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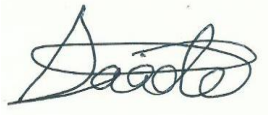
**EXPLORATION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES AND INTERVENTIONS  
AVAILABLE TO CHILDREN IN JAMES TOWN**

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**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA,  
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**DECLARATION**

This is to certify that this thesis is the result of my own research and has not been presented by anyone for any academic award in this university or any other. All references within this study have been duly acknowledged.



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## DEDICATION

First and foremost, I dedicate this work to the Almighty God for His love and kindness. I also dedicate this work to my parents, Mr. Isaac and late Mrs. Juliana Aderinto and my sister (Rebecca Aderinto) for their inspiration in helping me pursue my dreams. Also, to the family of Mr. Joseph and Dr. (Mrs.) Joana Salifu Yendork for their support. Finally, to everyone who has supported me one way or the other to make this thesis fruitful. Thank you all.



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## ABSTRACT

Poverty is the "world's biggest killer" and the major cause of misery and ill health. Children are however the most affected by poverty regardless of the level of development within a country often due to their dependence on adults. The vulnerable nature of children is heightened by the very presence of poverty. Children living in poverty are usually deprived of sanitation, nutrition, shelter, education, quality water, and health services. Studies have shown that over eight million children in developing countries die from preventable diseases mainly from poverty and deprivation.

Urban towns in recent years have housed many individuals from diverse regions due to urbanization and the dire need for greener pastures. As a result, population growth outnumbers the available resources within such communities, creating over-dependency on the limited resources available, which makes children more vulnerable. Also, the inability to distinguish between child and adult poverty within Ghanaian society has led to the oversight of the implications of poverty on children. Therefore, this study sought to explore perceptions of children from poor urban contexts in Ghana and their positive and negative lived experiences and gain information about their coping mechanisms.

This qualitative study interviewed thirty (30) participants: twenty (20) adolescents (between twelve and seventeen years) from James Town and ten (10) professionals. Results revealed that poor children suffer from inadequate access to basic education, decent shelter and clothing; and good nutrition. As a result of their condition, they are forced to engage in activities in the bid to cope with poverty such as begging and running basic errands. The implications of this study highlight the vast distinction between child and adult poverty and the importance of social support, including the role of religion to adolescents in coping with poverty.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background

Poverty is the "world's biggest killer" and the major cause of misery and ill health (WHO, 1995, p 1). It was previously thought to be in the eye of the beholder and was therefore often measured perceptually (World Bank Group, 2017), however Townsend's (1967) work gave rise to a paradigm shift in the measurement of poverty. According to Townsend, poverty denotes a limited control of resources over some time (World Bank Group, 2012). Touray (2016) defined poverty as a "multidimensional concept that seeks to measure levels of deprivation encountered by a person, household or community" (p. 1).

The measurement of poverty has since been a function of the World Bank which measures poverty largely on an income basis (World Bank Group, 2017). Around the late 1990s, the World Bank mentioned that individuals who lived below a dollar (\$ 1 Purchasing Power Parity-PPP) a day were considered extremely poor. This figure went to \$1.08 a day per person in 2001, \$1.25 a day per person in 2013, and now \$1.90 a day per person since 2015. The World Bank Group (2016) revealed that even with the increased figure, poverty remains excessively high, as a greater percentage of the world's population lives below \$1.90 a day.

The United Nations' key vision of reducing poverty started in the year 2000 with the inauguration of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 (World Bank Group, 2017). Even with that, poverty continues to be on the rise in recent years (World Bank Group, 2017). As of 2015, about 900 million people around the globe lived in severe poverty (Touray, 2016). Poverty is known to be

severe in conflict-affected countries as well as lower and middle-income countries that solely depend on available natural resources (specifically South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa) (Touray, 2016).

