beat my back and will knock my head and take the cane and beat my head -R1.

The insulting is too much sometimes she has been insulting me like small thing she (relative of foster mum) insults you. I tell mummy (foster mother) my aunty sometimes she (relative of foster mum) even insults my mum who is somewhere else – R7.

Regardless of the use of corporal punishment in the foster homes, foster children were appreciative of their foster placement and valued their relationships with foster parents. This is in tandem with for example (Kuyini et al., 2009; Owusu and Adjei, 2009) who reports the similar findings on informal fostering in Ghana.

Research has shown that foster siblings play a critical role in the foster children's care experiences and outcomes (Andersson, 2009; Nordenfors 2016). In the case of children in this study, the role of foster siblings is an important determinant of the placement stability. As

Nordenfors (2016) asserts, foster siblings should be seen as important agents and be provided support by social workers since they have been placed inadvertently in a position whether they like it or not to provide 'care' in different ways for children in foster care. In Ghana, since most foster placements are in homes with other members of the family available it is important to consider how other members of the family can be brought on board to support foster placement goals.

5.3.2 Limited biological family contact.

The two children who did not know about their birth family had no contact whatsoever with them. When asked who this child considers as family aside the foster mother, the child responded with "*My other family includes my aunties my grandma (relations of foster mum), and all the wives of my mother's (foster mother) brothers-***R4**. This really indicated that this child had no memory of the biological family and clearly did not know that he was in care

All the other five children who knew their birth parents but had relatively little or no contact with their birth families as the visits were not frequent or they simply did not know where their parents were. The quotation below from the data shows the variations in contact children have with their birth families. On family contact children who lived in a short-term placement an average of 6 months or less mentioned that they had not seen their parents since they went into care but they had been visited by their biological grand mum once within a period of four months; "*I haven't seen them (my parents) since I came here*"-R1. According to R2 "*She (Grand ma) came to visit us but not in this house we went to meet her somewhere*" -R2

The children in long term placements had different kinds of contacts and relationships with their birth families. Some children had no idea where their parents were, indicating a limited or a total lack of contact with biological family.

*Right now, I don't know where my parents are. My parents have come to visit me only once, [...] Sometimes when I am coming to sleep thoughts of my parents comes to my head. Praying telling God to help my mother wherever she is and help my father if he is alive. I miss them because it's been a very long time since I saw them-***R3**

*It's been about 8 years since I left that place (parents' home) up till now I have not heard any news about him (my father)[...]She (biological mother) came a long time ago when we lived in community (X), but she hasn't been here since we came here [...]I was happy (when she came to visit) when she is going, I feel very sad-***R6**

When my mum comes to visit me, I am very happy, and I wish I could go stay with her
-R7

Regardless of the little contact with birth family, moments biological parents visited, meant a lot to children which made them happy. At the same time sad when they had to part ways again clearly not knowing the next time, they would have a visit from a parent. Foster children also think about their parents and have hopes and worries. Regardless they still had hopes on future reunification with parents. When asked about hopes of the future with the mum this child said

...she (birth mother) said when she is having money she will come and take us so I would wait till she has money so that when she wants, she can come and take me **-R6**

Chapman et al. (2004) assert that, most young people in their study sample mentioned it was essential to be in contact with their birth. Although, some children in the study confirmed that they had missed their parents' frequent visits with biological parents helped them in dealing with the separation from them.

Face to face contact is important for children in maintaining relationships (Davies, 2012). However, barriers such as socio- economic situations could hamper this contact. It is therefore important for social workers and policy makers to invest more resources into supporting parents as contact could be an important determinant of reunification. In most cases, poor family contacts for adolescents in foster care have been linked to behavioural problems, anxiety and stress resulting in placement disruptions while quality family contact helps in placement success (Moyers et al., 2005).

This suggests, family contact should be considered as a planned professional activity toward specified objectives in the placement and reunification of children in foster care. In this case, family contact should involve therapeutic services employed by social workers for interventions with both children in placement and their family contacts. This will require social workers to manage contacts proactively by establishing the purpose and working on both the family contact and the child, in collaboration with the foster family. Family contact is a process with blurred outcomes. Therefore, it requires social workers and all stakeholders to navigate the process of contact towards a desired outcome. Here, family contacts would be reviewed and adjusted to meet the intended purpose.

5.3.4 Foster children's ambivalent emotions

Notwithstanding the fact that children had good relationships in foster placements some children also contrasted the feeling of living with birth parents and foster parents identifying both relationships as meaningful and feeling connected to them.

Sometimes when I sit down, and I feel like been adopted it feels like I should stay, or I should go, and then I remember the happiness in this house I feel like I should stay. But when we are scolded for doing something bad, we get angry and it's like we should go. When we recover from our anger then we remember the happy things, so the decision is sometimes here and there- R3

When we were living with our parents, we have no money but at home we are happy because our dad was a good dad. He was working as a (mentions fathers' occupation) and he had a tree which he had tied a tyre (car tyre) and a rope on it so he will sit on it and carry us on his lap. So, when we go to school, we miss him and when we come home, we are happy but here when we are going to school, they give us snacks they give us good clothes to wear so here is better than that place -R6

Because children had not been in contact with their families for a long while their feelings were mostly 'neither here nor there', what some researchers classify as 'ambivalent emotions' (Chapman et al., 2004). And these mixed feelings were clearly evident in this study.

5.3.5 Friendships as a meaningful relationship to foster children

Sociology of personal life places emphasis on relationships across the trajectories of children that are not connected to the 'family' but are meaningful to them. Example of such are friendships between children (Davies, 2015). Friendships form an important aspect in the lives of children's emotional development. Peer relationships are an important aspect in the lives of children because it has implications for their self-worth. Research has shown that friendships at the school neighbourhood levels can influence foster children's sense of adaptation and placement in care (The children's Society, 2015). According to Fernandez (2007) moving children from one place to the other has implications for children's friendship. In her study she reported that children were distraught about the loss of their old friends (Fernandez, 2007).

Friendships have been identified as a vital relationship that requires to be studied in its own right because it serves as a source of emotional and material support (Davies, 2015). Research has shown the unclear boundaries between friendships and other family relationships. (Spencer

and Phal, 2006; Smart, 2007; Heaphy and Davies, 2012). And how family has been broadened to encapsulate friendships and other meaningful relationships.

The description of friendship as a meaningful relationship to foster children in this study was evident in the empirical data. Some children listed numerous friends they had made in their new communities on the network charts used in this study. R1 for example insisted on showing me the homes of his friends before I left the field. This indicated the importance and attachment he felt to those places. The examples below show how children consider their friendships in the foster care relationships as vital for their stay in care

Before coming here, I had not been here before, but I like it here. People also like me here. I do (I like this neighbourhood very well) because of my friends. I have so many friends here - R2

...sometimes we invite our friends at school to our home, they come, and we all share ideas, sometimes we play football. Last week Sunday the boys went to play football at town park -R6

Delgado et al. (2019) also found similar findings in his study. He asserts that children in his study described making new friends and meeting new people who became essential to their placement. Collins (2005) Interaction Ritual theory indicates that people's emotional energy is contingent on people's interactions and where they situate themselves in these interactions. Depending on whether one is interacting from a position of acceptance or rejection one's emotional energy is boosted or not, and this shows in the persons relationships. It can be argued from this point that, since foster children from this study have successfully made a number of friends in their placements this can be linked to their fitting in their new environments. Consequently, translating into how they relate with significant others in their placements. Research has shown that one of the loss's for children in their foster placement is their relationships with friends which can even impact on their self- esteem (The children's society, 2015; Fernandez, 2007). Children's friendship in this study could thus be an indicator for children's adjustment in care.

