

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
CENTRE FOR MIGRATION STUDIES

**EXPERIENCES OF LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN: THE CASE OF
FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICERS' CHILDREN IN GHANA**

BY

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DECLARATION

I, PRISCILLA ANKOMAH, hereby declare that except for references to other people's work which have been duly acknowledged, this thesis is the result of my independent research conducted at the Centre for Migration Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, under the supervision of Dr. Margaret Delali Badasu. I also declare that as far as I know, this thesis has neither in part nor in whole been published to any other institution for an academic award.

SIGNED.....

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(STUDENT)

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DATE.....

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(SUPERVISOR)



DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the Almighty God, my late mother, Grace Ofori, my beloved husband, Alex Kusi Ankomah, my lovely Children, Grace-Love Ankomah, Godwin Ankomah, Emmanuella Ankomah and my indefatigable Niece Gloria Opoku. I love you all!



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ABSTRACT

Transnational migration has become a reality and is on the increase globally. Most of the parents travel to provide economic and other support for their children and families. As a result of this, millions of children are growing up with single or no parent staying with them. However, children's wellbeing is very dependent on parental care. The roles of parents are delegated to caregivers when they migrate. These have necessitated the concern about the effect of migration on left-behind children. The general objective of the research was to examine the experiences of left-behind children of FSOs. Specifically, it explored the influence of their parents' absence on children's health, education as well as other challenges and their coping strategies. The study was conducted in Accra, Ghana. Snowballing and purposive sampling method were used to recruit the children for the study. In all, fifteen children and five caregivers were interviewed. The data was analyzed thematically.

The results of the study showed that almost all the left-behind children expressed good knowledge about the work of their parents and they were involved in the decision making process of whom to stay with before the parent(s) departure. The caregivers provided the needed support for the left-behind children as a result, they had favorable relationship with them. Furthermore, communication was seen as a medium fostering the relationship with the migrant parents and left-behind children. In addition, the findings of the study indicated that the absence of the parents had both positive and negative influence on the academic performance as well as the health of left-behind children. Also, among some of the challenges mentioned by the caregivers and left-behind children included inadequate support from extended family members, poor finance and poor health.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that the absence of parents have consequences for the health and academic performance of the left-behind children; negative effect on emotional health and positive effect on academic performance. These therefore have influence on the well-being of the children. There is the need for government to enhance bilateral engagement with other countries which do not allow spouses of diplomat to work as this will enable spouse to take their partners as well as children along to postings. In addition psychological counselling should be offered to left-behind family of FSOs (especially children), before the parent leaves the country and during their term of office at post.

ABBREVIATIONS

- FSO - Foreign Service officers
FSR - Foreign Service Regulations

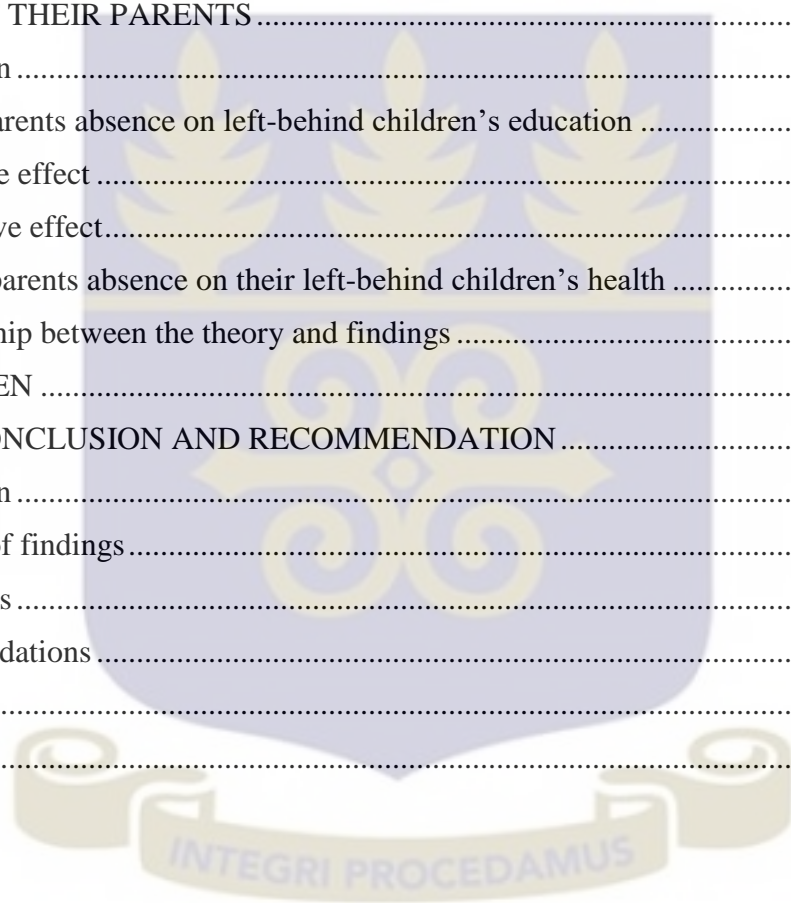


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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

International migration has increasingly become an important feature of globalization, involving nearly 200 million people in 2006 (UN, 2006) and 244 million people in 2015 (UN, 2016). It plays a significant role in the spatial redistribution of people, which is considered as an integral part of daily lives (de la Garza, 2010). People migrate in response to their individual needs, differences in resource distribution and unequal opportunities (Coe, 2012). This gives an indication that globally migrants keep on increasing as people tend to search for better standard of living, employment, pursue further education, move away from conflict areas, bad weather conditions, and among others. The above reasons act as push and pull factors for migrants crossing international borders (IOM, 2010).

However, population control arising from tightening of migration laws such as border control in some countries tend to reduce the flow of people (Beneria et al., 2012). As a result, people migrate and leave their families behind mostly children (Parrenas, 2010). Parents' decision to leave their children behind means the transfer of their roles as best care givers to others. The absence of parents may have implications on the wellbeing of left-behind children (Maruja, 2006). The situation becomes deemed when mothers' instead of fathers' migrate because the former play active role in child care (Asis et al., 2004). Coe (2012) argues that the lives of these children become difficult because of the transfer of the role of child rearing from parents to other people as caregivers. Consequently, life becomes unbearable for these children and studies have shown the plight of children left-behind by migrants (Sanaratna, 2012).

In Ghana, there are mixed findings on the absence of parents on left-behind children's health. Some studies have shown that these children find it difficult to pay their fees at school, drop out of school, while others suffer health risks such as malnutrition (Anarfi, 2003; Coe, 2012). On the contrary, Abutima, (2012) indicated that parents' absence has no effect on their children's education. According to Hoang & Yeoh (2012), the mixed findings make it difficult for migrants to appreciate the changes that occur in the absence of their children.

Migrants become vulnerable in their destination countries particularly when there is limited or no form of protection. They are faced with a lot of challenges such as rejection, the process involved in regularizing their stay, employment, deportation and low status (Taran, 2001). This requires the need to provide protection to them through shared action by countries and International Institutions (Taran, 2001). The destination countries provide protection to these migrants to ensure better conditions of living. In addition, Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) are sent abroad to represent the sending state in the host country as well as ensuring better living conditions of migrants. Of particular concern to these FSOs is the degree to which Foreign Missions of migrant countries of origin take up their responsibility to actively engage in the protection of the human and labour rights of migrant workers. Migrants in crisis at destination countries are often advised to look for their Foreign Missions for assistance. Their functions include:

- Represent the home country in the host country
- Protect the interests of the home country and its citizens in the host country
- Negotiate with the government of the host country
- Monitor and report on conditions and developments in the commercial, economic, cultural, and scientific life of the host country
- Promote friendly relations between the host country and the home country

- Develop commercial, economic, cultural, and scientific relations between the host country and the home country.
- Issue passports, travel documents, and visas (Brandful, 2013)

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Migrants tend to be vulnerable and are left unprotected. Taran (2001) argued that there is no full time and corresponding resource allocated to monitor and promote the protection of migrants at the global front by International Organization and other governmental organizations. The resultant effect may be as a result of the little funds allocated to any organization that is engaged in addressing human rights of migrants. This has necessitated the need for missions abroad to take it upon themselves to protect migrants.

Foreign Service officers (FSOs) are sent on post outside the country. Under the Foreign Service Regulations (FSR) of Ghana, FSOs are expected to go on postings for four years duration from the date the officer arrives at post, unless otherwise directed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Brandful, 2013). However, going on postings sometimes become a challenge to many of the Officers in Ghana as compared to other Public Service Institutions due to the duration of years stayed abroad. Although many FSOs always yearn to go on postings, it sometimes becomes a challenge when they realise the effect it has on their families especially the children.

Sometimes FSOs leave their children behind for four years in the hands of caregivers such as relatives and house helps. The children may experience less bonding with the parent who has been posted. Parents are often compelled to leave their children behind as a result of the cost involved in educating them abroad which is borne by the parents. Parents who take the risk of taking the children along and enrolling them especially in international schools abroad may find it difficult

to save and cater for the children. Moreover, parents who migrate upon return find their children performing poorly at school. They experience greater risk of emotional disorder (Graham & Jordan, 2011).

The left-behind children tend to experience health problems including psychological stress and other problems when their parents migrate (Dreby 2010). The emotional gap of children is likely to be greater between them and their migrant parents (Pribilsky 2004; Parrenas 2008). The use of modern communication technologies and social support networks seem to be positive contributors to the emotional well-being of children left-behind (Asis, 2006; Wen & Lin, 2012). However, research has demonstrated that technology is not sufficient and sometimes makes it difficult for parents to stay in touch regularly with their children. This might generate imperfections and gaps of information, often to the detriment of family relationships (Carling 2008; Hoang & Yeoh 2012). For instance, evidence from India (Rogaly et al., 2002) and China (Fan et al., 2010; He et al., 2012) reveal increased psychological distress and other problems in children with parents who migrate internally and internationally.

Some studies also indicate that migration disrupts parent-child bonding (Smith et al., 2004) and that family reunification does not necessarily restore emotional bonds (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). These factors coupled with others make life unbearable for migrants' children. Sometimes, remittances sent by parents to caregivers do not get to these children and they may find it difficult getting in touch with their parents. The caregivers may report to the parents that their children are doing well while they do not have any knowledge of the situation they are facing at home. These disrupt children living arrangement, education and well-being making them vulnerable to anything that may come their way. (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002).

In addition, studies in Ghana on migration have focused on pattern and flow of migration (Anarfi et al. 2003), determinants of migration (Arthur, 1991; Anarfi et al., 2010), migration and fertility (White et al, 2005) migration and development (Black et al, 2003), Ghanaians abroad and home ties (Tonah, 2007), experiences of children left – behind by migrant parents (Owusu, 2013) and others. These studies have shown that living arrangement by migrant parents has impact on the lives of children left-behind (Abutima, 2012). Consequently, this could lead to other effects on the health and the education of the children left-behind. In addition, there are mixed findings on the wellbeing of children left-behind. Notwithstanding, there are few studies on experiences of FSOs children left-behind leading to an evident gap. These people are unique government officials who take up the responsibility to protect the human rights of migrants and serve as a representative for the sending country in the host country. In the host country, the government of Ghana does not pay the fees of children of FSOs when they are taken abroad. Consequently, the children are left behind in the country. There is therefore the need to look at the experiences faced by these children to bring to bear for parents to make proper arrangement before they travel. The experiences of the migrants’ (one or both parents) children with caregivers and their coping strategies have received less attention in Ghana despite the mixed evidence and this is the gap that the study seeks to fill.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The general objective of the study was to explore the experiences of children left behind by FSOs.

Specific objectives;

- To examine the socio demographic characteristics of left-behind children and caregivers.
- To explore the views of the children left-behind on their parent’s work as FSOs.
- To examine the effect of the absence of the parents on their children’s education and health.

- To explore the relationship between caregivers and children left-behind by these FSOs.
- To examine the coping strategies adopted by the children left-behind by FSOs.

1.4 Research questions

The study addresses the following questions to understand the experiences of children left-behind by FSOs on Missions.

- What living arrangements do FSOs make for their left-behind children?
- What are the experiences of left-behind children of FSOs regarding contact with their parents?
- What are the effects of the absence of the parents on children left-behind's education and health?
- What are the coping strategies adopted by left-behind children and caregivers?

1.4 Relevance of the study

The emigration of Ghanaians to other countries has been a cause of concern as the phenomenon has been on the increase in recent times due to economic hardships and other factors (Anarfi et al, 2003). This has become a topical issue in recent times due to the effect of migration on health, families among others. In order to protect and foster the relationship between immigrants and their home governments as well as between host and home country governments, diplomats are sent abroad for such purposes.