According to the Children's Defense Fund (2019), children are the most affected by poverty regardless of the level of development within a country heightening the vulnerable nature of children (Chaudry & Wimer, 2016). According to DeNavas-Walt and Proctor (2014), about 1 in 5 children live in households with incomes below the national poverty mark, with Short (2016) mentioning that child poverty is measured by the number of households living below the poverty line considering the number of children within that household.

In 2006, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted, for the first time, a universal definition of child poverty. The Assembly defined children living in poverty as the section of individuals who are deprived of sanitation, nutrition, shelter, education, water, and quality health services (UNGA, 2006). Non-availability of these basic facilities makes children more vulnerable as it infringes on their basic rights and thereby inhibiting their full potential (Leriu, 2019; UNGA, 2006). The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the agency tasked to promote international child well-being, equally believes measuring child poverty must not be based solely on income, however, must be measured on a multidimensional basis (UNICEF, 2017).

Globally, about thirty percent of children live in poor and deprived conditions (Nandy & Minujin, 2012) and as a result of this deprivation, it becomes difficult for them to survive. Again, Nandy and Minujin (2012) indicated that a child lives in absolute poverty only if he/she suffered from two or more severe deprivations of their basic human needs. Black et al. (2010) estimated

that over eight million children below five years in developing countries die from preventable diseases mainly resulting from poverty and deprivation.

Also, the human rights-based approach to poverty acknowledges that poverty is neither natural nor unavoidable but it is the responsibility of significant individuals within the society to minimize or curb it (Peels & Silvander, 2016). The right-based approach to child poverty encompasses a framework of multidimensional perspectives of poverty, i.e., healthcare, sanitation facilities, education, food, information, etc. (Nandy & Minujin, 2012). Hence, using the World Bank's US\$1 per day purchasing power parity may not accurately measure and distinguish child poverty from adult poverty (Nandy & Minujin, 2012).

In light of this, Nandy and Minujin (2012) suggested that child poverty required the consideration of non-monetary factors that encompassed the development of the child and promote both physical and psychological well-being. Non-monetary conditions include the child's ability to partake in societal endeavors as part of being a citizen, protection against exploitation or abuse, and freedom against discrimination and favoritism (UNICEF, 2017). McKenzie (2019) mentioned that as a result of child poverty, over 200 million children around the globe are unable to attain their potential for cognition, and/or socio-emotional development.

## **1.2 Child poverty in Ghana**

In 2017, Ghana's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates increased from 3.7 percent to 14.0 percent, making Ghana one of the fast-growing economies in the globe (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2018). Within that same period, Ghana moved from a poor country to a lower-middle-income country as a result of the commercial production of crude oil in 2011 (GSS, 2018). This made Ghana the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to achieve the then Millennium

Development Goal One (MDG 1) of halving poverty (National Development Planning Commission [NDPC], 2019). Nonetheless, poverty continues to be present in the country.

As a result of the widespread and adverse effects of poverty, the UN SDG's first challenge was targeted at eradicating poverty in all dimensions by 2030. As part of poverty eradication, the UN including their representatives in Ghana also acknowledges the increased prevalence of child poverty. As such, a major sub-target is to reduce by half the number of children living in poverty within the Ghanaian society (1.2.2 of the SDGs) (Liu, Yu & Wang, 2015; NDPC, 2019).

According to the NDPC (2019), children in Ghana are more vulnerable and easily susceptible to poverty compared to other age groups as a result of their reliance on the resources of their guardians.

Similar to other countries, child poverty in Ghana is multidimensional, encompassing malnutrition, low income, insecurity, illiteracy, and many more (GSS, 2018). The combination of these several factors keeps children, households, and the community at large in abject poverty (GSS, 2018). Based on the Population and Housing Census in 2010, the number of people projected to be living in abject poverty increased from 2.2 million to 2.4 million from the year 2013 to 2017. This is a result of the rapid increase in population growth leading to over-dependency on the limited resources available within the country (GSS, 2018; NDPC, 2019).