Albeit, other foster children also expressed concerns on not being able to go out to meet friends like they would have wanted. For some children, their friends play a role in their connectedness to the foster placement. R1's response to the question of what he likes about being in care was his friends. '*The thing I like about being here is my friends, my friends like me to be here*' -R1. However, this came with challenges when he continued by saying that although he likes to play

with the friends *his uncle didn't like him to play with them ~R1*. Another child also reported limitations to access to friendships;

Aside my mates in school. Here we are not permitted to go outside unless in group or unless the family goes out, we are not permitted to go out when we want to because of that we don't have many friends aside our classmates and church mates - R3

This shows the power dynamics in adult children relationships and how adults served as gate keepers in facilitating the friendships of children (Davies,2015). Gallagher (2008) argues the concept of power from a Foucauldian perspective is essential in understanding ways in which power is exercised through network relations. In understanding children's participation in such things as who they socialize with and who can be included in their friendship bracket is based on how much power is devolved to them. The power here lies with the adults to determine the friendships of children. These restrictions from the adults can affect the self-worth of children and consequently have impacts on their wellbeing. It is thus essential for foster parents to be trained on the importance of encouraging friendships of children in care as this makes their placement more rewarding.

5.4 Foster Children's Sense of Belongingness in Care

The aspect of belongingness in this study is examined from the model of Schofield (2002) who proposes a psychosocial model for long term foster care. According to Schofield (2002) the meaning of 'belonging' to a foster family is multidimensional. Belonging has five interrelated elements which are family solidarity which is showed by practical and emotional support, family rituals, family identity, family relationships and family culture evidenced by norms and values that characterize these relationships. Using these concepts of Schofield's belonging, I discuss the aspects in the empirical data that characterize how Ghanaian foster children consider their belongingness. Emphasis is on family rituals, family identity, family culture and family solidarity.

5.4.1 Family Rituals building sense of connectedness

Family rituals involves shared emotions which can generate solidarity and group membership (Collins, 2005). Family rituals perpetuating strong sense of belonging exists in various families mostly because one is born into a family. Rituals are those activities that make meaning to members of the family and could be simple activities such as going to church together, praying together, sharing meals together, attending various concerts among others. According to Riggs et al. (2009), family rituals could be more complex through storytelling and documenting of

foster children's story. Children in the study identified family rituals that builds a sense of connectedness in their homes. For the children simple activities made the home, a happy home and influenced their feelings of having a place in the home. Story telling as an example is shared by this child below, where the happiness of the child among other things include story telling by the mother. *"I am very happy in this family. Some of the things that make me happy include studying with my mother (foster mother) and [...]and my mother telling me stories -* **R4.**

More so, the feeling of having to do things together and been involved in family activities binds foster children to families in a way that makes the foster children have a feeling of a home. These family rituals like playing together, sharing meals together are captured in these extracts.

We pray together on Tuesdays and Fridays and we read the bible and learn Gods word. We also pray every morning and evening, sometimes we also do exercise. Sometimes when we have issues, we talk about them and solve them in Bible study and prayer meeting- **R3.**

We go to church together, we go to the market together we also eat together, we also dance together. I dance with my mum- **R5**

Foster children describe these activities as creating safe spaces which brings the children and their foster families together in special ways. Activities like reading the Bible together and praying become platforms where conflicts are resolved, and love shared. R3 described Bible and prayer studies as meetings where they discuss *family conflicts and resolve conflicts*.

The extract below describes other family rituals that enforces children's sense of belonging.

On 6th March we were supposed to go for an excursion but my sister in form three went, and my mum (foster mother) said it was expensive and that she could not pay for all of us to go but rather she took us out. On 10th April we are going for harvest praise we are going to celebrate. We will celebrate with musicians. We go there every year- **R6**

In describing this activity with the family, the child was joyful with an expression of happiness all over the face. He describes how it was costly for the foster mother to pay for an excursion where himself and other siblings in care were to attend, but it was still a happy moment because the foster mother took the rest who could not go for the excursion together for another event. This translated to a sign of caring and showing of love by the foster parent even in a difficult situation. The family ritual of going to a music concert every year and celebrating with

musicians was another act from the foster parent, that the child described as something he looked forward to every year with his family. From my perspective, there was an indication of this family ritual informing his sense of connectedness.

From the foster parents' point of view in explaining her perceptions on belonging and relationships she elucidates that, being sensitive to the needs of children by actions such as touching and providing warmth to the child is equated to love for the foster child. According to Davies (2015), In analysing a study on children's kinship of Mason and Tipper (2008) she asserts that touching could be a feature of children's belief of a good family although there are risk discourses on touch. See example below on how a foster parent describes the act of touching as therapeutic for her foster child that characterizes their relationship.

You know, when my son gets hurt and he starts screaming mummy, mummy ,mummy the moment I touch it and I put him on my lap he stops crying he can even fall asleep, but if I treat him anyhow he can go wayward - Foster Parent .

This finding supports the assertion of Riggs et al. (2009) on caring. They state that no matter how insignificant caring is it creates a sense of belonging and shows how children are valued and have a place in the foster home as well as therapeutic for children with negative backgrounds.

Family rituals as identified in this study reflects Schofield's (2002) work on children's sense of belonging. Regardless of the simplicity in these activities such as going to church together, praying together, sharing meals together, these collectively can influence children's sense of belonging.

5.4.2 Family Identity as a vital component in belongingness of foster children

Family membership is a vital component in one's identity narrative. In Ghana, family is an important concept. One's identity is linked to the kin relationships and this becomes relevant for purposes like inheritance and recognition in different spheres of the society (Agyekum, 2006). Where one originates from can serve as a community door opener in various situations like looking for a job or even sometimes acceptance into a marriage. A person's name is crucial when it comes to family identity. It is quite common to meet an elderly person in the streets and to have a conversation that links to who your parents are and where you come from. In Ghana certain names can be easily ascribed to tribal groups and narrowed down to the specific lineage or clan one belongs. For example, the name Addy is peculiar to the Ga people of Ghana and the Ga Mashie clan. The development of a family identity can prevent stigmatisation.

Foster children themselves are aware that they are different from the ordinary child who is living with the biological family (Schofield,2002). The child's position may feel abnormal which can lead to stigma.

Interviews with parents in my study indicated that four out of the seven children in the study who were placed either in short term or long-term placements had their names changed. Their foster parents assigned them different names than what they originally brought to care. Some of the children had both their first names and last names changed whilst others also had only their last names changed. Parents explained that changing the names of children helps to avoid being considered as children in care but rather their biological children and prevents name calling. A foster parent confirmed that changing the name of children in care can protect the child and reduce stigma. According to her it is a way of dealing with negative reactions from people. From the parent's perspective, when children carry the last name of their foster parents, to some extent it removes question marks and doubts about which family the child belongs to. Extracts below will show examples why children have their names changed by foster parents.

... You know, everyone in church sees them as my children as to how I got them they do not know [...]. You see when you expose them sometimes people or children will use it to insult them, stigmatize them. [...] So, no one here knows they are in care. [...] I gave them that name to remove the question mark, where are you coming from, whose child is this, where is he is going to [...] - **Foster Parent**

Also, it could be deduced that parents try to display to relevant audiences that they are a family Finch (2007), by the name changing so that people do not stigmatize them on their inability to have children of their own. Although there is a motive of protection, these are also decisions parents take without consulting the children; features of non-participation. (Hart, 2008; Landsdown,2010). Children do not get to participate in this decision of name changing neither are they asked if they want their names to be changed. One child confirmed that he did not like his new name given by the foster parent because people made fun of the name. The respondent also mentioned that, he did not disclose his old name to friends because the foster parent did not like him to do so. See below the responses of R1 on this interview

Do you like your new name?

No, I like A (previous name) and B (previous name) but not this last one (new name) -

R1

Why didn't you tell me about your real name earlier?

Whispering my mummy (foster mum) didn't like me to say I am A- R1

Although changing of names seems to situate children in foster families and influences their belonging, parents should engage children and work collaboratively with them to find out what works for children and what will be in their best interest.