Studies have focused on children left-behind as a result of parental migration. However, majority of these studies focused their attention on the economic benefits of migration (Appiah, 2003;

Tetteh, 2008). This study however seeks to examine the experiences of left-behind children of FSOs a category of migrants who are responsible for the welfare of the various kinds of migrants at the destination country.

In Ghana, Foreign Service officers are sent to missions abroad to assist migrants and ensure good rapport among migrants, home country and host country. These officers leave their children at home under caregivers who may be concerned about the welfare of their children. As a result, the study is very significant as it seeks to unearth the experiences of children left-behind by FSOs abroad.

The study examines the experiences of left-behind children which would serve as a reference document for policy recommendation for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration. In addition, the findings of the study would provide research evidence for policy adoption concerning FSOs. This would help to design appropriate interventions that would support FSOs. Lastly, it will add up to literature to help advance the cause of knowledge on left-behind children in Ghana, West Africa and beyond.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the relevant literature on the left-behind children. It highlights the views of children's on parents work, discusses the relationship between caregivers and left-behind children, identifies the coping strategies of children, review on Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration in Ghana as well as a theory explaining the concepts of left-behind children. The chapter ends with a summary of the review.

2.1 International migration

Migration is not a new phenomenon, but has become a global issue in the twenty-first century, due to the massive movement of people from one country to another. Consequently, the incidence of migration is of increase and this is fueled by opportunities, inequality and forces of globalization. Globally, there were about 173 million migrants in 2000 and this increased to 222 million in 2010 and 244 million in 2015. The majority of the world's migrants reside in high income countries such as United States of America, Germany, Russian federation and United Kingdom (UN, 2016).

Kwankye *et al* (2009) defined migration as movement of people resulting in the change of geographical location bounded by time and space. This could be internal or international depending on the boundary of the migrants' movement. International migration occurs when people move from one country to another. The dominant form of international migration is the movement of people from developing countries to developed countries (Akokpari, 2000; Koc & Oman, 2004).

Traditionally, international migration was viewed to have an adverse effect on the sending countries, but is now seen as a tool towards development in both the host and sending countries

(Black & king, 2004). Migration as a component of population change is essential for socioeconomic and social life, which also can be beneficial to the migrants and the host countries if there are measures to manage migrants well.

People migrate for several reasons and among some of the factors include search for employment opportunities, family reunification, access to health care and social amenities, education, environmental and political reasons (Card, 2005). Migration within the Africa continent dates back to the past before the coming of the whites. Adepoju (2006) explained that Africa's migration history is dynamic and rooted in historical antecedents. The major interaction (form of migration) existed between the West and the North Africa was through the trans-Sahara route. Exchange of scholars, religious clerics, and wars between tribal groups over resources were the cause of migration (Boahen, 1966). With the arrival of the Europeans, routes of international migration were disrupted and new paths were created first through the slave trade and later colonization connecting Africa to the rest of the world (Boahen, 1966). Due to migration measures policies and constraints, the onset of migration among Africans was largely informal and undocumented, making it difficult to know the number of people who have migrated. Notwithstanding, there is an evidence of an increase in migration, thus from developing countries to developed countries, or from developing to developing countries and from developed to develop countries with little prospect of migrants returning (Akokpari, 2000)

In Ghana, migration predates colonial time and has become increasingly extra regional thus movement beyond the continent (Quartey, 2009). The migration profile of the country between 1996 and 2005 showed that about 18.6% of the population had travelled to different countries and professionals dominated the early departure of Ghanaians abroad (Jaspers Faijer, 2009). Twum-Baah (2005) indicated that political and historical ties influence the departure and direction of

migrants. In the past, the major destination of Ghanaians was United Kingdom but the trend has changed to countries such as United States of America, Netherlands, Germany and Italy (Twum-Baah, 2005). In a similar situation, Anarfi et al., (2000) emphasise that between 1950 and 1960's, the destination for Ghanaian migrants was not only within the sub-region of Africa but Europe and America were also major destinations. About 33 countries according to the 2008 Ghana Migratory Profile hosted Ghanaian migrants.

Anarfi et al (2003) identified four distinct phases of international migration in Ghana. The first period occurred before 1960 where Ghana was a destination for migrants from most neighboring West Africa countries who come and work while international movement involved small number of people who were mainly professionals travelling to the United Kingdom and other part of the world. The second was around 1970 where Ghana experienced a period of economic hardship and falling standard of living. The majority of Ghanaians left for neighboring West Africa countries particularly Nigeria and Cote d'voire. Most of them were unskilled persons. Between 1980 and 1990 was the third phase. This period witnessed emigration of unskilled, skilled and semi-skilled labour. At the fourth stage, there was a period of intensification and diasporization of Ghanaians from 1990s. Ghanaians left for West Africa countries, Europe and North Africa. There was a decline in the destination to West Africa Countries.

2.2 Gender, migration and influence of migration on children left-behind

Globally, migration varies greatly among men and women, between and within countries with variations between developed and developing countries. Generally, in the past, more men than women migrate and the case is different in both developing and developed countries (Pessar, 2005). The phenomenon is changing and current evidence has shown that there are more women migrating to other countries than men. In Europe and Northern America, female migrants

predominate men (UN, 2016). The decision of parents leaving their children behind marks the transfer of power from them to caregivers. Consequently, the situation becomes problematic when mothers leave; their departure changes the organization of family life and structure than migration of fathers (Asis, 2006).

Transnationalism is an emerging phenomenon which is defined as “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch *et al*, 1994:7). Furthermore, Mazzucato (2008) explained transnational migration as multiple ties and interaction that connect people or institution across internationally. This therefore includes the involvement of the migrant in the activities at his/her host and origin countries. It therefore establishes a bi-relationship between the migrant and people of the origin state (Mazzucato, 2008). A major issue associated with the transnational migrant is transnational child raising arrangements. Studies have shown that transnational migrants keep in touch with families through remittance, long distance communication and parenting (Dreby, 2010; Coe, 2011). In Ghana, Dankyi (2011) found that there is no adverse effect on children when there is parental and children separation. This is due to fosterage which is dominant and incorporated in the care system. The fostering system enables caregivers to take care of children well despite the absence of the parent(s). Consequently, migrants who do not explicitly arrange for their children get caregivers within the extended family to take care of them (Dankyi, 2014). On the other hand, according to Parrenas (2005), migrants face emotional problems and are of guilt of not taking care of the children. This therefore affects the wellbeing of the children as well. Parrenas (2001) study in Filipino explained that mothers’ inability to take care of their children is seen as very painful and their inability to meet the gender - based nurturing expectations of their children as well as following culturally and ideological-inscribed duties of the families.

Transnational migration of men increases the responsibilities for women, difficulty with disciplining children as well as loneliness and isolation (Castro, 2002; Hugo, 2000; Skeldon, 2003). The trend of men travelling only has changed, women also migrate and leave their husbands and children behind. Studies have found that fathers partially or fully take the role of domestic work and care giver with the departure of mothers (Assis *et al*, 2004; Pingol 2003). Asis (2006) used children and families' survey data in Philippians and noted that when mothers migrate, fathers act as the primary care givers and they exert minimal participation in care giving. This makes children intensely feel the absence of their mothers making them feel emotionally dislocated. The study also compared children with both parents around with those whose parents have migrated. The children of migrated parent (s) feel jealous and unsecured. Further the departure of either mother or father has consequence in the wellbeing of the child (ren).

Psychological, studies have found that children left-behind in the care of either the mother or father had poorer psychological wellbeing. In Indonesia and Thailand, children left-behind in the care of the mother appear to have a greater risk of emotional disorder (Graham and Jordan, 2011). On a different note, Parrenas (2008) indicates that when Filipino men migrant, they maintain traditional gender division in the host country, as a result fathers are able to exercise control over their children by instilling disciplines in them from afar. Battistella and Conaco (1998) argue that when fathers instead of mothers migrate, the effect of migration on children reduces and remittance from fathers helped to improve the conditions of children. Contrary, Jampaklay (2006) indicates that there is a negative consequence on educational outcome on children left-behind.

In Ghana, a study by Owusu (2013) on transnational migration revealed that parental migration affects everyday life of children left-behind. They go through a lot of experiences while some get support from others. In addition, gender also manifest in the work engages by left-behind children

to earn a living. For instance boys are engaged in activities that require the use of physical strength while girls are involved in less physical strength work such as selling. On the contrary, Mazzucato argued that child fostering is a normal practice in Ghana. Parents give out their children to others (family or non –family members) to take care of them in their absence, children left-behind may not be affected much. The situation is such that child care is not a responsibility of biological parents only but a communal care.

2.3 Care and living arrangement for left behind children left-behind

With the increased participation of women in the labour force and migration, good caregivers are very central to the wellbeing of left-behind children and necessary for the maintaining of transnational migration (Mazzucato & Schan, 2011). Migration of parents either father or mother disrupts the care giving arrangement for children. The absence of mothers' generates varying degree of displacement, disruptions and changes in caregiving arrangement (Hoang et al., 2015). As this happens, children also experience changes in the material, emotional and other care arrangement received (Hoang et al., 2012). Consequently, family structures are affected creating room for other members to take over the responsibilities and roles of migrants (Hugo, 2002; Gamburd, 2000). On the other hand, when mothers travel and leave the husband behind, the care arrangement and giving is assisted by the extended family members. Parrenas (2005) identified that children maintaining 'biological-based views on mothering' may see the effort of the person who takes over from their parent as inadequate. The absence of parents may still pose a challenge to the children. Again, the eldest daughter may assume the responsibilities or the role of taking care of her siblings; do housework and make decisions for the wellbeing of the family. Not all girls or daughters take the responsibility of the heavy burden acting as mothers; some reject while others take the responsibility and readjust their lives to act in their mother's absence

In Vietnam, Hoang and Yeoh (2012) found out that fatherhood comprises of breadwinning and childcare. Men take on caregiving role when their wives migrate. Similar findings have been found in Bangladesh, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, where fathers have been identified as the main care givers and take the responsibility of care giving in the absence of their wives (Asis et al., 2004; Chantavich 2001; Gamburd 2000). Interestingly, Sri Lankan men do not openly assume the status of child-rearing tasks because it threatens their masculinity. However, a study by Gamburd (2000) identified that more men actively take part in household activities than reported. This means that they underreport due to the stigma or emotional stress attached to it.

The extended family plays critical role in caring for children mostly in developing countries. In Philippines, Battistella and Conaco (1998) emphasized that the contribution of extended family is very crucial during the upbringing of children when parents leave. This gives parents the chance to migrants since they are assured of someone taking care of their children. On other point, grandparents also take the responsibility of child caring in the absence of parents, mostly in cases when fathers are unable to take care of the children in the absence of their wives (Senaratna, 2012). In Poland, grandmothers are considered as reliable and devoted caregivers because they do not only take in charge of left-behind children but young fathers as well by acting as caretakers in the absence of their wives (Lutz & Palenga-Mollenbeck, 2012). The Latinos are very careful about who takes care of their children when they are away (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). Pantea (2012) argue that grandmothers in Romania intensively involve themselves in caregiving by playing multiple roles; act as caregivers, solve problems in family and give emotional support to their migrant daughters. Most of the wives prefer their biological parents taking care of their children than the husband's mother because they believe that their parents would be able to take

care of the children better than the husband's parent. Parents sometimes return home to find out that their children have been pampered by grandmothers than themselves.

In Filipino, migrants continue to bear much responsibility of child care despite their absence. They get connected to the children through phone calls and other means of communication. This helps them to succeed in establishing bond with their families and emotional ties at a long distance (Asis, 2002). Hoang et al (2015) indicated that when this happens children feel sorry for their parents, behave well both in school and at home to compensate their parents sacrifice abroad. They do all these things not to make their parents regret about the decision of travelling. This engagement enhances the confidence children have in their parents.

In Ghana, a study by Appiah (2003) in Amansie East District showed that parents who migrate to Cote D'voire secretly travel hence are unable to make necessary arrangement for the care of the children. The lives of the children are left in their own hands and may be taken care of by other members of the family. This makes life difficult especially in cases where parents failed to remit. Tetteh (2008) study in Ghana indicated that children in boarding school also miss their parents as a result efforts are made by care givers and parents through remittance to make life bearable for them.

Jingzhong & Lu (2011) draws data from 10 rural communities in China with 400 children to explore the deep impact of rural parents' migration on the care giving and nurturing of children left-behind. The findings of the study showed that there are multiple impacts, mostly negative on the lives of children left-behind. Children have increased loads, little study tutoring and supervision and an unmet need of parental affection. The basic daily needs of children sometime become problematic since the surrogate caregivers, mostly the elders are sometimes exhausted

with their livelihood maintenance. Children feel emotional for the absence of the parents due to the poor care they receive from caregivers.