Globally, poverty is primarily a rural phenomenon, with Ghana having an approximated number of 2.2 million people living in extreme poverty in rural areas as of 2017 (GSS, 2018). Research has shown that Greater Accra is the least affected by poverty while the Upper West region of Ghana is the most affected by poverty (Ghana Demographics Profile, 2018; GSS, 2018), specifically, the rural savannah area at 67.7 percent (GSS, 2018; Nyamah, 2019). Even with its

least number of poor people within its boundaries, the Greater Accra region in recent years has housed many individuals from diverse regions due to urbanization and the dire need for greener pastures. As a result, the population growth outnumbers the available resources within the region, creating over-dependency on the limited resources available (GSS, 2018).

Efforts have been put in place to help reduce the marginalization of poor children within society. Some efforts from the Government of Ghana include the national immunization against polio, Community-based Health Planning Services (CHPS), Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP), School Feeding Programme, Free Senior High School Education, Capitation Grants, elimination of schools under trees, etc. (Wang, Otoo & Dsane-Selby, 2017).

These policies were developed specifically to assist children and households within poor contexts. Nonetheless, the implementation of these interventions is problematic. Most of these interventions are not adequately implemented due to some forms of hindrances such as finance, logistics, staffing, etc. As a result, children in poor contexts are still subjected to the cruel influence of poverty (Bassoumah, Adam & Adokiya, 2021). This is indeed challenging as the government in whom the citizenry has placed their trust to make their lives better are not able to assist in improving their socio-economic status (Fusheini, 2016).

GSS (2018) revealed that one out of every ten children lived in extreme poverty even with the presence of these interventions. Such persons are characterized by deprivation of their basic needs (Liu, Yu & Wang, 2015). Some deprivation of basic needs includes low educational achievement, poor health, and nutritional conditions, unsafe living conditions, etc. (Liu, Yu & Wang, 2015). Children living in poor communities are more exposed to food insecurity,

depression, parental substance abuse, trauma and abuse, divorce, violent crime and many more (Children's Defense Fund, 2015; Schweiger, 2019).

The Government of Ghana recognizes that poverty in itself is a multi-dimensional concept that has complex domains affecting men, women, adults, and particularly children (Nyamah, 2011). Schweiger (2019) mentioned that children raised in poor urban households are at risk of varied negative consequences from their very birth, extending into adulthood. This is because the various kinds of buffers that protect children from negative influences are limited or non-existent (Schweiger 2019). A significant number of children are constantly faced with challenges of meeting their daily basic needs such as food, shelter, etc. As such, children within poor urban households are equally disadvantaged as those from rural areas (Nyamah, 2011).

Poverty has negative effects on children (The Children's Defense Fund, 2015). According to Poverty Brief (2017), poverty is "the most prevalent Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) reported nationally" (p. 1). It is usually associated with unhappiness, impulsiveness, aggression and disobedience, high rates of dependency, feelings of anxiety, and many others (Children's Defense Fund, 2015; Schweiger, 2019). Poor children are also likely to experience some degree of social deprivation and neglect, negatively affecting their self-esteem (Ford & Stein, 2016). The British Medical Association [BMA] (2017) mentioned that children living in poor contexts have worse health conditions as they are more susceptible to overweight and obesity, asthma, infant mortality, low birth weights, shorter life expectancy, and lack of readiness to learn.

A worrying cause of concern is the influence of poverty on the intellectual development of the child (Schweiger, 2019). According to Ford and Stein (2016), children in poor contexts have an increased risk of mental and behavioral problems such as aggression, depression, anxiety,

substance addiction, and schizophrenia. Most often, these children lack cognitive stimulation and nutrition, leading to poor academic performance (Balter, 2015). Poverty also shrinks significant parts of a child's brain responsible for memory, decision-making, and planning (Rocheleau, 2019), thereby inhibiting brain development.