A reason for the name changes from the perspective of the foster carer as stated earlier is to avoid stigma and labelling. Some children in the study corroborated this stigma and labelling by narrating their experiences. This child stressed on teasing from friends who knew that he is in care and did not live with his biological parents and used every least opportunity to remind him about his care status. When R6 was asked about how he feels about his friends knowing he was in care, his response was;

So, when they were teasing at first, I feel bad within me but now when they say it, I don't mind them, they say: you, this boy you are here, and you are begging. If those who know book (those who are intelligent) are fooling you also come and fool meanwhile you don't have a parent, you are poor. When they say that I feel bad, but now when they say that I sit with my books (I study hard) so I'm coming up small (I am making progress). [...] once in a while if I make a mistake like playing football and I give a wrong pass they say: "poor boy you don't know how to give pass" -R6.

According to **R6** when his friends used 'poor boy' to tease him it simply meant that he did not have parents "*They are trying to say that I don't have parents*". This child describes how he is teased by his friends for his low academic performance, his wrong passes in football simply because he is in care.

When **R7** was asked if his friends knew that he was in care this is what he had to say, that although his friends knew he was in care they felt sorry for him. "*Yes, they know (that I live with someone else) some of them they feel bad (feel sorry for me) because sometimes they ask why I am not staying with my mum but someone else*"- **R7**.

For some other foster parents since they had not disclosed to their foster children about their identity, they used their last names for the children to prevent questioning from the children and intrusion from outsiders. From the standpoint of Finch (2007), foster parents in this study in their relationships with foster children, tend to 'display' their families in the communities they find themselves, by renaming foster children with their family names to prove to social

audience that they are a family. Children in foster care are likely to face stigma due to their past negative experiences and for the reason that they are in care. According to Riggs et al. (2009) This stigma accounts for reasons why some foster children identify with their foster families as though they were their real family. Research has shown that many foster children exhibit the need for parental figures by defining meaningful relationships with their foster parents and ascribing the symbol 'mum' or 'dad' to their relationships (Eitzen & McIntosh, 2004). The use of mum and dad as already mentioned kept coming up with all children interviewed in my study. Riggs et al. (2009) suggest that this has a therapeutic effect on foster children who want to have meaningful relationships with their foster carers. Schofield's (2002) study show that foster families have the capacity to help foster children 'think' through their negative past experiences which helps in negotiating new positive 'alternative identities'. On the other hand, a goal of fostering in Ghana is for eventual reunification with family. When foster parents change names of children when they do not have full legal rights to children it has future ramifications for the identity of the child when a child is reunified back with the family. Especially in countries like Ghana where names are very important in various contexts. Schofield's family identity as perpetuating children's sense of belonging is explicit in this study but with more complexities on issues of stigma with the peculiar context of the foster children in this study.

5.4.3 Family Culture enhancing children's sense of belongingness

Family culture refers to broader beliefs or values that shape the family (Riggs et al., 2009). Every family has its own values and norms that guides their existence and foster families are no exception. In Ghana, social norms and values are transmitted to the younger generation not only by their nuclear family but also other adults in a community. Transferring values to foster children in this study, were rooted in teaching of Christian morals. Practicing Christianity was a common thing that run through all the interviews with children describing going to church together with the family, doing Bible studies and praying. Parents believed that using the word of God was a good way to bringing children to conformity.

The interviews with the foster parents and children also brought to fore the various everyday routines that shows the various values and norms and shared responsibility in maintaining the home. Children knew their responsibilities and discussed how they performed their house chores on a daily basis. Most children in Ghana are brought up with the orientation of performing some basic house chores which includes such chores as sweeping the house every morning, fetching of water in cases where there is no running water and washing of bowls.

According to a Ghana Living Standards Survey round 6 (2014), more than half of household members who are seven years and older engage in household activities such as washing clothes (57.3%), cleaning activities (52.4%) and fetching water (52.2%). Informal training is given to children from an early age so they can assume responsibilities when they become adults in their various communities (*Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 6, 2014*)

Sweeping of the house, cleaning of the house and washing dishes were responsibilities, that children had come to accept, and performance indicated some sense of fulfilment which perpetuates their sense of connectedness. All seven children in this study had a daily routine which comprised of performing house chores and they seem to have understood the importance of their own contribution and participation in maintaining the home.

The following examples captures how children described these routines.

When I wake up I wash plates, I will go and bath, I will go and wear my school uniform, then I clean my shoe, when I finish eating, I will go and wear my shoe, then they give me money then I go to school, then I come back home I will go and bath and then I wash the plates-R1

When I wake up in the morning, I sweep my room before I go to school...On weekends I work outside and also, I work in my room to make sure it looks good-R3

If I wake up, I sweep and then I wash bowls, I bath then I dress and go to school...On weekends we clean the windows and mop the floor and then also wash our clothes and that of the children-R7

While children are creatively participating to ensure the maintenance of the homes by performance of their chores, non-performance of house chores could lead to punishments. This study showed some children expressed how they could get punished as a result of not performing their chores well.

... my uncle will take the cane to follow me to go and wash the plates when I don't wash it well, he will take cane and beat my back. He will knock my head and take the cane and beat my head - R1

R3 was asked about what he didn't like about living in his home his response was;

Sometimes you are given too much work that cannot be performed like washing the dirty walls of the house-R3

Although R3 had previously responded to the house as being a happy home and felt that he belonged he wasn't happy about the fact that sometimes his chores were too difficult to perform. On the other hand, when children describe doing these chores, they highlight how they feel they are playing their roles to ensure the maintenance and functioning of the home. In Schofield's (2002) study she emphasizes that "taking on the family culture in addition to the various other components of family membership provided a more broadly defined 'secure base' that increased the likelihood of hopefulness for the future" (Schofield, 2002 p.269). According to Corsaro (2015 pg. 19) "children's participation in cultural routines is a key element of interpretive reproductions". He also emphasizes that taken for granted nature of routines provides children and all social actors with the security and shared understanding of belonging to a social group (Corsaro,2015 pg. 19). The Ghanaian context here although might not be necessarily reflexive of the culture of the above authors, this study highlighted children's sense of belongingness in their placements through the family culture.

5.44 Family Solidarity influencing belongingness of foster children

Schofield (2002) describes family solidarity as feelings of connectedness based on family membership and commitment which comes naturally because one is born into a family. In non-biological relationships such as foster families these bonds can be created in special ways (Riggs et al., 2009). Family solidarity has characteristics of kin like relationships whereby virtue of membership of the family can receive lasting emotional and physical support similar to kin relationships (Schofield, 2002).

On family solidarity the following quote captures children's hope that they could count on the foster parents till they leave her care.

When asked if she feels she has a place in the family, R7 responded by "*I have a place in this family and if I had the chance I will still want to be in this house*" -R7

Also, some foster children's sense of belongingness in this study was connected to witnessing the good relationships that exist between formal foster children and the foster parent. As well as been assured of an enduring relationship into adulthood. They described how foster parents still kept in touch with foster care alumni till their adulthood and this provided a base for the child to see himself as belonging to this family.

I feel like I belong here because mummy (foster mum) said she wants to take care of us till I grow, she took care of some people and they are grown in America [...] I think the future will be alright- R6

This child's sense of belonging to this family comes into perspective he places emphasis on the foster mother's willingness to take care of him till his adult life. Belonging to a family is a lifelong relationship and hence the assurance from the foster parent and the observation of existing relationships informed this child's belongingness.

Foster parents in various extracts also expressed the sense of belonging that characterized their relationships with the children. The foster parent describes how well she feels the foster child fits into the family "*I think he fits very well into this family, everywhere my uncle, my mother, my siblings everyone identifies with him as my son nobody treats him badly*" - **Foster Parent**. According to this foster parent the child recognises her as mother and her partner as father signifying the child's belongingness in their home.

The expression of happiness and willingness to stay with foster family was evident in the responses of the children. Children's belonging in this study was shown in the various family practices in the elements of family rituals such as praying together, going to church together, sharing meals together, going to the market together, family identity, family culture and family solidarity which consists of provision of basic needs and an assurance of a place to call home. All these created strong bonds with foster parents and influenced children's sense of belonging towards their foster homes.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarises the major findings in the study in cognizance of the main questions of this study which are:

1. How does the foster child and foster parent benefit from foster care placement?
2. How do foster children define their relationships and belongingness in their foster families and birth families?
3. What are foster parents' perceptions of children's experiences in care?
4. What are the challenges of fostering for both foster children and foster parents?