An important determinant of how children experience separation is age. When parents migrate at a younger age of their children, the relationship between them could be weak and children may not have real memories of parents (Schmalzbauer, 2004). For instance, a study by Dreby (2010) in Mexico found that experiences of teenagers and non-teenagers differ; there is much distress among teenagers than non-teenagers when their parents depart. In addition, parents who spend enough time with their children before leaving tend to have strong memories about them and display strong emotional connection (Carling et al., 2012). Parents use a lot of medium to stay in touch with their children as a way of reassuring them that in their absence they care about them. Although regular communication may help parents maintain a virtual presence in the family home, it does not always provide the intimacy usually attained through day-to-day physical interactions (Hoang & Yeoh 2012). Remittances are sent by migrant parents to take care of the children to secure better lives and this may not be enough (de la Garza, 2010). The lives of these children become unbearable in the hands of caregivers. Concern has been raised on the situation of these children most importantly on their schooling and health care needs and issues affecting their personal and social development (Coe, 2012).

In Ghana, Coe (2011) identified that altruism and intergenerational reciprocity where a child take care of the adult in their old age are among the primary reasons why people tend to care for children. Dankyi's (2014) study in Greater Accra and Kumasi indicated that care for left-behind children is usually performed by kin and is mostly women who are delegated to perform this function. They operate in the home country and act according to the norms of local parenting practices thus committing their time and resources and emotions to take care of the children. Also,

economic status of the caregiver plays a major role in the stability of the care received by children. Being able to access enough resources help the care giver to take care of the children well. She further identified child fostering as a major reason why parents are able to leave their children behind and travel. This is integrated in the Ghanaian care system which makes it possible for extended family to take care of children of migrant parents. Despite the fact that care giving is provided mostly by the kin group, she found out that there was an emerging trend of hiring people to provide services for left-behind children while more men were venturing into the role of providing care giving.

2.4 Views of children on parents' work and travelling abroad

In Filipino, a study by Asis (2006) showed that, children were happy and understands the absence of their parents migrating. They explained that parent had to travel in order to support and prepare better place for them. Children of parents who had been working abroad for a longer time said that they are used to the absence of their parents. Dreby (2007) also argued that children left-behind may be powerful or powerless; they may have little influence on the decision of their parents' migration and may accept the decision. Reyes (2007) argued that children views on migration depend on their age and cognitive development. On the cognitive development, young children see migration as abandonment by their parents while adolescent may be resentful or receptive. With regards to age, acceptance of parents' migration is accepted by children who were less than five years when their parents were travelling because no strong bond was established. Children between the ages of 6 and 16 years find it difficult to accept their mother's absence because of the strong bond that was established before the departure of the mother.

2.5 Relationship between caregivers and children left-behind

Studies have shown that caregivers especially females' lack the legitimacy to impose their strict discipline on left-behind children despite the emotional attachment they may have for the children (Lutz & Palenga-Mollenbeck, 2012). Using ethnographic research approach, Moran-Moran-Taylor (2008) provided supporting evidence that there is a social relationship that develops between caregivers and children. Consequently, they are able to identify the emotional costs of these arrangements, as a result children are properly taken care of. Studies have found that children left-behind enjoy the care arrangement made by the parents and are able to have strong relationship with care givers (Parrenas, 2005). Hoang et al. (2015) identified that children receive quality care from caregivers and are able to bond not with care givers alone but children of care givers. Again, there is a strong bond between caregivers and children left-behind. This bond enables migrant(s) to interact with their children. Children are reminded, given the chance and are sometimes convinced to talk to their parents when they are not in the mood (Hoang & Yeoh, 2012).

In Ghana, Dankyi (2014) argued that caregivers dedicate themselves in providing care for left-behind children. This helped to ensure very good relationship between care givers and the children. Again, the results of the study showed that most of the caregivers were kin and were women. Notwithstanding, there were also domestic caregivers who take care of the left-behind children. Fostering as an integral part of the care system in Ghana help caregivers to have greater control to raise children left-behind. In addition caregivers aim at providing physical and emotional needs of the children in their care as well as protecting migrants from anxieties.

2.6 Absence of parents on left-behind children's education

The absence of parents has both positive and negative consequences on children left-behind in all the sphere of their lives. As a way of helping children left-behind to perform in their academics,

migrant parents send remittance to the caregivers to take of the expenses of their children in school in Bangladesh (Kuhu, 2006). Similarly, In Indonesia, left-behind children are most often put into private schools where teachers take care of left-behind children. This enables the left-behind children to receive the best form of education as a way of not feeling the absence of their parents. Parents remit care givers to ensure that this is done and the children are free from distractions in their academics (Meier, 2004).

Jampaklay (2006) recorded some of the negative consequences on parental absence and children's school enrollment using evidence from a longitudinal study in Kanchanaburi, Thailand. The findings of the study indicated that the absence of parents has negative impact on the enrollment of children in school. The study further revealed that school dropout among children is high in the absence of mothers than fathers. This is because the gender role of mothers in the home in providing ultimate care is enforced when they are around while fathers are not likely to provide the care that mothers give. Battistella and Conaco (1998) reported that children of migrants' parents performed badly academically as compared to children with non-migrants parents. This could be as a result of inadequate support they may get from the care givers. In a cross sectional study by Women's Federation of Meishan City in Sichuan province showed that left-behind children have high school dropout rates, poor academic performance and problems in socialization and psychological development (Biao, 2007).

In Philippines, using an interview, Parrenas (2005) identified that not all left-behind children are prone to emotional damage associated with transitional families. Children feel that they are not abandoned because parents make consistent efforts to show concern to their children while away. In addition, there is a support from extended kin group to help children feel that they are not neglected or abandoned. In Latin America, Artico (2003) indicated that the absence of parents

become like a business exchange “commodity” between parents and left-behind children where the love between them changed from unconditional to conditional. The commodification of the relationship makes it difficult for the parent to have a good relationship with the child after reunion. Similarly, Fan *et al*, (2010) used a cross sectional data to study the emotional and behavioral problems of left-behind children in China. The findings of the study showed that they are at risk of developing emotional behavior problems, particularly if they are left-behind at an early stage in their lives, for longer periods in the care of young caregivers or non-relatives with poor education and low socioeconomic status.

Gianneli and Mangiavacchi (2010), used detailed information drawn from Living Standard Measurement Survey for 2005 and applied multiple choice model to evaluate the school progression of older children and adolescents. The results of the study showed that parental migration has a negative consequence for school attendance in the long term. Left-behind children drop out from school due to low effort in monitoring the attendance of school by care givers. The absence of parents may lead to psychological costs and change the decision making process within the household which possibly might reduce the time left-behind children spend in school-related activities.

In Mexico, McKenzie and Rapoport (2006) examined the impact of migration on educational attainment among the rural Mexicans. Historical migration rates by state instrument were used to estimate the effect of migration on educational attainment. The results of the study showed that there is a negative effect of migration on school attendance and attainment among 12 to 18- year old boys and 16 to 18 -year old for girls. A further analysis using four (IV) censored ordered probit showed that living in a migrant household lowers the chances of girls and boys completing high

school. Also, the negative effect of migration on schooling for younger girls is reduced by mothers with low education. Among the rural children, family migration depresses educational attainment.

Lu (2012) used a longitudinal data from China on Health and Nutrition Survey to examine the consequences of out migration for children's education. Family migration strategies and distinguished various types of migration in China such as sibling migration and different forms of parental migration were taken into account in the study. The findings show that siblings' migration provide benefits for left-behind children's education especially for girls and children at middle-school levels. However, parental migration was found to have a negative association with children's educational outcomes. Migration has not given the educational prospect that migrant parent wished for their children. There was a difference in the disruptive effect; younger children were more prone to the effect of parental out-migration than older children.

On the contrary, using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the results of Abutima (2012) indicate that parental absence does not negatively have influence on left-behind children's educational performance in Ghana. The majority of the children believed that parent(s) absence does not affect their concentration in class rather they are always either at home or in a classroom studying as a result their performances increased. The caregivers provide necessary attention to children left-behind and this helps them in their academic performance.

The findings from the literature indicate that there is conclusive evidence of parental absence on left behind academic performance. Studies have found both negative and positive effects on academic performance (Abutima, 2012; Gianneli & Mangiavacchi, 2010). However, most of the studies point to the negative than positive effects. Again, the findings of the studies could emanate from the context of environment. Most of the studies done in Europe and Asia indicated negative performance while in Africa specifically Ghana, it had positive or no effect (Abutima, 2012).

2.7 Absence of parents on left-behind children's health

Research has highlighted the effect of migrants on the health of left-behind children. The concern has been how separation from parents affect the psychological, social and emotional development of children left-behind. In Sri Lanka, Wickramage *et al* (2015) used a cross sectional data to study the risk of mental health and nutritional problems of left-behind children of international labour migrants. The findings of the study revealed that 2 in every 5 left-behind children had mental disorders. In addition, a study in Moldova by Salah (2008) showed that left-behind children are not given the needed care as a result receive poorer quality food. They are also exposed to alcohol consumption, drug abuse, sexual abuse due to inadequate supervision, peer pressure and inadequate financial support received from parents and caregivers. Another study found that in Nairobi, children left-behind are vulnerable to cold, cough, stomach pains and loss of appetite (Konseiga *et al.*, 2009).

Graham and Jordan (2011) identified in their study on the impact of the psychological wellbeing of left-behind children in four Southeast Asian countries that children of migrant fathers in Indonesia and Thailand are more likely to have poor psychological wellbeing compared to children in non-migrant households. As found by Parrenas (2002) in his study, the wellbeing of children is affected by their parents' departure. They experience loneliness and become reserved. In terms of basic needs provision, children whose both parents have migrated get more basic needs than those with only migrating fathers. Also children whose mothers have migrated tend to have difficulty in academic performance and have poor emotional and physical health.

Using a cross sectional data among middle school students in China to assess the impact of parental migration on health status and health behaviors among left-behind adolescent school children. Gao (2010) found that about 18.1% of left-behind children had their parents working from home. The

study concluded that there are risky unhealthy behavior that these children are likely to find themselves in. Left-behind children were at risk of skipping breakfast, higher level of physical inactivity, internet addiction, smoking tobacco and taking alcohol. These children were found to be unlucky and likely to commit suicide.

Lee (2011) examined parental migration and left-behind children's welfare in rural China. The results of the study showed that children of left-behind parent had low enrollment rate and years of schooling compared to children whose parents have not migrated. They were also more likely to develop smoking habits. Children mental health and physical wellbeing were likely to be affected

Also, Hilderbrandt and McKenzie (2005) used a nationally representative demographic survey data to explore the impact of international migration on child health outcomes in rural Mexico. The findings showed that children in migrant households are found to have lower rates of infant mortality and higher birthweight. Migration raises health knowledge in addition to the direct effect on wealth. Consequently, the wealth and health knowledge impact and reduce mortality among children. The findings further showed that preventive health care such as vaccinations and breastfeeding were less likely to be utilized for children in migrants' households.

Jia and Tian (2010) indicated that children who are left-behind are likely to experience loneliness. The severity was among children who were raised by grandparents, having poor economic status, bad relationship and low frequency of communication with parents. Moreover, children with a higher risk of severity of loneliness are those with poor relationship with parents. The study concluded that children are at a higher risk for loneliness.

The above literature reviewed indicated that parental absence affects the health of the left-behind children. This affects them through their emotional and psychological wellbeing. Children feel loneliness and are emotionally disturbed due to the absence of their parent. Consequently, they become vulnerable and develop other health problems such as mental disorder. Again, the evidence on the health of children has largely been conclusive that there is a negative effect on the health of left-behind children.

2.8 Coping strategies

A study by Liang (2004) in Jichun County among students showed that more than half of the students who are left-behind had difficulties adapting to left-behind life. Boyden and Mann (2005) identified that as a way of children coping with their mothers' absence, they rely on their own capacities as individuals. Parrenas (2005) identified that Filipino parents and children resort to gift giving and communication as the means of coping. Among the communication types used include phone calls and daily text messages that enable parents to unite and bond with their children. Again, children adopt immature coping strategies such as avoidance and self-accusation when they are faced with negative events in everyday life (Yang, 2007; Duan & Yan, 2007). According to Ye and Zhang (2008), such negative strategies could lead to mental health problems among children left behind.

2.9 Summary

In conclusion, this section reviewed different reports and studies to demonstrate everyday experiences of left-behind children. While offering limited discussions on the findings on some few studies, these highlights the diverse impacts of parental absence on the wellbeing of children left-behind in almost every sphere of their lives. Effects of parental absence on children left-behind health and education were reviewed. Again, living arrangements as well as coping strategies were

also reviewed. The findings of the studies show that there is inconclusive evidence on children's education. On the health of the children, most studies indicated that parental absence affects the health of children and the effect may be as a result of inadequate supervision and attention by caregivers. Furthermore, the coping strategies developed by children and caregivers enable them to cope with daily challenges. The transnational and family theories helped to explain the dynamics associated with the plight of left behind children.