Long-term poverty is associated with chronic stress which may subsequently affect the memory of the child, specifically the working memory (Blair & Raver, 2016). Hence, such children tend to have a reduced chance of completing high school (Schweiger, 2019), robbing them of their pleasant future (Poverty Brief, 2017). Moreover, thoughts of being poor may create low self-worth and self-efficacy among such children, and also increased the probability of becoming poor in the future, etc. (Blair & Raver, 2016). Most often, poverty places more stress on the child, affecting their ability to successfully perform in school (Rocheleau, 2019).

Child poverty tends to affect children psychologically (Nyamah, 2011). For instance, children facing deprivation usually encounter difficulties in their academic performance (Lai, 2014). Blank et al. (2016) asserted that children from poor contexts suffer from increased levels of stress, hopelessness, and/or low levels of happiness and life satisfaction. Hopelessness creates severe outcomes as the perception of being a failure in adulthood is heightened (Lai, 2014). Also, in a study by Lynam, Caspi, Moffitt, Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber (2012), it was revealed that poor psychological health among children led to greater chances of psychopathology during adulthood. Deprivation in any form subsequently hinders the progressive development of the child. According to Abraham Maslow's theory, the child may not aspire to achieve higher levels of needs when the fundamental ones are not adequately satisfied. Hence, if Ghana hopes to eradicate child poverty and poverty in general, there is a need to understand and appropriately measure child poverty.



### 1.3 Problem Statement

Childhood poverty is a worldwide menace that has attracted the attention of governments, policymakers, and other stakeholders (NDPC, 2019). Globally, one in five children lives in poverty (Children's Defense Funds, 2015). These children are usually deprived of their daily survival needs. These deprivations have a severe negative impact on the growth of the child. Child poverty leads to food insecurity, inadequate accessible health care and creates unavoidable stress on the child (Blank et al. 2016; Children's Defense Funds, 2015). Long-term stress obstructs the brain functioning of the child, hence preventing normative cognitive development (Children's Defense Funds, 2015; Nandy & Minujin, 2012). Awatey (2014) added that extreme deprivation and social segregation created an opportunity for youngsters to engage in crime.

In Ghana, children below eighteen years make up about 45 percent (11.4 million) of the total population (NDPC, 2019). They are thus approximately twice likely to be poor than adults (Nandy & Minujin, 2012). Ghana is no exception to childhood poverty as three out of four children (73.4 percent) face at least three deprivations at the same time (NDPC, 2019). Liu, Yu and Wang (2015) intimated that children's experiences of poverty have largely been overlooked. The implication of this oversight is that child poverty may affect the individual, the family, and the nation as a whole (Liu, Yu & Wang, 2015). Situations, whereby children are unable to reach their full potential and thus become successful individuals within society may largely be attributed to consistent exposure to poverty (Nandy & Minujin, 2012). Poverty may inhibit the occurrence of the diverse innovations and novelties a child may discover within their lifetime (Policy Brief, 2017), impeding the overall development of the nation.

Poverty also creates feelings of social exclusion leading to low self-esteem, poor self-regulation, and low levels of self-efficacy (Blank et al. 2016). "Double jeopardy" is the term Oberklaid (2007) ascribed to situations of children living in poor urban contexts. This is a result of their vulnerable nature combined with their parents or guardians' inability to compensate for these vulnerabilities due to poverty (Blank et al. 2016; Short, 2016). Given the adverse effects of poverty, the Government of Ghana in combination with the UN Sustainable Development Goals hopes to eradicate poverty by the year 2030.

In addition, children's huge contribution to the economic growth of the country cannot be over-emphasized. Thus, deprivation in their health and other spheres of their lives may be costly to the nation as a whole (Touray, 2016; NDPC, 2019). Even though the Government of Ghana and other corporate bodies have put in place measures to curb poverty, many children to date remain deprived of their fundamental rights and needs (NDPC, 2019; Nyamah, 2019). Also, with only ten years left to the end of the SDGs, Ghana must prioritize the reduction and the total elimination of child poverty. To enable the government to achieve this aim, there is a need for continuous studies on the phenomenon to inform interventions and policies aimed at eradicating poverty and alleviating its harmful impact on the well-being of Ghanaians.