6.1 How foster children describe their relationships and belongingness.

The key findings of this study highlight various conflicts and uncertainties at different stages. For example, the findings show majority of the children who had stayed in care for more than four years expressed that they are happy with their foster care placement and have a strong sense of connectedness to their foster families irrespective of issues of corporal punishment and verbal reprimands. Findings corroborate Kuyini et al. (2009) in Ghana who stipulates that children were satisfied with their kinship foster placements although they go through some abuse. Since children in this study seemed to have normalized the use of punishment in the Ghanaian setting, it has very little impacts on their judgements of happiness. Children's happiness and sense of connectedness in my study also supports research of Maaskant et al. (2016) where they found that foster children had a strong sense of connection to their foster families due to their foster parents ensuring their wellbeing. In my study, children also expressed that they were looking forward to being with their birth families in the near future which ropes in with Chapman et al. (2004).

On family contact, the study showed that foster children had very limited contact with their birth family's. Biehal (2013) also found that how foster parents related to foster children and the extent to which foster children have contact with their families also influences their sense of connectedness. My finding also illuminates the groups of children in Biehal's (2013) study who felt more connected to their foster parents and related to their foster parents as sets of other parents mainly because they had not been in contact with their birth parents for so long. At the time of interviews children in this study were more inclined towards their foster families and didn't say much about their birth family. This could be an indicator that, when there are little

family contact children tend to adapt to the family they have. Some children in the study were anxious about the whereabouts of their parents since they had not met them in several years. This anxiety has implications on the emotional and physical wellbeing of children. Article 9 sub section 3 of the UNCRC states that ‘States Parties shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child's best interests’(United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Children in foster care have the rights to maintain contact with their family based on this clause both in a legal and ethical perspective. Research has also shown that contact with family can improve the wellbeing of the child (Delgado et al., 2017). The culmination of daily routines, a place to call home, the availability of foster carers who related with children as if they were their very own and various family activities influenced children’s sense of belonging in foster homes in this study

The theme of ambivalence is explicit in this study in the sense that, children have helpful relationships and are happy with their foster families, even though they still feel a sense of connectedness with their biological family. According to the children if circumstances were different with their biological parents having the financial capacity, children would be happy to live with their biological parents. Children wanting to live with their biological parents under different circumstances are similar to previous studies of Chapman et al. (2004) and Delgado et al. (2019). Children interviewed expressed feelings of happiness when birth parents pay foster children a visit and pain and hurt when birth parents visit them and leave.

6.2 Benefits of fostering for foster children and foster parents

The findings show that generally children have better standards in care. And foster parents are able to achieve their personal parenting goals of being identified as parents in the Ghanaian context. The Ghanaian context is bedevilled with stigma when a couple marries for many years without children and fostering gave this opportunity to some parents to be seen and displayed as parents.

Also, this study found that unlike many studies which talks about children taken from their usual environments and losing out on friendships, it was interesting to see the creativity and adaption of children in making friends even within few months of placement. This shows that children are indeed capable of contributing to their childhood (Corsaro,2015). Children in this study were able to make new friends in their placements and they found these relationships significant in their foster placement.

It is worth adding that this study also found that foster parents found the training given by foster care agencies as very helpful in raising foster children as well as their own children. In many instances foster parents counted on the expertise of social workers in making important decisions concerning the child, in this sense, identifying with foster care agencies as co-parents.

6.3 Perceptions of foster parents on children's experiences

Foster parents in this study unequivocally feel that children have a sense of belongingness in their placements. Some foster parents perceive that family reunification can have negative impacts on children and considering the number of years children had lived with them, reunification could affect the identity of the child. In addition, foster parents consider themselves as parents to foster children and not as alternative parents. Blythe et al. (2012) had similar findings of foster parents considering themselves as parental figures rather than paid carers.

The operations of foster parents in the fostering relationship depicts a mindset of quasi adoption, this means that although children have not been officially handed over to foster parents, they consider foster children as their own. This mindset of quasi adoption can also be connected to the ideas of informal fostering, where children are able to live with acquaintances or other family relations of parents for many years without seeing their biological family's. Foster parents are of the view that corporal punishment as a parenting strategy is the ideal way in raising of children which culminates in various challenges.

6.4 Challenges of foster children and foster parents

This study found a number of challenges in the foster home leading to various family complexities. A complex situation that arose in this study is the use of corporal punishment as a parenting strategy. In this study particularly it was evident that the use of corporal punishment has implications for the foster placement stability. A child interviewed asserted that, any time he was hit he considered leaving the placement. These are children who were placed into care with backgrounds of abuse among other things. Children who are corporally punished and verbally reprimanded can be a trigger to retraumatize children. This also shows the dynamics of power relations between adults and children in the care giving process. Where adults can use their will to enforce punishments on other humans. This is an infringement on the right of the child. No human being has the right to inflict pains on another human under the guise of punishment. Although, corporal punishment is legally permitted for disciplining children in Ghana and has not been legally abolished in family settings and alternative care settings.

However, the foster care operation manual in Ghana discourages the use of corporal punishment in care. This shows the clash of policies which makes this whole situation a difficult one to tackle. Research has shown that corporal punishment has negative implications for the child and outcomes in adult life.

The study found that foster parents feel a strong sense of entitlement to children in their care and this can be linked to investments they make in children and the limited financial support in catering for the child's needs. Children who have good outcomes in care depends on their adaptation as well as the motivation of the care givers (Moyers et al., 2005). Providing financial support to foster parents can boost their motivations for fostering and limit sense of entitlement to children. Perhaps one will argue that money is not the only thing that is needed in childcare but love amongst other factors. There are no doubts that when foster parents are financially sound, they will derive more joy in the work that they do. Researchers have also found that the higher the motivation of an adult carer the likelihood of a more stable placement Riggs et al. (2009 p.167), and the tendency for that relationship to be long lasting even after placement.

In a country that is risk oriented rather than family oriented with limited social welfare services available for families, children placed are at an extra disadvantage without financial support for foster parents. A situation analysis report of women and children in Ghana showed that, traditional and kinship fostering which has been the dominant type of foster care provision in Ghana indicates that fosterage although helpful for many children is a disadvantage. The reason being that, often foster parents are unable to afford the 'costs of school uniforms, materials, lunch among other needs (Situation Analysis Report, 2011). Another study also found that in about four regions in Ghana fostered children were less likely to have attended school compared to biological children (GLSS6,2014). The findings of my study contrast the above findings in the sense that, children in my study have better standards, such as access to education and educational materials, access to electricity, access to food and physical sense of safety. Nonetheless, foster parents emphasized on the need for extra financial support to lessen the burden of taking care of foster children. This shows that parents could burnout in the care giving process should they at any time have more financial difficulties without support. It can be assumed that the lack of financial support has implications for the lower numbers of foster parents in the foster care system in Ghana.

A complexity in the family dynamics also show that foster care provides children with an identity that perpetuates their sense of connectedness and prevents stigma. At the same time

this provision of identity has implications on children's biological family identity in the event of a family reunification.

The non-disclosure of foster entrance narratives to children can be discussed from various angles. Whilst foster parents are considering the best interest of children there is the argument on how this could affect the future identity of the child should there be family reunification. Besides even if children are unable to be reunited back to the family the child has every right to know of his biological roots. Some foster parents reported that they had not disclosed the identity of children because in the event of an adoption there might be no reason to. This mindset in itself places the child at risk of future consequences when the child finds out about his parentage through some other means. Also, to say, the child has not been given the chance to participate and to voice out their thoughts on issues that concerns their wellbeing. This is in contrast to participatory approaches which emphasize on the need for children to be informed or collaboratively worked with on issues that concerns their wellbeing (Hart, 1992). One-way foster parents can be recruited is through mechanisms such as word of mouth and recommendations Madge (1994, p. 64) as cited by (Andersson ,2001). Seeing the success stories of other families. When parents who have children in care conceal them it could be challenging for children as well as foster parents' recruitment. It is therefore important for education on the public about the benefits of fostering.