2.10 Theoretical background of the Study

Various theories can be linked to explain experiences of children left-behind by migrant parents thus FSOs. Some of the theories include family system, social protection, transnationalism, children agency theory and self-differentiation theory. The theories adopted to explain the background of the study are family system and self-differentiation. Both theories were developed by Bowen Murray (1978).

2.10.1 The family system theory

The family system theory views the family as an emotional unit which connects the members together (Bowen, 1978). The connectedness makes members of the family function and depends on one another. Consequently, people help one another as they pay attention, support and reach out to each other's needs, expectations and upset. Due to the connectedness and interdependency within the family, a change in one person's function will lead to a change in the functioning of others. This implies that people cannot function well when they are isolated from one another. It is through the support of the family that they function, define their capabilities and have access to support.

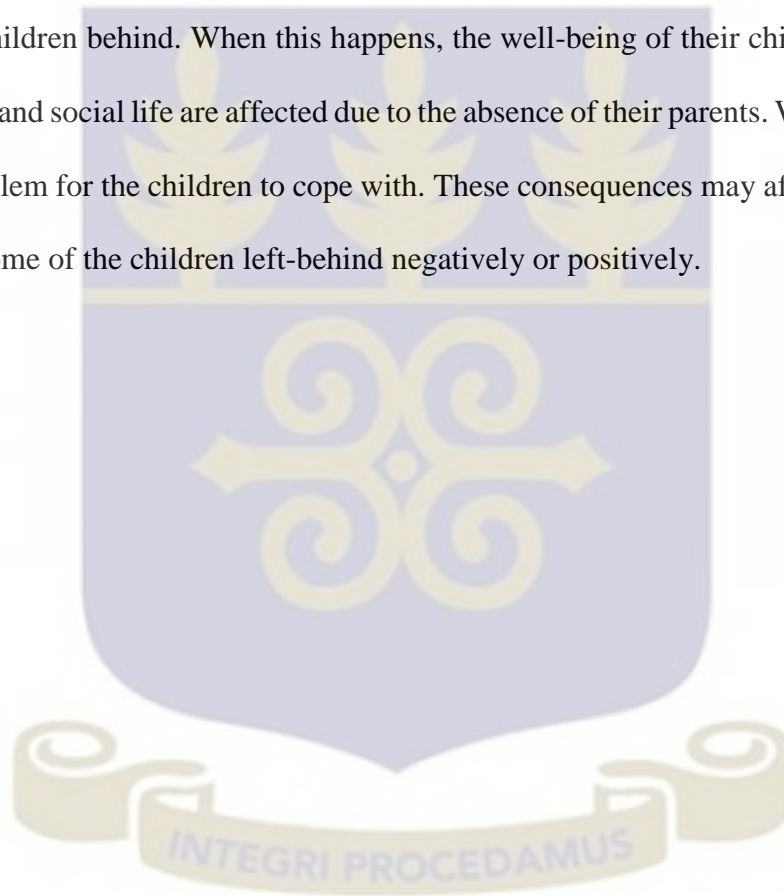
Linking the theory to this work, the best way for an individual or people to function or build up is to stay together. The connectedness help to build a relationship and develop life. Migration of parent (s) breaks the unity and connectedness which linked the family together to receive support from each other. When this happens, the family experiences a change and functioning of responsibilities. The migration of parents detaches the left-behind children from their parents. They are left in isolation which makes them difficult to receive support from their parents. When this happens, they get distracted and are affected in their wellbeing such as health, education and other aspects of life. Children tend to have positive or negative experiences depending on the relationship they have with parents as well as caregivers. These experiences are shaped by the connectedness of the members within the family as well as interdependency. Children with negative experiences find it difficult to define their capabilities and have access to support while others with good experience are able to define their capabilities and have access to support. As a result of these, it becomes difficult for the children to cope with the challenges that they may face.

2.10.2 Self differentiation.

On the other hand, the self-differentiation theory also explains the ability of an individual to think and function while staying together. This serves as a basis for the understanding of the maturity of an individual from childhood to adulthood. The best way for an individual to build himself is to stay connected or together with one's original family. Bowen (1978), further argued that, the basic building block of a family is inborn, but the development of an individual "self" is determined by the family relationship during childhood and adolescence stages.

The theory implies that the best way for an individual to function is to stay together as a family, when there is a breakdown or disruption of the family, an individual within the family suffers.

Applying this to the work, when parents have not migrated but are staying together with their children, they may develop the concept of “self” and become less differentiated. On the other hand, left-behind children are disrupted and are not able to function well when they are isolated from their parents. The theory explains that individuals cannot function well in isolation. Migration of parents therefore tends to have consequence on the lives of their children. Migration is one of the ways that disrupt the relationship between families. Foreign Service personnel (parents) migrate and leave their children behind. When this happens, the well-being of their children such as their health, education and social life are affected due to the absence of their parents. When this happens, it becomes a problem for the children to cope with. These consequences may affect the health and educational outcome of the children left-behind negatively or positively.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

3.0 Introduction of methodology

The techniques employed in conducting any research can considerably affect the results of the study. It is therefore very necessary to adopt and apply reliable methods to ascertain the necessary information for analysis and results (Kumekpor, 2002). In view of this, the section discusses appropriate methods and techniques that were used for the study, including research design, study area, sample and sampling technique, data collection method, analysis and ethical consideration.

3.1 Research design

This study employed qualitative research method to solicit for responses as it perceives lived experiences as a product of social construction (Bryman, 2008). In addition, qualitative method seeks to tap into individual experiences by providing an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon through which they are reconstructed (Silverman, 2011). As a way of using this method, it helped to explore range of opinions of left-behind children of migrants (FSOs) and their caregivers' experiences. However, secondary information from books, journals among others were used as an additional sources of information.

3.2 Study Population

The study was conducted in Accra. It is the national capital and located in the southern part of Ghana. It is the smallest of the 10 administrative regions in Ghana and has the highest number of employees in the formal sector. The region is densely populated with an area of 3,245 square kilometer (1.4%) of the total lands area of Ghana. There are very good international schools with boarding facilities for FSOs children and other professionals. Accra is chosen for the study due to its known diverse groups of employees whom this study hopes to cover. Again, it is the

headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration where the sample of the study was drawn from.

The target population of the study consisted of children of Foreign Service officials who are on mission from one year and beyond. Out of this, children aged 15 to 20 years were sampled as well as their caregivers for the study.

3.3 Sampling Technique

The study adopted snowball and purposive sampling method in recruiting interviewees for the study. Snowball method was used as a result of the inability of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration to release the list of officers at post due to the confidential nature of the document. As a result, identifying the children of FSO's was difficult because of the nature of the work of their parents and consent by caregivers. With the snowball sampling method, an interviewee was asked if he/she knows another family of migrant Foreign Service Officer, and this continued to the time all interviewees were recruited for the study. In addition, after identifying the families, purposive sampling method was used to select the children and caregivers. According to Babbie (2003), purposive sampling helps to select a sample based on the knowledge of a population, its elements and purpose of study. After identifying the families, the children and caregivers were interviewed.

3.4 Sample size

The sample for the study was twenty (20) interviewees comprising fifteen (15) children and five (5) caregivers. For the purposes of this study, children are defined as any person from 15 to 20 years. Children below fifteen (15) years were not chosen because of recall bias and their inability to express themselves well due to their low maturity level. Children, who are fifteen years and

above are mostly considered as older and they will be in a better position to give a vivid account of their experiences. The caregivers were selected purposely based on their relationship with the children left-behind and the officials abroad.

3.5 Data collection

In-depth interviews were conducted with respondents using Interview guide. The interview schedule allowed for probing when certain explanations were not understood. The interview helped to tap into the experiences of the children and caregivers. Interviews were conducted in English due to the educational level of the children and the caregivers. All of the interviewees were more comfortable in English than any other local language. The participants were contacted and based on their response and availability, the interviews were conducted and audio taped. They were conducted at the preferred location of participants and where there was minimal noise level to ensure clarity in the play of audio for quality transcription.

3.6 Data and analysis

The audio taped interviews were transferred to compact disc and saved as a backup. The recorded files were transcribed verbatim from audio to a text format. Data was analyzed according to themes and content as this ensured deeper understanding of the issues under consideration. Data was coded, reduced to size, and relevant themes were abstracted from the text segments. Then I constructed the networks; assembled and grouped into similar and coherent groups, explored the thematic network, summarized the network and patterns constructed in sequence.

3.7 Ethical consideration

Firstly, permission was sought from the parents and caregivers before children were interviewed. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants before they were interviewed.

Anonymity was used to ensure that information provided by participants would not be traced to their identity. In addition, confidentiality of the participants was ensured.

3.8 Positionality

The interviewer is an employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration. This at some point in time became a barrier as some of the respondents were unwilling to participate as they saw it as intruding in their private life. This situation was managed by employing the services of research assistants who assured them of confidentiality and anonymity. To those who were willing to participate they were assured that the study was purely for academic purpose. Together with the research assistants, the interviews were done.

Again, it should however be noted that the researchers position as a FSO also helped in gaining access to the respondents as it could have been very difficult for someone outside the Service to gain such an access.

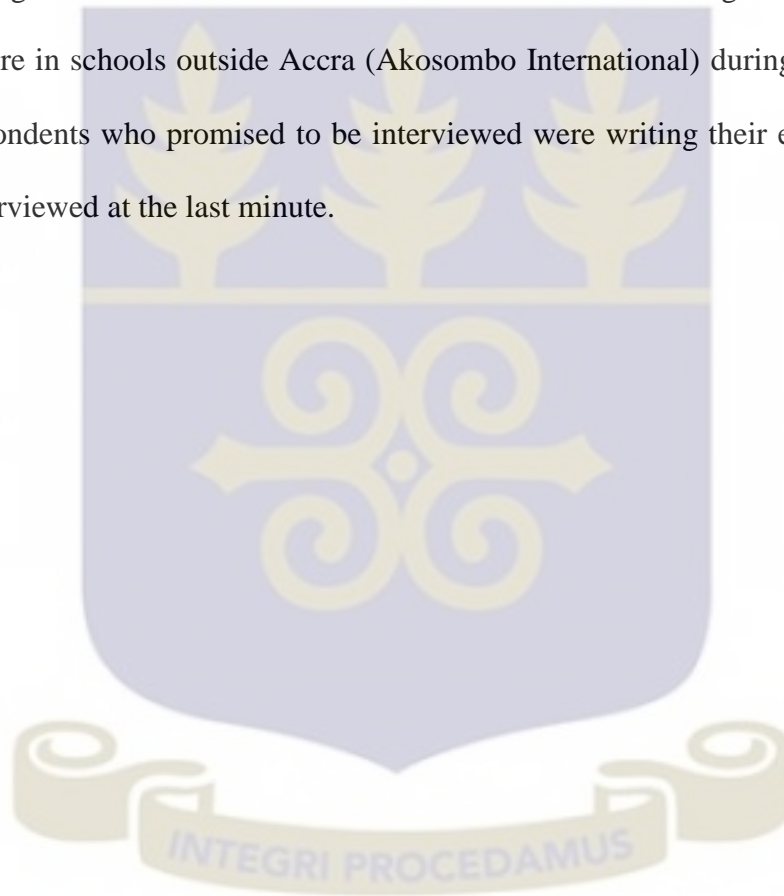
3.9 Limitation of study

First and foremost, the limited time available for the study did not allow for a detailed study of the home situation and academic performance of the children sampled for a longer period in order to undertake a trend analysis of the impact of parental migration on the educational and health outcomes of children left-behind as well as their caregivers.

Also, it was really difficult in getting parents to seek their permission for the researcher to interview their children and caregivers. They were not comfortable with the fact that the researcher was a colleague trying to intrude into their personal affairs. This could be attributed to the issue of Positionality and confidentiality. This problem was overcome through the assistance of research

assistants I employed. Most of them interviewed children of parents who were not comfortable that I interview their children and caregivers.

Finally, it was time consuming. The interviewer had to travel the length and breadth of Accra. Respondents were located at different parts of Accra and as such could not interview more than one person a day. The researchers had to wait till the children close from school, finish eating before interviewing them as she could not interview all the children during the weekends. Again, some of them were in schools outside Accra (Akosombo International) during the study period. Most of the respondents who promised to be interviewed were writing their exams and as such refused to be interviewed at the last minute.