Moreover, children are disproportionately poor compared to adults (US Census Bureau 2014), and the fact that child poverty varies from culture to culture calls for an in-depth understanding of its mechanism within Ghanaian society (Roelen, 2015). In addition, studies that focus on the psychological implications of poverty on the child within Ghana are limited (Devereux et al. 2018; Nyamah, 2011). The contextual literature gap prevents the holistic understanding of childhood poverty in the Ghanaian context and how empirical evidence gleaned through research that can help to tackle the problem from the Ghanaian context also missing. This in turn forces

government, policymakers, and stakeholders to fall on Western policies which might not necessarily be a true reflection of the Ghanaian child as a result of different governmental policies, socioeconomic status of the country, systems at work, intervention resources available among others, therefore causing the perpetuation of the problem or the slow results of implementing western policies.

Therefore, this study hopes to understand how poverty is experienced from children's perspective with a specific focus on children's perception of poverty, the benefits and challenges they experience, the impact of such experiences on their well-being and future aspirations, how they cope with such challenges and the nature of interventions available to such children to inform policymakers and stakeholders working with children within the Ghanaian society.

#### **1.4 Aims and objectives**

The study aimed to explore how poverty is experienced from children's perspectives. Specific objectives include to explore:

1. Children's perception of poverty.
2. Children's lived experiences (both positive and challenges) of being a child in a poor urban context.
3. How perceptions about poverty affect children's wellbeing and their aspirations.
4. How children cope with challenges associated with poverty.
5. Explore existing interventions available to children in poor urban contexts.

#### **1.5 Relevance of the study**

This study seeks to unveil the experiences of children in poor urban contexts and how it affects their psychological well-being. Findings from the study will contribute to the limited literature

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regarding the concept of child poverty in Ghana and its implications on the child, the family, and the nation at large. The study will also provide insight into the consequences of poverty on the well-being of the child and its perceived impact. Masten and Barnes (2018) found that an individual can develop resilience with the right training and interaction with their environment. Hence, every child has protective factors that serve as a buffer against the negative consequences of child poverty. Thus, identifying children's coping mechanisms in dealing with poverty provides policymakers and the community as a whole with the right amount of information to direct intervention programs toward the needs of the child.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework guiding the study as well as literature reviews that are relevant to the present study. Additionally, this chapter presents the rationale, the research questions and some operationalized definitions of certain terminologies.

#### 2.1 Theoretical framework

##### 2.1.1 The Family Stress Model (Conger, Elder & Lorenzo, 1994).

The Family Stress Model centers on the economic aspect of socioeconomic status, that is lower levels of income create developmental challenges for children (Conger, Elder & Lorenzo, 1994). This model denotes that hardship destabilizes proper family functioning, which subsequently affects the lives of parents and their children negatively (Conger, Conger & Martin, 2010). It proposes that economic lack leads to an economic burden within the family (Conger, Conger & Martin, 2010). Some markers of hardship may include work instability, income loss, increased economic demands, etc. (Conger, Conger & Martin, 2010). Conger, Elder and Lorenzo (1994) mentioned that these markers affect family functioning and adjustments as a result of the economic burdens they create.

The Family Stress Model suggests that unmet needs such as food, shelter, and inability to pay bills or even make ends meet create some economic pressure on parents. These pressures give psychological interpretations to economic difficulties (Conger, Schofield, Conger & Neppl, 2010). Increased economic burden increases parents' risk of emotional stress and behavioral difficulties such as anger, depression, alienation, antisocial behaviors, substance abuse, etc. (Conger et al. 2010). Personal and/or marital stress tend to distract parents and their parenting

styles, making them channel less affection and attention to their children (Conger, Conger & Martin, 2010). The Family Stress Model points out that parental involvement and nurturance lead to increased cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral well-being of children (Conger & Elder, 1994). Thus, children indirectly suffer the negative outcomes of the economic hardship of parents (Conger, Schofield, Conger & Neppl, 2010) and later develop mental health problems (Lai, 2014).