6.5 Areas for further research.

This study has provided insights and bridged the knowledge gap of formal foster in Ghana and most importantly given a voice to children who have been side-lined in research for a long period of time. As an exploratory study it is thus essential to provide areas for further research. Further research on family contact in formal foster care is important to understand how this supports the goals of fostering. Also, a study on social workers perspectives and expectations of foster parents is another area that can be investigated. Foster care training and the challenges of trainers is worth researching. Furthermore, a bigger sample size of experiences of children in formal foster care can be studied. As well as a comparative study between the foster care typologies can be investigated to see what works best in the Ghanaian context.

6.6 Implications for policy and practice

In this study, it was common to find other members of the foster parents extended family living together in the same house and who could equally enforce discipline on foster children. This calls on training not just for foster parents but also incorporate foster parents own children and immediate family members in the training programs. More so, a number of studies have

identified the need for foster children's participation in the decision-making process in fostering (Nordenfors, 2016; Twigg & Swan, 2007). When these persons are brought on board in the fostering processes this could go a long way in making the lives of foster children more rewarding in the foster placement.

Parents should be trained on parenting strategies devoid of violence and strict mechanisms put in place to sanction perpetrators. It is also important to train parents on the need for family contact and the goal of reunification should be clearly defined in the foster relationship. Even when it is a foster to adopt so that, caregivers can come to terms with the possibility of family reunification. Also, there should be clear guidelines on what is expected with regards to the renaming of foster children.

Foster parents should be trained to understand the difference between foster care and adoption. Interactions with parents showed they were not fully aware of the difference. On the other hand, there is the need to expedite action to transfer custody to foster parents example the case of Sweden. In Sweden, after a child stays in care for three years irrespective of the status of the biological family, custody of the child is transferred to foster parents (Wissö, Johansson & Höjer, 2019). In this sense foster parents can make important decisions about the life of the foster child without necessarily contacting the birth parents. More so due processes can be followed for adoption completion. But this also means a reduction in the cost of adoption and bureaucracies in the adoption process as some foster parents really lamented on why they had to go through too much stress to adopt. This can be considered at the level of policy.

Financial support to all foster parents is something that should be reconsidered at the level of policy as this can significantly advance the best interest of children as well as achieving fostering goals.

In addition, policy makers should consider amendment of laws with regards to the use of corporal punishment as this method for child up bringing has outlived its purpose.

6.7 Final Conclusions

This study brought into perspective the various happenings in the Ghanaian formal foster families. Children value their placements however there are factors that can be improved to make the goals of foster care a better alternative for children who need these homes.

Although the study sample is numerically small it has produced results which corroborates with other researches. With the research focus on projecting the voices of children and incorporating

children's perspectives, this has supported the right of children to participate whilst providing important information to inform policy and practice.

This research did not set out with a problem focused lens. However, issues such as corporal punishment and poor family contact were highlighted in order to draw the attention of care workers and policy makers to revisit the debate on corporal punishment and to assess its impact on the foster child. And also, to strengthen mechanisms to ensure adequate family contact to support reunification goals of the foster care system in Ghana.

REFERENCES

- Aboim, S., Vasconcelos, P., & Wall, K. (2013). Support, social networks and the family in Portugal: Two decades of research. *International Review of Sociology*, 23(1), 47–67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2013.771050>
- Agyekum, K. (2006). Sociolinguistic of Akan personal names. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 15(2), 206–235.
- Andersson, G. (2001). The motives of foster parents, their family and work circumstances. *British Journal of Social Work*, 31(2), 235–248. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/31.2.235>
- Andersson, G. (2009). Foster children: A longitudinal study of placements and family relationships: Foster children. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 18(1), 13–26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2397.2008.00570.x>
- Annim, S. K., Awusabo-Asare, K., & Amo-Adjei, J. (2015). Household Nucleation, Dependency And Child Health Outcomes In Ghana. *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 47(5), 565–592. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021932014000340>
- Atkinson, R. (1998). *The life story interview*. London, UK: SAGE.
- Biehal, N. (2014). A Sense of Belonging: Meanings of Family and Home in Long-Term Foster Care. *British Journal of Social Work*, 44(4), 955–971. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcs177>
- Blythe, S. L., Jackson, D., Halcomb, E. J., & Wilkes, L. (2012). The Stigma of Being a Long-Term Foster Carer. *Journal of Family Nursing*, 18(2), 234–260. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1074840711423913>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4th ed). Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A., & Burgess, B. (2002). *Analysing Qualitative Data*. Taylor and Francis. <http://qut.eblib.com.au/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=170016>
- Cashmore, J. (2011). Children’s participation in family law decision-making: Theoretical approaches to understanding children’s views. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(4), 515–520. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.05.008>
- Cavazzi, T., Guilfoyle, A., & Sims, M. (2009 - 2010). A Phenomenological Study of Foster Caregivers: Experiences of formal and Informal Support. *Illinois Child Welfare. Volume 5. Number 1*, 125 - 141.
- Chapman, M. V., Wall, A., Barth, R. P., & National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being Research Group. (2004). Children’s Voices: The Perceptions of Children in Foster Care. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 74(3), 293–304. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0002-9432.74.3.293>
- Child and Family Welfare policy*. (2015). Government of Ghana –Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, supported by UNICEF and other local and international organisations and civil society.

- Christensen, P. M., & James, A. (Eds.). (2017). *Research with children: Perspectives and practices* (Third edition). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Christiansen, O., Havnen, K. J. S., Havik, T., & Anderssen, N. (2013). Cautious Belonging: Relationships in Long-Term Foster-Care. *British Journal of Social Work*, 43(4), 720–738. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcr198>
- Collins, R. (2005). *Interaction ritual chains* (2. print., and 1. paperback print). Princeton Univ. Press.
- Corsaro, W. A. (2015). *The sociology of childhood* (Fourth edition). SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed). SAGE Publications.
- Davies, H. (2015). *Understanding children's personal lives and relationships*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Delgado, P., Carvalho, J. M. S., Pinto, V. S., & Oliveira, J. (2017). Carers and Professionals' Perspectives on Foster Care Outcomes: The Role of Contact. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 43(5), 533–546. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2017.1340392>
- Delgado, P., Pinto, V. S., Carvalho, J. M. S., & Gilligan, R. (2019). Family contact in foster care in Portugal. The views of children in foster care and other key actors. *Child & Family Social Work*, 24(1), 98–105. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12586>
- Department of Social Welfare (2015). Care Reform Initiative. Retrieved from http://www.ovcghana.org/what_is_cri.html
- Dunn, D. M., Culhane, S. E., & Taussig, H. N. (2010). Children's appraisals of their experiences in out-of-home care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32(10), 1324–1330. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.05.001>
- Easthope, H., Liu, E., Burnley, I., & Judd, B. (2017). Changing perceptions of family: A study of multigenerational households in Australia. *Journal of Sociology*, 53(1), 182–200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783316635850>
- Eitzen, K., & McIntosh, J. (2004). 'Can I call you mummy?' Weighing political correctness against psychological need in foster care. *Journal of Family Studies*, 10, 273–281.
- Elden S. (2013). "Your child is just wonderful": On ethics and access in research with children. *Journal of comparative Social Work*, 2013/2.
- Fernandez, E. (2007). How children experience fostering outcomes: Participatory research with children. *Child & Family Social Work*, 12(4), 349–359. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2006.00454.x>
- Fernandez, E. (2009). Children's wellbeing in care: Evidence from a longitudinal study of outcomes. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31(10), 1092–1100. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2009.07.010>
- Festinger, T. (1983). *No one ever asked us – a postscript to foster care*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Finch, J. (2007). Displaying Families. *Sociology*, 41(1), 65–81. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038507072284>
- Flasher, J. (1978). Adultism. *Adolescence*, 13(51), 517–523. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/docview/1295889099?pq-origsite=gscholar&imgSeq=1>
- Foster Care Operational Manual*. (2018). UNICEF Ghana, Department of Social Welfare of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection.
- Fox, A., & Berrick, J. D. (2007). A Response to No One Ever Asked Us: A Review of Children's Experiences in Out-of-Home Care. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 24(1), 23–51. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-006-0057-6>
- Frimpong-Manso, K. (2014). Child Welfare in Ghana: The Past, Present and Future. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*. <https://doi.org/10.5901/jesr.2014.v4n6p411>
- Frimpong-Manso, K., Deliege, A., Wilson, T., & Norman, Y. (2019). Residential Childcare in Ghana: Analysing current trends and drivers. *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333651527_Residential_Childcare_in_Ghana_Analysing_current_trends_and_drivers
- Frimpong-Manso, K., Tagoe, I., & Mawutor, S. M. (2020). Experiences of Formal Foster Parents in Ghana: Motivations and Challenges. *Southern African Journal of Social Work and Social Development*, 32(1). <https://doi.org/10.25159/2415-5829/6529>
- Gallagher, M. (2008). Foucault, Power and Participation. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 16(3), 395–406. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157181808X311222>
- Galvin, K. M. (2006). Diversity's impact on defining the family: Discourse-dependence and identity. In L. Turner & R. West (Eds.), *The family communication sourcebook* (pp. 3–21). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gershoff, E. T. (2013). Spanking and Child Development: We Know Enough Now to Stop Hitting Our Children. *Child Development Perspectives*, 7(3), 133–137. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12038>
- Ghana Demographic and Health Survey 2014*. (2015). Rockville, Maryland, USA: GSS, GHS, and ICF International.
- Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 6* (No. 6). (2014). Ghana Statistical Service.
- Ghana Statistical Service (2017/2018) *Snapshot of Key findings of Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 6)* Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/ghana/reports/ghana-multiple-indicator-cluster-survey>
- Gilligan, R. (2000). The importance of listening to children in foster care. In G. Kelly & R. Gilligan (Eds.), *Issues in foster care: Policy, practice and research* (pp. 40–58). London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Graham, A., & Fitzgerald, R. (2010). Progressing children's participation: Exploring the potential of a dialogical turn. *Childhood*, 17(3), 343–359. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568210369219>
- Grant, M. J., & Yeatman, S. (2012). The relationship between orphanhood and child fostering in sub-Saharan Africa, 1990s–2000s. *Population Studies*, 66(3), 279–295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2012.681682>