CHAPTER FOUR

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND LIVING ARRANGEMENT OF FSOs CHILDREN LEFT-BEHIND

4.0 Introduction

This chapter is on the socio-demographic characteristics and living arrangement of FSOs children left-behind. The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants are discussed first and then followed by the living arrangement of left-behind children.

4.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of the left-behind children

The study is based on interviews conducted among fifteen left-behind children of FSOs in Accra. Table 4.1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of these children. The ages of the children ranged from 15 to 20 years with an average age of 17 years. The left-behind children comprised of eight females and seven males.

The level of education of the left-behind children ranged from Junior High School to University. Six of the left-behind children were in Junior High School, seven children were in Senior High School and two of them were at the University. The general level of education among the respondents could also contribute to their experiences as education inculcates virtues such as discipline and socialization. With regards to religion, many of the left-behind children (12 out of 15 participants) were Christians. Also, eight of the children were Akan, four were Ewe, two were Dagomba and one person was a Frafra.

Further, in terms of duration of parents' absence, many of the left-behind children indicated that their parents had been away for 3-4 years. However, there was no case where both the mother and father had travelled together. It was either the mother or father who had travelled. Many of them

were quick to add that their parents spent about four years abroad at their post. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration code of conduct, officers are required to stay at post for four years in the various countries they are sent to work. However, there are circumstances that may lead to shortening or overstay of the period at post. The findings of the study confirm the code of ethics of the work.

Table 1 Socio-demographic characteristics of left-behind children

Socio demographic characteristics	Number (N=15)	Percentage
Age		
15	4	26.7
16	3	20.0
17	2	13.3
18	2	13.3
19	1	6.7
20	3	20.0
Sex		
Male	7	46.7
Female	8	53.3
Educational level		
Junior High School	6	40.0
Senior High School	7	46.7
University	2	13.3
Religion		
Christians	12	80.0
Muslims	3	20.0
Ethnicity		
Akan	8	53.3
Dagomba	2	13.3
Ewe	4	26.7
Frafra	1	6.7
Duration of absence (years)		
1-2	4	26.7
3-4	11	73.3
Total	15	100

Source: Field data, 2016

4.2 Socio-demographic characteristics of caregivers

This section presents the demographic characteristics of caregivers. It includes kin and non-kin caregivers. In all, five caregivers were interviewed for the study and their socio-demographic characteristics are shown and described in Table 4.2 below. The age of the caregivers ranged from twenty-five to forty-four years old. Two of the respondents were twenty five and thirty eight years old each while one was forty-four years. Four of the caregivers were females while one was a male. This shows that there are more women in the care industry than men. It could also be explained by the gender division of labour where women are the main primary care givers and men providers of economic resources at home.

With regards to the marital status, three of the caregivers were married and the remaining two were never married. In addition, all the caregivers were Christians. Furthermore, the caregivers' educational background ranged from Junior High School to University. About three of them had University degree, one had completed Junior High School while another had as well National Vocation and Technical Institute Education. On employment status, four of the caregivers were working and one was not working.

The lowest number of children that a caregiver takes care of was two while the highest was four. The results further showed that there were four kin caregivers and one non kin man. Three of the kin caregivers were mothers of the children while one was a sibling. The non-kin caregiver was quick to add that the father of the children was staying with them in the same household, hence he assists in taking care of the children. The findings of the study attest to the fact that parents want their children to be raised by their own family members than others.

In addition, three of the caregivers were wives of the migrants, one was a brother and the other had no relationship with the child. All the caregivers' emphasized that they have taken care of the children for at least three years. In addition, three of the participants expressed that they are not looking after the children alone, they get help from the family members.



Table 2 Socio-demographic characteristics of caregivers'

Socio demographic characteristics	Number	Percentage
Age		
20-29	2	40
30-39	2	40
40-49	1	20
Sex		
Female	4	80
Male	1	20
Marital status		
Never married	2	40
Married	3	60
Religion		
Christians	5	100
Leve of education		
JHS	1	20
NVTI	1	20
University	3	60
Employment status		
Working	4	80
Not working	1	20
Biological children		
0	2	40
1-3	3	60
Number of children looking after		
2	2	40
3	2	40
4	1	20
Relationship to child		
Sibling	1	20
Children	3	60
Non family member	1	20
Duration of caregiving		
3 years	2	40
4 years	2	40

5 years and above	1	20
Migrants duration of stay		
3 years	5	100
Relationship to migrant (s)		
Parent	1	20
Husband	3	60
Non family member	1	20
Total	5	100

Source: Field data 2016

4.3 Living arrangement

The decision of a parent to migrate alters the living arrangement of the children. Powers, roles and responsibilities invested in parents are transferred to caregivers to take care of the children. Fourteen of the children stayed with kinsmen while one stayed with non-kinsmen. Changes in the living arrangement have an impact on the upbringing of the children. These include the social, psychological, health, and education. Sub-themes emerging from living arrangement include involvement of the decision of whom to stay with. The themes are represented graphically in Figure 1 below. These are discussed in the succeeding sections.

4.3.1 Involvement of the decision of whom to stay with

The left-behind children were asked if discussions concerning their living arrangement was made known to them and whether they were involved in the decision making process before the departure of their parents. The narratives of these participants indicated that some of them were involved in the decision while others were not as showed in Figure 1 below. Most (11 out of 15 participants) of the left-behind children were involved in the decision making process of whom to stay with. Among the people they stay with included kin (mother, mother's sister, brother) and

non-kin member (domestic worker). These are some of the narrative of the children who were involved in the decision of living arrangement:

“Yes, I was part and agreed to stay with my Aunt when I was 12 years”. (Interviewee 8, left-behind child).

“I was involved in the decision to live with a domestic worker and my dad.... because my father will be the only one to take care of me and do almost everything in the house and he can't because it will be too much” (Interviewee 1, left-behind child).

On the other hand, those who were not involved (4 participants) in this decision making process indicated that the decision was taken in their absence and the caregivers were chosen for them. To illustrate this point, a participant said:

“I am staying with my aunty. They chose the person for me” (Interviewee 4, left-behind child).

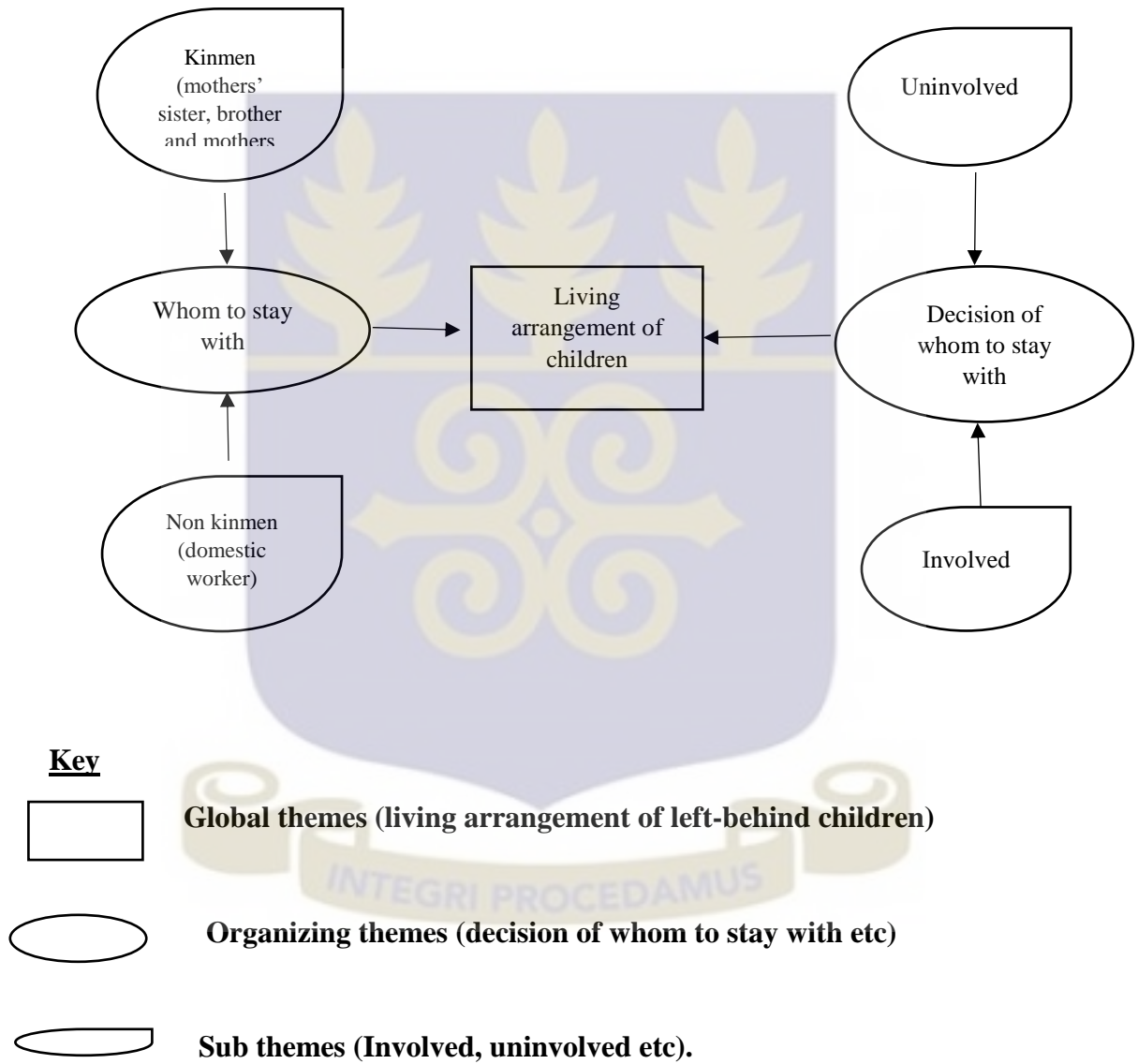
In addition, a left-behind child was of the view that he was not involved in the decision but the person he stays with was discussed before the parent's departure. He illustrated it in this way:

“My father discussed the person I am going to live with but wasn't engaged in the decision” (Interviewee 15, left-behind child).

Changes in the family structure occur when a member of the family migrates. This involves change in power, relocation and roles by the members of the family. The changes for instance in Ghana is not a very serious issue due to fostering and kin support. Parrenas (2003) identified that migrant leave their children in the care of kinsmen among the Philippians. The findings of this study are in congruent with Parrenas (2003) study. The results showed that most of the caregivers were kinsmen and only one was a domestic worker. The caregivers disclosed that they were part of the

decision of who the left-behind children were to stay with. This is evidential and reveals that caregivers are involved in the decision making of who the children are to stay with.

Figure 1 Thematic Network showing the living arrangement of left-behind children



CHAPTER FIVE

EXPERIENCES OF THE CHILDREN WITH THEIR ABSENT PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the experiences of left-behind children with their absent parents and caregivers. The socio-demographic characteristics of these participants are discussed first. As part of this section, the living arrangement, relationship between left-behind children and caregivers as well as migrant(s), challenges faced by caregivers, coping strategies adopted by caregivers and the available support services to the caregivers are discussed below. A graphical representation of the themes is showed in Figure 2 below.

5.1 The parent and the children.

Fifteen children were left behind by nine fathers and six mothers. They have travelled for the periods of three to four years. Among these left-behind children, six were living with their mothers, five with aunties, two with brothers, one with a cousin and one with a domestic worker. Among the sub themes that emerged from the study as indicated in Figure 2 below include views on parents' work/travelling abroad, remittance and communication

5.1.1 Views on parents work/travelling abroad.

The results of the study showed that almost all the left-behind children interviewed expressed good knowledge/opinion on the work of their parents. They were aware of the kind and the nature of work their parent(s) do. In addition, almost all (12 out of 15 participants) of them were satisfied that their parents are working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration. For instance, some of the participants shared these about their parents;

“He works with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration and they are posted to different countries after every four years. I know his job so I’m okay with it”. (Interviewee 9, left-behind child).

“I like the work my mum is doing. She is a diplomat, she issues visa and passport for people to travel”. (Interviewee 6, left-behind child).

Interestingly, acceptance of work a mother or father does had economic motive(s) according to the left behind children. These were what the children had to say;

“Yes, I know what he is doing... because of the work, he is able to pay my fees and other stuffs” (Interviewee 11, left-behind child)

“Yes, because that is what helps to take care of the family so I am in support of his work and schedules” (Interviewee 8, Left behind child).

Despite the satisfaction of the work of the parent(s) by most of the respondents, few (3 participants) of them indicated that they are not satisfied with the work, most especially when their parents travel abroad and leave them behind. They wanted their parents to be with them always. The notion was expressed by the participants as illustrated by the quotes below.

“Yes sometimes but not always. I am not happy to see her travel, because she is not around to take good care of me like she does when she’s around and I miss that. (Interviewee 6, left-behind child).