Osei-Owusu, Ampofo, Akyina and Amponsah (2018) mentioned that parents' coping mechanisms with stressful events, such as poverty and illness affect children's experience and interpretation of a stressful environment. For instance, stressed parents are less likely to address issues in an optimum way and thus use harsh and coercive disciplinary measures (Nachinaab, Nelly, Kumah & Yirenkyi, 2019). Poverty may lead to a deterioration of marriages which in turn disrupts parenting practices, which is the major cause of adolescent maladjustment (Nachinaab et al. 2019). Such parents are usually uninvolved and exhibit lower levels of nurturing behaviors, hence disrupting developmental results for children (Crowder, 2013). Poor parenting efficacy is correlated with maladaptive behaviors among children (Crowder, 2013).

This theory highlights the impact of stress on the family and how it can subsequently affect the overall development of children. Stressors such as inappropriate shelter, food insecurity, emotional imbalance, and many others may increase the risk of psychological problems for parents, leading to poor parenting styles (Lai, 2014). The presence of non-monetary stressors informs the multidimensional nature of child poverty. Non-monetary stressors negatively affect how children perceive and experience poverty, affecting the realization of their full potential. Moreover, the vulnerable nature of children combined with the presence of any form of stress

may severely affect the perceptions and experiences of children in poor contexts and subsequently their future aspirations (Nachinaab et al. 2019).

### **2.1.2 Family Investment Model –FIM (Conger & Donnellan, 2007).**

The Family Investment Model is based on the economic ideology that higher socio-economic status parents have access to human (e.g. education), financial (e.g. income), and social (e.g. occupation) capital (Conger & Donnellan, 2007). Thus, higher SES parents invest more in their children leading to the successful development of the child (Conger, Conger & Martin, 2010).

Kalil and Ryan (2020) asserted that families with higher economic resources usually make substantial investments in the growth of their children, while those from disadvantaged homes predominantly concentrate on the immediate needs of the family. Some parental investment includes the provision of adequate food, clothing, medical care, learning materials and/or extra tuition, unconditional love, and residing in an environment that promotes the development of the child's competence.

Conger, Conger and Martin (2010) extended the traditional investment model by proposing that parents' occupational positions and educational achievements correlate with investments in their children. Parents and caregivers with higher education are likely to place more priority on goods, services, and activities that foster the psychological, social, and academic competence of their wards, promoting their human development (Wakiuru, 2016). Wakiuru (2016) added that the occupational positions of parents and caregivers direct the priorities and values they place on the developmental course of their children.

The Family Investment Model also proposes that parents and caregivers use their resources as the "central organizing principle" to positively affect the lives of their children and their future

(Lai, 2014, p.16). Kalil and Ryan (2020) support the FIM by indicating that parents' and caregivers' educational level is linked to supportive childrearing. This is subsequently related to the child's academic accomplishment along with positive mental health (Wakiuru, 2016).

Lai (2014) argued that when parents invest their time and resources in the development of their children, they are more likely to achieve optimum growth. This is because the physical and emotional affection directed toward children goes a long way in affecting their mental health. In a study by Wickham, Anwar, Barr, Law and Taylor-Robinson (2016), children who are both socially and materially deprived are more vulnerable in terms of their mental health. They usually find it difficult to concentrate in school and also sustain a lasting relationship with their peers (Becerra & Evans, 2016). In another study, children irrespective of their upbringing deprived materially and emotionally, were more exposed to emotional, physical, and sexual health risks (Akansale, 2018).

This Family Investment Theory proposes that parental investments in terms of meeting their children's basic needs such as appropriate shelter, balanced diets, quality education, psycho-social support, and many more influence children's perceptions and experiences of poverty. Children whose parents provide the needed environment for their development are more likely to perceive and experience poverty differently and hence able to cope well with poverty.

## 2.2 Review of related studies

In addition to the above-mentioned theories, this section focuses on other related studies that highlight the experiences of children in poor urban contexts.