- Grimm, D., & Darwall, J. (2005). Foster parents: Who are they? *Youth Law News*, XXVI (3), 1-8.
- Guba, E. G., (1981) Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Technology Research and Development* 29 p. 75-91.
- Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. (1994). Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hammersley, M. (1992). 'By what Criteria should Ethnographic Research be Judged?', in M. Hammersley, *What's Wrong with Ethnography*. London: Routledge.
- Hampshire, K., Porter, G., Agblorti, S., Robson, E., Munthali, A., & Abane, A. (2015). Context Matters: Fostering, Orphanhood and Schooling In Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 47(2), 141–164. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021932014000169>
- Hart, R. (1992). Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship. *UNICEF Innocenti Essays*, No. 4, Florence, Italy: International Child Development Centre of UNICEF
- Hart, R. (2008). Stepping Back from 'The Ladder': Reflections on a Model of Participatory Work with Children. In A. Reid, B. B. Jensen, J. Nikel, & V. Simovska (Eds.), *Participation and Learning: Perspectives on Education and the Environment, Health and Sustainability*, (pp. 19–31). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Healy, K. (1998). Participation and Child Protection: The Importance of Context. *British Journal of Social Work.*, 28, 897–914.
- Heaphy, B., & Davies, K. (2012). Critical friendships. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 1(3), 311–326. <https://doi.org/10.1332/204674312X656257>
- Hedin, L. (2014). A sense of belonging in a changeable everyday life - a follow-up study of young people in kinship, network, and traditional foster families: A sense of belonging in a changeable daily life. *Child & Family Social Work*, 19(2), 165–173. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2012.00887.x>
- Hedin, L., Höjer, I., & Brunnberg, E. (2011). Settling into a new home as a teenager: About establishing social bonds in different types of foster families in Sweden. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(11), 2282–2289. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.07.016>
- Hestbæk, A.-D. (2018). The Rights of Children Placed in Out-of-Home Care. In A. Falch-Eriksen & E. Backe-Hansen (Eds.), *Human Rights in Child Protection* (pp. 129–146). Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94800-37>
- Hickmann, M., Adams, B., & Ghana Country core team. (2018). *Assessing Alternative Care for Children in Ghana*. Carolina Population Centre.
- Höjer, I. (2004). What Happens in the Foster Family? A Study of Fostering Relationships in Sweden. *Adoption & Fostering*, 28(1), 38–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030857590402800106>
- Höjer, I., Sebba, J., & Luke, N. (2013). *The Impact of Fostering on Foster Carers' Children*. An International Literature Review. The Rees Centre. Available at https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:5c4eca59-3f43-473a-abb8-f31199b6e59a/download_file?file_format=pdf&safe_filename=HojeretalVoR2013.pdf&type_of_work=Report

International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) & International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). (2004). *Ethics in Social Work: Statement of Principles*. 1–6. Retrieved from http://www.iasw-aiets.org/uploads/file/20130506_Ethics_in_Social_Work_Statement_IFSW_IASSW_2004.pdf.

International Federation of Social Workers (2018). *Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles*. International federation of Social Workers. Retrieved from <https://www.ifsw.org/global-social-work-statement-of-ethical-principles/>

Imoh, A. T.D. (2012). From Central to Marginal? Changing Perceptions of Kinship Fosterage in Ghana. *Journal of Family History*, 37(4), 351–363. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0363199012440081>

Isiugo-Abanihe, U.C. (1983). Child Fostering In West Africa: Prevalence, Determinants And Demographic Consequences (Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria. *Dissertations available from ProQuest*. AAI8316036. <https://repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI8316036>

James, A., & Prout, A. (1997). *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood*. Falmer.

Kuyini, A. B., Alhassan, A. R., Tollerud, I., Weld, H., & Haruna, I. (2009). Traditional kinship foster care in northern Ghana: The experiences and views of children, carers and adults in Tamale. *Child & Family Social Work*, 14(4), 440–449. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2009.00616.x>

Landsdown, G. (2010). Landsdown G. (2010). The realisation of children’s participation rights: Critical reflections. Pp 11-23. London: Routledge. In Percy-Smith, B., & Thomas “*A handbook of children and young people’s participation: Perspectives from theory and practice*”, (pp. 11–23).

Law and Development Associate (LADA) Group. (2018). *Corporal punishment in Ghana: A position paper on the legal and policy issues*. Department of Children, Ministry of Gender Children and Social Protection and UNICEF Ghana.

Lawrence, C. R., Carlson, E. A., & Egeland, B. (2006). The impact of foster care on development. *Development and Psychopathology*, 18, 57–76. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579406060044>

Lindsey, D. and Shlonsky, A. (2008) *Child Welfare Research: Advances for Practice and Policy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Maaskant, A. M., van Rooij, F. B., Bos, H. M. W., & Hermanns, J. M. A. (2016). The wellbeing of foster children and their relationship with foster parents and biological parents: A child’s perspective. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 30(4), 379–395. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2015.1092952>

Mason, J., & Tipper, B. (2008). Being Related: How children define and create kinship. *Childhood*, 15(4), 441–460. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568208097201>

Mawutor, S. (2015). *Examining Foster Care under the Care Reform Initiative: Experiences of Implementers and Foster Parents in Accra*. [University of Ghana, College of Humanities (Centre For Social Policy Studies)]. University of Ghana <http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh>

Mayall, B. (2001). The sociology of childhood in relation to children’s rights. *The International Journal of Children’s Rights*.