“I think it’s important for a child to have both parents around. If both parent are not around it may affect the child” (Interviewee 1, left-behind child).

5.1.2 Remittance sent to the children

Remittance plays a key role in living arrangement and ensures that the welfare of the children and caregivers are catered for. Caregivers were asked if migrants remit and how frequently the

remittance come. All the caregivers responded that migrants remit always but it sometimes delay before getting to them. The expectation of remittance for children's upkeep was generally met by most of the caregivers and left-behind children. This is illustrated by one of the caregivers;

"It comes on time, but due to the nature of his work, he is always busy so on very few occasions it delays sometimes" (Interviewee 5, Caregiver).

The channel of transfer was attributed to the reasons why remittances delay. The respondents put it in this way;

"It delays because the medium of transfer is very difficult... at times, the end of the month" (Interviewee 2, caregiver).

"At times it delays and it's due to the network, maybe he will send it early but we will receive it here late." (Interviewee 4, caregiver).

On sufficiency, some of the respondents expressed that, the amount of money send by migrants is not enough to take care of the children. This was attributed to high cost of living. A respondent mentioned that;

"Sufficiency is an understatement ooo, because he does not stay here more times he doesn't know the prices of things and doesn't go to shopping with us, so we manage sometimes" (Interviewee 4, caregivers).

The caregivers attested to the fact that migrants remit to take care of the children. However, remittance to caregivers delay and this was attributed to the medium of transfer. The findings of this study is consistent with a study by de la Garza (2010) who explain that remittances are sent by migrant parents to take care of the children and to secure better lives for their children. The participants indicated that remittance help to cover the children's living experiences and establish

enabling environment for them. Also, some of the participant identified that there are delays in remittance; medium of transfer and time differences were attributed to the delay of transfer. Consequently, life becomes unbearable for caregivers and left behind children when remittances delay. They have to manage the little they have till the time they receive remittance from migrants. To resolve this, migrants need to remit early to reduce the delays in transfer of money to caregivers and left-behind children. This would enable caregivers receive remittance on time. Again, remittance send by migrant according to the caregiver are not sufficient enough to take care of the children and themselves. Living condition such as rise in school fees and other material things are contributory factors for the insufficiency of the remittance.

5.1.3 Communication with parents

Communication helps children and caregivers to get connected to the migrant parent. According to Asis (2002), this helps to succeed in establishing bond with families and emotional ties with people at a long distance. It therefore enhances the confidence the children have with the families abroad. Further, communication holds transnational migrants and their families together. The left-behind children expressed that they always communicate with their parents' abroad. The various forms of communication mentioned include phone calls, text messages through emails, telephone, or other social media platforms such as whatsapp, IMO, skype, Facebook. They mentioned that they spend a lot of time on phone with their parent(s) and this was also supported by the caregivers. The children reiterated that they communicate with their parents frequently and have less difficulty in communicating with them. This is what a participant shared:

“I talk to my parent on phone, whatsapp and skype almost every day” (Interviewee 14, left-behind child).

“I talk to her through phones and she comes regularly to visit once in a year and I visit during vacation” (Interviewee 11, left-behind child).

“They communicate on whatsapp, phone calls and sometimes skype, facebook.... they communicate everyday” (Interviewee 4, caregiver).

Some caregivers mentioned that they did not know what the children discuss with the migrant parent on phone. However, most (4 participants) of them emphasized that they were aware of the details of the conversation that goes on between the children and the migrant parent. Among some of the purpose pointed out include checking on how the children are faring at home and in school, requesting for materials and others things. This is illustrated by the quotes below;

“At times they remember him and some of the things he does when he is here and will just call him and tell him they miss him. And also when they need something” (Interviewee 2, caregiver).

“They sometimes tell him about their computers; they want personal computers, they don’t want to use the general one, yeah so when they call all they do is ask for material things” (Interviewee 4, caregiver).

The findings of the study are in congruence with studies by Parrena (2005) and Asis (2002) in the Philippines. They posit that communication enhances the relationship between children and migrant parents as well as providing virtual presence at home. The participants confirmed that communication has made it possible to hear from their parents and get back to them anytime they want. They are able to see the face of their parents through skype calls and IMO video calls.

5.1.4 Relationship with absent parents

Migrants are mostly likely to leave their children with kin men and non kin men. Studies have shown that in the Philippines, children are left mostly in the care of kinsmen or close friends instead of domestic paid worker (Asis, 2006). In Ghana, this is not different because children are mostly left in the hands of kinsmen. Consequently, it enables the children to build and have a very good relationship with the family members as well as their parents. In the case of this study, among the

left-behind children interviewed, there was a mixed relationship between them and their parents. Some expressed that they have a very good relationship, somehow moderate and no bonding or negative relationship with migrants. These responses from the narratives emanate from the care they receive from their parents when they are around. This was how a respondent illustrated a positive relationship with the mother:

“I have a very good relationship with my mum (she replied quickly) and added whenever she comes we just sit and talk the whole time about what we both miss from each other. So there was no difficulty getting our friendship back” (Interviewee 6, left-behind child)

Others were of the view that they had a negative relationship with their parents, thus there is no bond between them. This is illustrated by the quote below:

“There is no bonding between us” (Interviewee 15, left-behind child).

Also, reasons for negative relationship between left-behind children and migrants were attributed to distance and communication. Participants indicated that they used to have a very good relationship with their parents before their departure. However, few participants responded that the present location of migrants has made it impossible for them to hear from them every day. This has resulted in negative relationship. A respondent mentioned it in this way:

“I feel there is a gap and I can hardly approach him. When he leaves I hardly hear from him because of the call rates in the country he is working” (Interviewee 15, left-behind child).

“When he was around I was really close to him but now his absence took that from me” (Interviewee 7, left-behind children).

However, most of them expressed that communication has helped to hook them back to their parents after some time of separation. Also, others expressed that the relationship between them and their parents has not changed taking into cognizance before and after their departure.

“It was negative but now changing through communication” (Interviewee 13, left-behind child).

“Very good with my Mother... Nothing has changed really ever since she left” (Interviewee 8, left-behind child).

5.2 Children experiences with their caregivers

The experiences of children with their caregivers are discussed below as well as showed in Figure 2. This includes caregivers’ expectations, and relationship between the children and their caregivers.

5.2.1 Caregivers’ Expectations

The children were asked what they expect from their caregivers to foster a good relationship with them. About 12 participants specified that they expected them to be like a mum, be a good listener granting their request, and providing financial support. Most of the left-behind children opined that their expectations were met. They were happy with their caregivers as well as been willing to maintain them. A respondent indicated that;

“She should listen to me when I approach her with my problems” (Interviewee 9, left-behind child).

“..... My only expectation is when I need something she should be able to listen and grant my request” (Interviewee 13, left-behind child).

Expectation of the caregivers emanate from a number of motives such as self-interest and reciprocity. Some have higher and more explicit expectation of taking care of the children while

others do it with the hope that it would be a gateway of kindness in return. Due to this, some caregivers had genuine expectations of taking care of the children. The caregivers were asked what the children expect from them as caregivers. From their responses, the caregivers emphasized that they are supposed to take care of the children, meet their needs, to guide them in putting up good behavior, being there both physically and spiritually, and providing financial support to the children.

“Am supposed to be a father and a mother at the same time, so I have to discipline them when they are going wrong, help them do their homework, take them to the hospital when they are sick and also keep them company so they do not miss their dad so much”(Interviewee 5, Caregiver).

“To guide them to do the right thing and be of good behaviour, teach them how to talk to people. In all, guide them on the right path” (Interviewee 4, Caregiver).

The findings suggested that the expectation of caregivers and left-behind children were almost the same. Caregivers were fully aware of their expectations; they were expected to raise the children under care as they would for their own children. The attitude of fostering and reciprocity among caregivers could have contributed to good expectation of caregivers. All of these encouraged caregivers to take care of the children well. As a result, caregivers often strove at the expense of their own to live up to society’s expectation for the wellbeing of the children.

However, the expectations of left-behind children staying with their aunts (mother’s sister) were not met leading to unfavorable relationship. As a result, they were willing and ready to change them. Left-behind children had unfavorable relationship with their aunts due to their poor attitudes. The left-behind children were treated badly to the extent that they wish their aunts are

changed. However, left-behind children with other kinsmen apart from their aunts had favorable relationship and these children were ready to maintain them as caregivers.

5.2.2 Relationship between children and caregivers

The choice of caregivers such as kin and friends over others “such as domestic workers” is because of provision of quality of care. Caregiver and left-behind children at times have strong bond and relationship that make children happy and not to regret the absence of their parents. However, it is not always the case that children enjoy and have good relationship with their caregivers as expected. In this study, the nature of the relationship that left-behind children had with their caregivers was grouped under favorable and unfavorable. However, all the caregivers expressed that they have only favorable relationship with the children. Unfavorable relationship was not mentioned among the caregivers.

5.2.2.1 Favorable relationship

From the left-behind children, most of them were of the opinion that some caregivers are very caring. As a result, they had a favorable relationship with them. This is what they had to share;

“We have a very good relationship, grandpa was like my father and grandma was like my mother” “It’s good at least you get some good advice from them” (Interviewee 15, left-behind child).

The left-behind children were further asked how the positive relationship which existed between them and the caregivers would be maintained. Most of the left-behind children responded that they do what is expected of them, such as being obedient. This is how a respondent illustrated his opinion:

“I do what I was asked to do and I was quiet, obedient and attentive to her instructions so for me and her we don’t really have a problem” (Interviewee 3, left-behind child).

All the caregivers expressed joy that they have favorable relationship with the children. Some of them mentioned that it was difficult having a favorable relationship at the beginning but as time went on, they had been able to have a very good relationship with the children. This is illustrated in the quote below;

“we are very close even my son is now turning into a young man but still give him a bath once in a while (laughing) that’s how close we are no matter what problem they are having in any part of their body they always show it to me. We are very close” (Interviewee 4, caregiver).

Having a favorable relationship at the beginning does not necessarily translate to the end of care. There is the need to continually build the relationship and maintain it. Due to this, caregivers identified some of the ways to ensure that they maintain the relationship they have with the children. This includes paying attention to them, not comparing them to other people, asking of their needs, addressing their needs and advising them. This is illustrated in the quote below

“I have a positive relationship with the children and I can maintain that by paying attention to whatever they want and addressing their needs, accordingly” (Interviewee 2, Caregiver).

“What I try to do is always ask them are you ok. Especially when they come back from school, the first question I ask is how school was and they will tell you everything that happened. If I realized it wasn’t good I just advise them. I also educate them on how to deal with challenges they may encounter. We pray together in the evening. So this is some of the things I do to maintain the relationship” (Interviewee 4, Caregiver).

5.2.2.2 Unfavorable relationship

The left-behind children reiterated that they have bad relationship with the caregivers and would be happy if they could be changed. The unfavorable relationship was more towards caregivers who

were their mother's sisters (aunties). Comparatively, they had favorable relationships with other family members such as siblings, fathers and mothers than their aunties. Among some of the reasons given for the bad relationship/behavior included no freedom, disagreement on issues such as television, going out and lack of attention. This is how the respondents illustrated the bad relationship they had with the care givers.

“I have very bad relationship with my aunty, I will give her 40%. At first it was ok but getting to the middle of it, it became some way, when my mother remit not all comes to me. She can even throw money on the ground for me to pick”. (Interviewee 9, left-behind child).

Most of the children indicated that, there is no conflict between them and their caregivers. They expressed that they obey caregivers and do whatever they are told to do and always try to avoid conflict. However, few of the children indicated that, they sometimes have conflicts with the caregivers on certain issues such as when to go out and disagreement on watching television. On resolving the conflict, the left-behind children explained that they pay attention and respect the caregivers in order to prevent further conflicts between them.

With regards to the relationship between left-behind children and parents as well as caregivers, the findings of the study revealed that there is a favorable relationship between children and caregivers as well as parents. This is supported by other studies such as Moran-Taylor (2008) and Hoang *et al.* (2015) who found supporting evidence that children receive quality care from caregivers and are able to bond with them. The existing strong bond and relationship facilitate communication between left-behind children and migrants as well. Hoang and Yeoh (2012) argued that children are convinced by caregivers to talk to their parents even when they are not in the mood. Dankyi (2014) argue that dedication from caregivers form the basis of bond with left-behind children in Ghana.

5.3 Challenges of caregivers

Taking care of left-behind children has its own challenges. Despite the support from the migrant, family and the children, caregivers encounter multiple challenges. They faced challenges with the migrant children upkeep. These include finance, health of children, support from other extended family members, remittance and relationship with the children. In addition, the caregivers disclosed that the non-performance of the children in school is very challenging. A respondent mentioned it in this way;

“I don’t have problem financially, but the only problem is the children’s education; they are under performing compared to when their dad was around” (Interviewee 5, Caregiver).