- McCredie, G. and A. Horrox (1995) *Voices in the Dark*. London: Allen and Unwin
- McCrystal, P. (2008). Researching children and young people living in residential state care: Hurdles on the path to consent. *Research Ethics Review*, 4(3), 89–94.
- McFadden, E. J., & Ryan, P. (1991). Maltreatment in Family Foster Homes: Dynamics and Dimensions. *Child & Youth Services*, 15(2), 209–232.
https://doi.org/10.1300/J024v15n02_13
- Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection. (2018). *Mapping of Residential Homes for Children in Ghana*. UNICEF Ghana and Department of Social Welfare of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection.
- Mitchell, M. B., Kuczynski, L., Tubbs, C. Y., & Ross, C. (2010). We care about care: Advice by children in care for children in care, foster parents and child welfare workers about the transition into foster care: We care about care. *Child & Family Social Work*, 15(2), 176–185.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2009.00657.x>
- Morgan, D. H. J. (1996). *Family connections: An introduction to family studies*. Polity Press; Blackwell Publishers.
- Morgan, D. H. J. (2011). *Rethinking family practices*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Moyers, S., Farmer, E., & Lipscombe, J. (2005). Contact with Family Members and its Impact on Adolescents and Their Foster Placements. *British Journal of Social Work*, 36(4), 541–559. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bch270>
- Munro, E. R. (2005). Researching Vulnerable Groups: Ethical Issues and the Effective Conduct of Research in Local Authorities. *British Journal of Social Work*, 35(7), 1023–1038.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bch220>
- Nelson, L. R., & Horstman, H. K. (2017). Communicated Meaning-Making in Foster Families: Relationships Between Foster Parents' Entrance Narratives and Foster Child Well-Being. *Communication Quarterly*, 65(2), 144–166.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2016.1215337>
- Nordenfors, M. (2016). Children's participation in foster care placements. *European Journal of Social Work*, 19(6), 856–870. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2015.1084493>
- OHCHR (2015) Committee on the Rights of the Child examines the report of Ghana. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15987&LangID=E>
- Oliver, D. G., Serovich, J. M., & Mason, T. L. (2005). Constraints and Opportunities with Interview Transcription: Towards Reflection in Qualitative Research. *Social Forces*, 84(2), 1273–1289. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2006.0023>
- Owusu, G. A. and Adjei, F.G. (2009) This Place is better than my Home': Anecdotes on child fosterage and child domestic work in three Districts in Northern Ghana. Retrieved from <http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh/handle/123456789/24319>
- Patrick, D., & Galvin, K. M. (2012). Family communication and the foster care experience: The next frontier. Paper presented at the 2012 National Communication Association Conference, Orlando, Florida.

- Petrowski, N., Cappa, C., & Gross, P. (2017). Estimating the number of children in formal alternative care: Challenges and results. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 70, 388–398. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2016.11.026>
- Pittaway, E., Bartolomei, L., & Hugman, R. (2010). ‘Stop Stealing Our Stories’: The Ethics of Research with Vulnerable Groups. *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 2(2), 229–251. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/huq004>
- Reddy, N. and Ratna, K. (2002) *A Journey in Children’s Participation*. Vimanapura: The Concerned for Working Children. Retrieved from <https://www.pronats.de/assets/Uploads/reddy-ratna-a-journey-in-childrens-participation.pdf>
- Republic of Ghana (1960). Criminal Offences Act (29). Accra Retrieved from <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/gh/gh010en.pdf>
- Republic of Ghana (1998). *Children's Act of Ghana (560)*. Accra. Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org/education/edurights/media/docs/f7a7a002205e07fbf119bc00c8bd3208a438b37f.pdf>
- Republic of Ghana (2016). *Children’s Amendment Act of Ghana (937)*. Accra
- Riggs, D. W., Augoustinos, M., & Delfabbro, P. H. (2009). Role of foster family belonging in recovery from child maltreatment. *Australian Psychologist*, 44(3), 166–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00050060903147075>
- Rittner, B., Affronti, M., Crofford, R., Coombes, M., & Schwam-Harris, M. (2011). Understanding Responses to Foster Care: Theoretical Approaches. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 21(4), 363–382. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2011.555654>
- Rodger, S., Cummings, A., & Leschied, A. W. (2006). Who is caring for our most vulnerable children? The motivation to foster in child welfare. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 30, 1129–1142. doi: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2006.04.005
- Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.
- Schofield, G. (2002). The significance of a secure base: A psychosocial model of long-term foster care. *Child & Family Social Work*, 7(4), 259–272. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2206.2002.00254.x>
- Schofield, G., & Beek, M. (2009). Growing up in foster care: Providing a secure base through adolescence. *Child & Family Social Work*, 14(3), 255–266. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2008.00592.x>
- Schofield, G., Beek, M., Ward, E., & Biggart, L. (2013). Professional foster carer and committed parent: Role conflict and role enrichment at the interface between work and family in long-term foster care: Professional foster carer and committed parent. *Child & Family Social Work*, 18(1), 46–56. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12034>
- Shuker, L., Sebba, J., & Höjer, I. (2019). Teenagers in foster care: Issues, themes, and debates from and for practice and policy. *Child & Family Social Work*, 24(3), 349–353. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12650>
- Siminski, P., Chalmers, J., & McHugh, M. (2005). *Foster carers in New South Wales: Profile and projections based on ABS census data*. Sydney, Australia: The Social Policy Research Centre.

- Simons, D. A., & Wurtele, S. K. (2010). Relationships between parents' use of corporal punishment and their children's endorsement of spanking and hitting other children. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 34(9), 639–646. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2010.01.012>
- Skoog, V., Khoo, E., & Nygren, L. (2015). Disconnection and Dislocation: Relationships and Belonging in Unstable Foster and Institutional Care: Table 1. *British Journal of Social Work*, 45(6), 1888–1904. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcu033>
- Smart C., Neal B., and Wade, A (2001). *The changing experience of Childhood*. Blackwell Publisher: Malden
- Smart, C. (2007) *Personal life*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Spencer, L. & Phal, R. (2006) *Rethinking friendship: Hidden solidarities today*, Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Stebbins, R.A. (2001). *Exploratory research in the social sciences*. SAGE. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412984249>
- Storer, H. L., Barkan, S. E., Stenhouse, L. L., Eichenlaub, C., Mallillin, A., & Haggerty, K. P. (2014). In search of connection: The foster youth and caregiver relationship. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 42, 110–117. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.04.008>
- The Children's Society (2015) *Friendships of Children in Care*. Retrieved from <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources-and-publications/friendship-for-children-in-care>
- Thoburn, J. (1994) *Child Placement: Principles and Practices*, 2edn. Arena, Aldershot
- Twigg, R., & Swan, T. (2007). Inside the foster family What research tells us about the experience of foster carers' children. *Adoption & Fostering*, 31(4).
- UNICEF (n.d.) *Child Protection; Solutions* .Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/ghana/child-protection>
- UNICEF, & MOWAC. (2011). *A Situation Analysis of Ghanaian Children and Women: A Call for Reducing Disparities and Improving Equity*. Retrieved from <https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/A%20Situational%20Analysis%20of%20Ghanaian%20Children%20and%20Women%20A%20Call%20for%20Reducing%20Disparities%20and%20Improving%20Equity.pdf>
- UNICEF. (2017). *Children in Alternative Care* Retrieved from <https://data.unicef.org/topic/childprotection/children-alternative-care>
- United Nations General Assembly (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/documents/professionalinterest/crc.pdf>
- Wissö, T., Johansson, H., & Höjer, I. (2019). What is a family? Constructions of family and parenting after a custody transfer from birth parents to foster parents. *Child & Family Social Work*, 24(1), 9–16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12475>
- Yamada-Rice, D. (2017). Using visual and digital research methods with young children. In P. M. Christensen & A. James, *Research with Children, Perspectives and Practices* (3rd ed.). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Young, S., McKenzie, M., Omre, C., Schjelderup, L., & Walker, S. (2014). Practicing from Theory: Thinking and Knowing to “Do” Child Protection Work. *Social Sciences*, 3(4), 893–915. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci3040893>

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Foster children Interview guide

Descriptive characteristics of children in care

- Age
- Sex
- Age at admission
- Number of foster siblings
- Number of biological siblings

Foster Care Family Practices

- Tell me about how a day is like for you?
- What are the main highlights of your week?
- Who would you go to when you have a problem?
- Could you describe the family you are living with now, what is good and what is not so good?
- What are the things you do together with your foster family?
- Can you tell me about some activities you enjoy doing with your foster family?
- Can you tell me about activities you don't enjoy doing with your foster family?
- Can you describe the changes you feel now that you are here with this family?
- How will you describe your place in this family?
- How happy do you feel living with this family?
- What do you think about the future?
- What would you like to happen in the future?
- How long would you like to stay with this family if you had the opportunity to decide?
- How safe do you feel here compared to your birth family?