Another respondent explained that she is taking care of the children alone and that makes it difficult to respond to the needs of the children. This is how she expressed her opinion;

“At times, because of the workload you won’t even eat, if one of them is sick I have to do everything on my own. I sometimes feel tired..... Financial challenge is a lot, daddy is not all that fit financially over there so it’s not easy” (Interviewee 2, Caregiver, 38).

Other participants revealed that delay in transfer of money makes it sometimes difficult for her to ensure an upkeep of the family.

“There are times that monies sent to us delay because they are working in one of the Arab countries where it is extremely difficult to transfer money. But we’ve been able to manage and cope with each other” (Interviewee 1, Caregiver, 25).

Contrary, not all caregivers experience challenges in taking care of left-behind children. A respondent indicated that, it is not difficult for her to take care of the children though there are few challenges. This is what the respondent shared;

“..... ooh it wasn't that difficult for me because I've been doing this job for a long time so I knew how to manage” (Interviewee 3, Caregiver).

5.4 Coping strategies of caregivers and left-behind children.

Despite the challenges faced by caregivers and left-behind children, various strategies have been adopted by them to deal with these challenges. From the study, it was evident that problem and emotion – focused coping mechanism were adopted by both caregivers and left-behind children. These included support from family members, remittance, religion and spirituality. The problem focus is where left-behind children and caregivers solve problems directly by being proactive or reactive to bring about change while the emotional focus deal with the use of resources to change the meaning of the stressful relationship.

5.4.1 Problem focused coping mechanism

As a way of dealing with the challenges, some participants revealed that they involve the parents (migrant) when things become difficult for them to handle, sometimes manage problems themselves, and travel to other places to release tension. Some of the participants indicated that they forget to complain and the problem is resolved by itself. Their coping strategies are expressed in the quote below;

“It's not easy oooo, I don't like to complain by the time he comes back all the bitterness is gone. Honestly, we don't have a way we resolve these problems, it resolves by itself (laughing) I try not to complain” (Interviewee 4, Caregiver).

“.. Internally, I talk to my mum, sometimes I talk to friends but I don't really have many friends so I talk to the few I have” (Interviewee 1, Caregiver).

“I try to forget about itI always laugh and try to forget about it and play with my friends as if everything was normal” (Interviewee 6, left-behind child).

Even though family support is key to caregivers, the caregivers mentioned that they receive support from the family in times of distress and that help them to cope with the situation.

“... I don’t talk about it, I cope through family support too” (Interviewee 3, Caregiver).

“... I took my brother to be my father” (Interviewee 13, left-behind child).

5.4.2 Emotion-focused by participants

This involves the use of personal resources to change the meaning of stressful relationship as a way of coping mechanism. Among some of the strategies used by caregivers and left-behind children to cope include spirituality and faith in the various religions they found themselves. Most of the participants resort to spirituality as a way of coping strategy;

“Sometimes I go to church and get myself involve in so many church activities, most at times I love travelling within the country, sometimes I also go out shopping even if I am not buying anything, I just go there and come back” (Interviewee 5, Caregiver).

“I listen to radio, reading, watching television and attending church services as ways of my coping strategies” (Interviewee 11, left-behind children).

In addition, some of the children resort to reading books and consoling themselves. This was common among the left-behind children;

“I like reading so I have a lot of story books I read each time I miss her and those story books create a different world for me”(Interviewee 8, left-behind child).

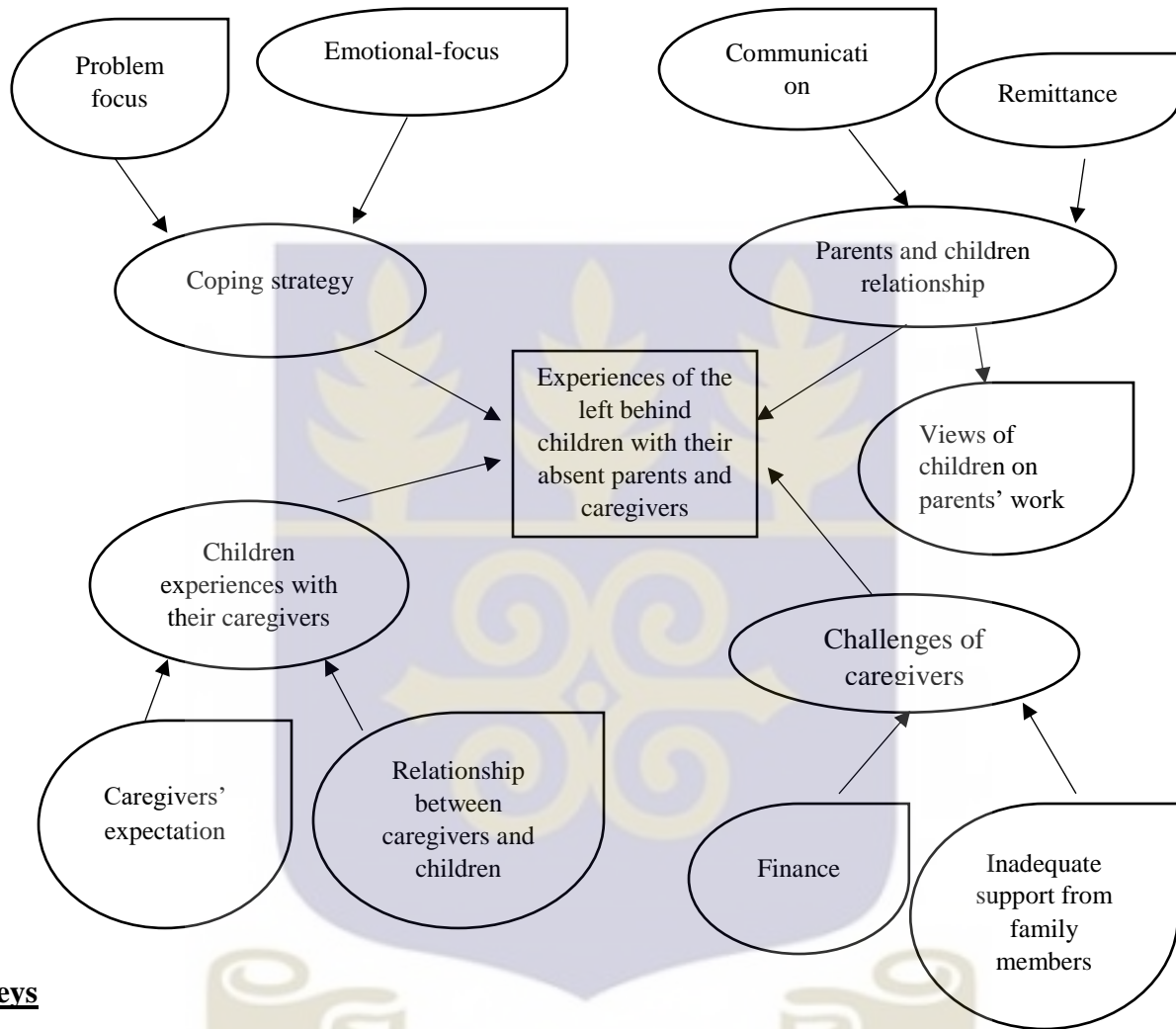
“.... I always tell myself that he’s not staying there forever and that he would be back soon” (Interviewee 15, left-behind child).

“I just console myself and know he will come back” (Interviewee 12, left-behind child)

Despite the relationship that existed between caregivers and children, conflict and misunderstanding were mentioned as some of the challenging issues. Others include finance and inadequate support from the extended family. The coping strategies by the caregivers and left-behind children include problem-focused and emotion focused problem. Both the left-behind children and caregivers had the same coping methods. However, the children adapt through reading and listening to radio or watching television. Unlike the children, caregivers had spiritual method of coping with the challenges which was different from the children.



Figure 2 Thematic network showing the experiences of left-behind children with their absent parents and caregivers



Keys

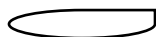
Global themes (Experiences of left-behind children with their absent parents and caregivers)



Organizing themes (Coping strategies, challenges of caregivers etc)



Sub themes (Caregivers' expectation, finance problem focus, emotion focus etc)



CHAPTER SIX

THE HEALTH AND EDUCATION OF THE LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN IN THE ABSENCE OF THEIR PARENTS

6.0 Introduction

This chapter is on the health and education of the left-behind children. The effects of the parental absence on the children's education are discussed first followed by the health of left-behind children.

6.1 Effect of parents absence on left-behind children's education

Absence of parent(s) may have potential effect on the education of their children. These children are affected by the parental separation which causes detrimental effect on their school performance. The narratives of the participants indicated that the effects of parent's absence on their education had both positive and negative consequences, but largely positive.

6.1.1 Positive effect

Left-behind children emphasized that the absence of their parents (either or both) helped them to improve on their academic performance. Almost all the caregivers (12 out of 15 participants) expressed that their parents' absence encouraged them to learn. They took inspiration from their parents' absence which really helped them to focus on their academics. As a result, they decided to learn and make their parents' proud. This is illustrated by the quote below;

“His absence increased my studies because I was always told to study hard to make my father proud wherever he is” (Interviewee 14, left-behind child).

Others were of the view that they had few things to do at home and their parent (migrant) make sure they are provided with everything in school to encourage them to learn. Also, fees and other materials were provided on time to facilitate their learning.

“She wasn’t around so she made sure everything we need was there before we even ask so that we would not miss her much” (Interviewee 2, left-behind children).

“I don’t think it really affected me in any negative way because I have been brought up to know the value of education” (Interviewee 8, left-behind children)

In addition, some also expressed that the absence of their parent did not mean there was no interaction and supervision. They indicated that the parents call to check on them and ask of how they are performing in school anytime. This helped them to improve on their academic performance. Some of the respondents had this to share;

“.....he calls regularly to encourage me and I know I am learning for myself” (Interviewee 11 left-behind child).

Interestingly, a respondent indicated that she gets the freedom to learn when the parent is not around and this has helped to improve on her academic performance.

6.1.2 Negative effect

The absence of parents had negative impact on the performance of left-behind children. This was attributed to reasons emanating from children and caregivers. Few of the children who were affected by their parent(s) absence indicated that the caregivers do not give them much attention on their education. Aside, they are not well educated to assist them in their academic activities;

“It was not good as compared to when she was around and my caregiver is not well educated so she couldn’t help out” (Interviewee 5, left-behind).

Others explained that they have extra classes but was not enough for them to perform well since they do not get explanation they wanted compared to when the parent (s) were around;

“Okay, when they are not here even though I have extra lessons but I don’t get more explanations like when they are here” (Interviewee 6, left-behind child).

Again, the left behind children expressed that the negative effect on their performance may be attributed to the absence of their parents because there was no one to check on their results and fees were not provided on time;

“I was performing very well before he left but after his departure my performance is down because I know there is no one to check my results. Fees and materials were not provided on time but were given on time whenever he is around” (Interviewee 9, left-behind child).

Interestingly, some of the respondents reiterated that there has been no change in their academic performance comparing the presence and absence of their parent (s). They added that they communicate with their parents’ on their performance in school and this has helped them to maintain and improve on their performance. They mentioned it in this way:

“My performance is the same as when my dad was around” (Interviewee 10, left-behind child).

“There is no effect. He calls regularly to encourage me and I know I am learning for myself” (Interviewee 11, left-behind).

6.2 Effects of parents absence on their left-behind children’s health

Health challenges were some of the issues indicated in the absence of their parents. These effects are psychological, social and emotional development. From the study few of the respondents mentioned that there was no effect on their health. However, most of the respondents indicated that there were negative effects on their health. Almost all the participants were of the view that

they were emotionally disturbed. They miss the parent and resort to crying which makes them disturb emotionally most often. The quote below illustrates a respondent view;

“.....Yes, “I cry when I miss them” (Interviewee 6, left-behind child).

Furthermore, the left-behind children expressed that they become emotionally disturbed when they are alone;

“Sometimes, I really miss my mum. I also feel lonely when I vacate and come home” (Interviewee 12, left-behind child).

“Yes, I feel sad because when I am lonely there is no one to talk to and that is bad” (Interviewee 6, left-behind child).

Other respondents expressed that they become emotionally hurt when they see other children and their parents together. This is illustrated by the quote below;

“It really painful seeing my colleagues and their mothers hugging and chatting makes it more painful” (Interviewee 8, left-behind child).

In addition, a respondent was of the view that the caregiver paid less attention to her health. The aunty (caregiver) has changed the hospital she attended when she is sick and this has affected her health;

“When they are around anytime I fall sick they take me to Ghana Canadian hospital at East Legon but my aunty doesn't” (Interviewee 14, left-behind children).

Moreover, absence of parents has effect on the education on the left behind children. The findings of the study showed that most of the children indicated that there was a positive effect thus the absence of their parents' encouraged them to study. Again, their fees and materials were provided on time and this translated in their performance. This could also be explained by the desire to

please their parent and make them proud. The findings of the study is inconsistent with other studies (Gianneli and Mangiavacchi, 2010; Mckenzie and Rapport, 2006). Their studies revealed that parental absence has negative effect on the education of left-behind children. This includes consequence on school attendance, drop out from school and poor academic performance. However, Lu (2012) found out that siblings migration provide benefits for left-behind children education but parental migration has negative consequence on education.

Left-behind children suggested that the absence of parents affected their health. This was manifested in the emotional health of the children. Participants were of the view that they miss their parents and become lonely which makes them unstable. The findings of the study are supported by other studies (Graham & Jordan, 2011; Parrenas, 2002). They found that the absence of their parents affect the psychological and emotional wellbeing of left-behind children. They experience loneliness and become reserved (Jia & Tian, 2010). Children with a higher risk of severity of loneliness are those with bad relationship with parents. Explaining the results of this study by the respondents, left-behind children expressed that they become lonely and this leads to emotional disturbance and crying hence affecting their health.

6.3 The relationship between the theory and findings

The family system provides an emotional unit linking individuals in the family together while the self-differentiation theory explains the ability of the individual to think and function while staying together. Linking the theory to the findings, migration breaks the unity and connectedness of the left behind children. The separation of parents from the children had emotional and psychological impact on their health. As a result, they had negative health experiences. However, the findings of the study showed that there was less impact of separation on their academic performance. Therefore, the theories explained well the health of left-behind children health than their education.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

7.0 Introduction

This chapter is on the summary of the study. It describes the main conclusions from the study. Also, some recommendations are made based on the findings and further research has been outlined. In summary, there has been concern about the consequences of parental migration on the wellbeing of children they leave behind globally. This is due to the challenges children experience in the absence of their parents.

The aim of the study was to understand the experiences of left-behind children by FSOs. Specifically, the study examined the effects of the absence of the parents on their children's education and health. In addition, it explored the coping strategies of the left-behind children and caregivers. The study employed qualitative research method to solicit for responses from children of FSOs and their caregivers. Non-probability method including snowball and purposive sampling strategies were used to recruit interviewee. In all, twenty interviewee comprising of fifteen left-behind children and five caregivers were done. The ages of the children ranged from fifteen to twenty years while caregivers ranged from twenty five to forty five. All the interviewee had at least Junior High education. On parental separation, the left-behind children indicated that their parents have been away for one to four years.

7.1 Summary of findings

The results of the study showed that almost all the left-behind children interviewed expressed good knowledge/opinion on the work of their parents. They were aware of the kind and the nature of work their parent(s) do. However, majority of the left behind children indicated that they were not

happy with the absence of their parent (s). On the other hand, the caregivers indicated that they help the children to manage the absence of their parent (s) by talking to them and engaging in things that will take away the mind of the children from their parent(s). On living arrangement, both the left-behind children and caregivers were of the opinion that they were involved in the decision making process of whom to stay with. The people they stayed with included kin (mother, grandparents, aunty, siblings) and non-kin member (domestic worker). Nevertheless, the left-behind children complained of bad relationship with their aunts than any caregiver.

Among the various forms of communication mentioned included phone calls, text messages through emails, telephone, or other social media platforms such as whatsapp, IMO, skype, Facebook. The children reiterated that they communicate with their parents frequently and have less difficulty in communicating with them. The caregivers added that the children talk to their parent(s) frequently and at any time. Furthermore, the study revealed that there were remittances from migrants to caregivers which was used to take care of the children. Despite the challenges in transfer of remittances, the caregivers reiterated that remittances come frequently but they were at times not sufficient.

In addition, there was a mixed relationship between left-behind children and their parents. Some expressed that they had a very favorable relationship while others indicated no bonding or unfavorable relationship with their parents. Communication was seen as a medium of fostering the relationship with parents. Through the various means of communication, parents were able to talk with their children anytime. Again, the relationship between caregivers and left-behind children was very cordial. All the caregivers expressed that they had favorable relationship with left-behind children.

The results of the study indicated that absence of parents had both positive and negative effects on the academic performance of left-behind children. Few of the left behind children attributed the negative effect to the absence of their parents. Interestingly, some of the respondents reiterated that there has been no changes in their academic performance comparing the presence and absence of their parent (s). Again, the absence of parents had health challenges on left-behind children. From the study, few of the respondents mentioned that there was no effect on their health. However, most of the respondents indicated that there was negative effect on their health. Almost all the participant were of the view that they were emotionally disturbed.

Lastly, caregivers mentioned health, education and inadequate support from extended family members as some of the challenges faced. In order to overcome the challenges faced by left-behind children and caregivers, emotion and problem focused methods were adopted. These included help from some family members, emotions attached to religion, reading books and confinement in friends.

7.3 Conclusions

Parental absence did not affect the educational performance of left-behind children of FSOs, rather, it influenced health of the children. Again, left-behind children and caregivers were involved in the decision of living arrangement before their parents' departure. This is very important and is due to the fact that living arrangement and the support received by left-behind children affect their wellbeing. Almost all the children indicated that they have regular contact with their parents. This enabled the children to appreciate the love parents have for them in their absence. In conclusion, despite the challenges faced by left-behind children in the absence of their parent (s), the positive experiences outweigh the negative. Therefore, left-behind children of FSOs had good experience with their caregivers and parents. They also do well academically but with health challenges.

7.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions made, the following recommendations are made;

The fact that school fees outside Ghana is expensive and the FSOs are unable to afford with their salaries, government should take some of the children's educational burdens off the shoulders of its diplomats who represent the nation outside the country as its being done in other countries such as Nigeria, Lesotho, South Africa, United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Though the study found out that the children know their parents work and do not have much problem with the parents leaving, because of the economic benefits their travelling comes with, the study also revealed that, after the parents have left, some of the children face psychological problems because of the absence of their parents. Therefore, the study recommends that, as part of the service benefits to FSOs who represent the nation outside the country, psychological counseling should be offered to their left- behind families (especially children), before they leave the country and during their term of office when they are at post.

Again the study also found that, caregivers are not happy with the money transfer systems from some of the Arab countries. Based on this, the study recommends that the Bank of Ghana adopts systems that can facilitate effective money transfer to Ghana. There should also be a bilateral agreement with Bank of Ghana and destination countries of FSO to facilitate transfer of money. This can boost remittances flowing into the country and will enhance caregiving of the children left- behind. Again, FSOs workers should remit early before the end of the month. This would help caregivers to receive the money on time. In addition, part of the salary of FSO should be paid in Ghana by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration.

The key findings shows that, majority of the left – behind children in the care of non-parents were not happy with the care they received. At the same time, caregivers who are spouses also complain of their inability to join their spouses because they did not want their skills to remain dormant, since most of the countries do not allow spouses to work. This in a way can lead to break down in family relations. Therefore, the government should enhance its bilateral engagement with countries which do not allow spouses of diplomats to work. This will enable their spouses to join their partners and take their children along. On the other hand, the government should make job opportunities available for FSO spouses to facilitate caring and wellbeing of children.

Recommendations for future research

The following areas of work are recommend for future research:

Since the present study used purely qualitative research method, future researches in this area should go a step further to conduct both qualitative and quantitative research so that the advantages of both methods can lead researchers to make generalization (quantitative) as well as find deeper meaning of experiences of the children and their caregivers (qualitative).

Additionally, I recommend that, future research should delve into the reasons why FSOs leave their children behind when going out on postings.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE

I am a student from the Centre of Migration Studies at University of Ghana, Legon, conducting a study on “the experiences of left-behind children: the case of Foreign Services Officers children in Ghana.

As part of my research project towards the award of M.A degree in Migration Studies. I am obliged to carry out some research in the field of migration. I humbly request you to grant me an interview lasting about an hour. Your participation is very important to the success of this project. If at any point you don't understand any questions, please let me know and I would be glad to clarify. Be assured that this interview is purely for academic purposes and will be treated confidentially. Your anonymity is assured; No information provided will be passed on to a third party. If you wish to withdraw from this study, you may do so at any point during the discussion.

Thanks for your cooperation.

PART 1

CAREGIVERS

SECTION A: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CAREGIVERS

Sex

Age

Marital status

Religion

Educational background

Current occupation

No of biological children

Number of children looking after

Probe: Including biological children

Excluding biological children

Relationship to child (ren)

Duration of caregiving

Migrants' duration of stay

Relationship to migrant (s)

Are you the only person looking after the child (ren)

SECTION B: LIVING ARRANGEMENT

Was the child (ren) leaving with you before the parent (s) migrated?

How long has the child (ren) leave with you?

Were you part of the decision making process, thus the child (ren) coming to stay with you?

Probe: Who started the initiation of the child (ren) staying with you?

Probe: Was a proper negotiation made before the departure of the parent (s): such as finance, when to visit, communicate, house to stay etc

Did you accept to stay with the child (ren)?

What are the forms of communication do children have with migrants' parent (s)?

Probe: forms, frequency and purpose.

Do the parent (s) send remittance to take care of the children?

Probe: frequency and sufficiency?

Probe: Does it come on time or delay?

SECTION C: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAREGIVERS AND CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND

What is expected of you as caregiver?

Are the children happy staying with you?

What is the relationship between you and the children?

Probe: if positive, how can it be maintained?

Probe: if negative, what can be done to improve it?

Have there been conflicts between you and the children?

Probe: If so, what led to the conflicts?

Probe: how was it managed?

What do children say about the absence of their parent(s) (probe for missing parents, understand that parent have to be away, angry at parents, proud that parents are out of the country, wish that parents will return and travel nomore)

What are the things you do to help children manage the absence of their parents?

SECTION D: CHALLENGES FACED BY CAREGIVERS

How often do you hear from the migrant (s)?

What are some of the challenges you faced?

Probe: finance, health, relationship with children, education etc

Probe: challenges from migrants (does assistance come on time, receive support from the family members)

*How have you been resolving these challenges?

Probe: Any assistance

SECTION E: COPING STRATEGIES OF CAREGIVERS

What are you coping strategies?

Probe: for external (from friends etc) and internal support (family etc)

Is there any issue that we did not talk about that you wish to talk about or any additional information that you want to add?

PART 2

LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN

SECTION A: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN.

Age

Sex

Religion

Ethnic group

Educational level

SECTION B: VIEWS OF THE CHILDREN ON THEIR PARENTS' DEPARTURE AND WORK

What are your views on your parent(s) work?

Probe: Are they in favor or not?

Probe: Are they happy to see the parents away?

Probe: Do they want the parent (s) to be with them or away?

Was living arrangement discussed with you before the departure of your parent(s)?

Probe: Their level of involvement in the decision?

Probe: Did they agree to stay with the person they are now

SECTION C: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Whom did he or she grow up with?

Probe: If he/she was raised up by others than the parents, what is his/her view of how it was to be raised by parents/caregivers?

What is the relationship between children and parents?

Probe: for difference in relationship before and after departure

Probe: for bonding before and after departure

Do they hear from their parent (s)?

Probe: How often and through what medium?

Probe: Does he come to visit regularly?

SECTION D: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAREGIVERS AND CHILDREN

What is the relationship to your caregiver?

Probe: Family member or not.

Are they happy staying with the caregiver?

Have there been conflicts/challenges between you and the caregiver?

If so, how was it managed?

What is the relationship between children and caregivers?

Probe: if positive, how can it be maintained?

Negative, how can it be improved?

What are their expectations from caregivers?

Probe: Mention at least two of them

Are they met?

Will you like to change your caregiver? If so, why?

SECTION E: EFFECT OF PARENT'S ABSENCE ON THEIR EDUCATION AND HEALTH

What are some of the effects of parent (s) absence on their education?

Probe: Are school fees paid on the time?

Probe: Are other materials needed in school provided?

Probe: Are they prevented from going to school early and daily?

Probe: Performance before and after parent (s) departure on education. if so, what account for the changes?

What are some of the effects of parent (s) absence on their health?

Probe: Are they given balanced food to eat?

Probe: Do they face emotional, psychological issues?

What personal challenge(s) do you have that you think affects your studies and health?

SECTION F: CHALLENGES FACED BY CHILDREN

What other challenges are you faced apart from education and health?

Probe: With the caregivers

With parents

SECTION G: COPING STRATEGIES

What are their coping strategies in dealing with all the problems?

Is there any issue that we did not talk about that you wish to talk about or any additional information that you want to add?