Relationship with birth family

- Do you keep in touch with your birth family and how?
- How often do you see/ visit your birth family?
- Can you describe what you do when you have contact with your birth family?
- How do you feel after visiting your biological family?
- How do you feel about living with them in the future when you leave your foster home?

Neighbourhood

- How do you perceive your neighbourhood and the school you attend?

- Do you have friends in this new place?
- Do your friends know that you are in foster care?

Challenges and Coping Mechanisms

What are the challenges you face in this family?

How do you deal with these challenges?

Before Coming into Care

- Do you know what brought you to this family?
- How long have you been with this family?
- Did you have a role to play on the decisions that brought you to this family?
- Did you live with any other family aside your biological family before coming to this family?

Perceptions on Foster Care

- Do you know what foster care is?
- What are your views on foster care?
- What do you like about been in foster care?

Practical tools

- Visual methods (Warm up exercise drawing activity and relational mapping activity)

Drawing Activity

Drawing the persons, you consider important in your life? or anything of significance important to you.

Describe what you have in your pictures?

Network Chart

Can you describe your relationship with your foster siblings?

Who would you go to if you have a problem?

Can you tell me about your various relationships and the closest person to you?

Foster Parents Interview Guide

- What were your reasons for deciding to foster?
- How long were you trained?
- How are you supported in the Foster case?
- What would you define as good parenting?
- What are your experiences with children in care?
- What are your thoughts on family reunification?
- What are your expectations of the foster children in care?

Appendix 2: Guardian consent form

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am Tabitha Naa Akuyea Addy, a Ghanaian international student of the European Master's Program in Social Work with Families and Children, at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

As part of my requirements for a master's degree, I am required to do a research and to collect data as well as present a thesis for academic purposes. The above is my research topic and hence the need to involve your child/children in the study. I would be grateful if you would allow your child/children partake in this study.

The consent form is a vital part of this work as the law in my research country, Sweden requires that children below the ages of 15 need the consent of the guardians to participate in the study. This form is designed to document your agreement to allowing your child to participate in the study. Please feel free to answer accordingly, and do not hesitate to contact me for any clarity.

Attached to this will be an information guide providing you with all the details for the study. Kindly feel free to ask any further questions.

Kindly tick the box corresponding to the information provided and later endorse this by appending your signature.

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information form provided
 2. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary, with freedom to withdraw at any time without giving reasons.
 3. I understand that the information gathered will be used for academic purposes and that it may be used for future research-in line with the current study.
 4. I agree that my child can be audio recorded during the process of interview
- Yes
- No

Guardian's name

Signature.....

Date and place.....

Researcher: Tabitha Naa Akuyea Addy

Signature and date

Supervisor //PhD. Monica Nordenfors //Senior Lecturer//Department of Social Work//
Gothenburg University // monica.nordenfors@socwork.gu.se

Contact details of Researcher//Ghana Contact- +233245112035//Sweden Contact-
+46764553151// gusaddta@student.gu.se// tabithanaaakuyeaaddy@gmail.com

Appendix 3: Participant consent form

I am Tabitha Naa Akuyea Addy, a Ghanaian international student of the European Master’s Program in Social Work with Families and Children, at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

As part of my requirements for a master’s degree, I am required to do a field research and collect data as well as present a thesis for academic purposes. The above is my research topic and hence the need for your voluntary participation.

I would be grateful if you would share ideas on your experiences in foster care. Your identity will be protected. This means that no one will know who you are because your real names will not be used in writing the findings. You are also free to withdraw from the research without any consequences. Feel free to let me know if you are interested to participate in this study. Please note that you can either accept or decline to join this study and this will not affect you in anyway.

The consent form is an important part of this work to prove that you agreed to participate. Please do not hesitate to contact me for any questions.

Attached to this is an information guide providing you with all the details for the study.

Kindly tick the box corresponding to the information provided and sign to prove consent to participate;

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information form provided
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary, with freedom to withdraw at any time without giving reasons.
3. I understand that the information gathered will be used for academic purposes and that it may be used for future research-in line with the current study.

4. I agree that I can be audio recorded during the process of interview yes No
5. I understand that my identity will be protected in this research

Participant’s name

Signature.....

Date and place.....

Researcher: Tabitha Naa Akuyea Addy

Signature and date

Supervisor //PhD. Monica Nordenfors //Senior Lecturer//Department of Social Work// Gothenburg University // monica.nordenfors@socwork.gu.se

Contact details of Researcher//Ghana Contact- +233245112035//Sweden Contact- +46764553151// gusaddta@student.gu.se// tabithanaaakuyeaaddy@gmail.com

Appendix 4: Information Guide

My name is Tabitha Naa Akuyea Addy a Ghanaian international student at the Gothenburg University, Sweden. My program of study is European Master's Programme in Social Work with Families and Children. I am currently undertaking a research project titled "***Formal Foster Care in Ghana; The Experiences and Perceptions of foster children and foster parents***" as part of my requirements to obtain a master's degree.

The motivation for doing this research is to better understand how children and foster parents perceive and experience foster care in Ghana to provide additional knowledge in this area from the perspectives of children.

Kindly read the guidelines below carefully.

Why do I want to study children in formal foster care in Ghana?

In Ghana, formal foster care is not common and lots of people do not know about foster care. A research in foster care especially with children will provide information and hopefully provide information to stakeholders on what can be done to ensure the best interest of children in foster care.

How will I benefit from the study as a participant?

There will be no direct benefit from the study for the participant. However, the participant will help provide information on this area as there is scant information on the experiences of Foster children in Ghana.

How will my information collected be handled?

Information will be taken by audio recording if you agree to it. Your information is only for academic purposes although it might be used for future research. This information will be kept on a computer and password protected. Your real names will not be used in recording of the findings and hence no one will know your identity and who said what at any point in time. Your identity will be kept confidential. I will be the only one working with information you provide.

Will I be in trouble if I do not want to participate?

No, you would not be in any trouble if you do not want to participate. This research is voluntary, meaning the decision to be a part solely depends on you. You can either say yes or no and this will not have any consequences for you. Even, if you agree to participate and at any time of the research process you feel that you do not want to go ahead you can quit without giving reasons of why you did so. Although, if you find necessary you can share with me or other participants the reasons for not wanting to proceed if you feel this can help the research process.

Will I be rewarded for participating?

No, you will not be rewarded for participating. However, refreshments and travel costs might be provided should the situation demand for it.

How will the research be done?

The main methods considered for this research is ***Interviews***. Interviews are a one on one face to face discussion with the researcher on your personal experiences in foster care.

Will the research cause me harm?

It is unforeseeable that the research will cause you any harm or have any negative outcomes. The researcher will be guided and will consider all ethical situations to prevent retraumatizing. In the event that this happens the researcher will assist with counselling or connect you to other relevant resources to help you.

How long will the research last and where will it be held?

It is estimated that the research will last for 4 hours including travel time if a Focus Group or Photovoice is used. Interviews will take about 40 minutes to 1 hour and the researcher will meet you at a safe point for interview purposes such as your home, your school or at a point where you and your guardians consider safe. Longer sessions will however be divided into various sessions and if possible, different days based on what is convenient or agreed upon with a child/children.

Thank you for sharing your valued time in reading this guide. Kindly refer to the consent form for further information and agreement to participate in the study.

For any further questions please find below my contact details.

Supervisor //PhD. Monica Nordenfors //Senior Lecturer//Department of Social Work//
Gothenburg University // monica.nordenfors@socwork.gu.se

Contact details of Researcher//Ghana Contact- +233245112035//Sweden Contact-
+46764553151// gusaddta@student.gu.se// tabithanaakuyeaddy@gmail.com