### 2.2.1 The concept of childhood poverty in Ghana

For ages past, the monetary approach has been used to explain the concept of childhood poverty with Ghana being no exception (Newhouse, Suarez-Becerra & Evans, 2016). Evans, Nogales and Robson (2020) cited that using the monetary approach is justified as it is considered the most influential and traditional approach within the sphere of poverty research. Watts (1993) added that the monetary approach provides a more standardized measure of childhood poverty as it allows for easy comparison among nations (Short, 2016). Nonetheless, the monetary approach provides a limited understanding of the concept of childhood poverty as poverty goes beyond the absence of money-oriented assets (Sen, 1999). Hence, UNICEF describes childhood poverty as the absence of physical, emotional, and spiritual resources critical for the welfare of children (UNICEF, 2005).

Benedetti, Betti and Crescenzi (2020) asserted that household income levels were inadequate in measuring child poverty. This measure is heavily criticized as it assumes that the income-expenditure of children is equally shared among family members (Agyire-Tettey, Asuman, Ackah & Tsiboe-Darko, 2021), thereby hiding the real conditions of children (Benedetti, Betti & Crescenzi, 2020). Newhouse, Suarez-Becerra and Evans (2016) found that a greater number of children tend to experience deprivation compared to income poverty. This involved the lack and/or denial of rights, goods, services, or resources, preventing a child's full participation in socio-economic, political, or cultural activities (Biggeri & Ferrone, 2021). Benedetti, Betti and Crescenzi (2020) found a strong relationship between the levels of social deprivation and income poverty, indicating that increase in one led to an increase in the other.

Gender is considered a moderating factor in childhood poverty (Frearson, 2019). Child poverty is unevenly distributed among males and females, as both parties experience poverty differently (Jones & Summer, 2011). Globally, more females live in poor and unhealthy conditions in both developed and developing countries (UNICEF, 2012). More than half of children who die from preventable diseases due to poverty are females (Jones & Summer, 2011). In 2004, the UNDP mentioned that today's girls and boys represent tomorrow's adults. Thus, poor, uneducated, and even malnourished children are likely to become poor, uneducated, and malnourished adults. These poor, uneducated, and malnourished adults subsequently raise their children in poverty, creating the generational cycle of poverty (UNICEF, 2012).

### **2.2.2 Children's perception of poverty**

Another area of concern is children's perception of poverty. Children make up about half of Ghana's population, however, their views are least considered in conceptualizing poverty for governmental policies and interventions (Central Intelligence Agency, 2020). Children's views about poverty are usually similar across diverse groups (Ozoemenam, Ekanem & Delamonica, 2021). Understanding children's perception of poverty requires acknowledgment of their various stages of cognitive development (Hakovirta & Kallio, 2015). According to Piaget's cognitive stages of development, children from the formal operational stage (12 years and above) are mature enough to think abstractly and thus provide insightful views about poverty.

Usually, children from poor households are described with negative and derogatory terms (Hakovirta & Kallio, 2015). In a study by Ozoemenam, Ekanem and Delamonica (2021), children referred to emotional, personal, family, and spiritual factors when they were asked about their perceptions of child poverty. Respondents mentioned that children from poor backgrounds

are usually submissive to individuals with more money, never happy as they are always worried, wandering around with nothing to do, with mental problems, etc. Others added that poor children have low self-esteem, play in soils as there is nowhere to play, regret why they were born, and also have a lower inferiority complex (Biggeri & Ferrone, 2021; Ozoemenam, Ekanem & Delamonica, 2021).

In addition, environmental factors such as children living in areas susceptible to drought and floods; areas without clean water and/or latrine, and war-affected areas are also perceived notions about children living in poverty (Ozoemenam, Ekanem & Delamonica, 2021). The unavailability of these facilities makes life very unbearable for these children contributing to their vulnerabilities (Hakovirta & Kallio, 2015). Similarly, in a study by UNICEF (2007), children mentioned that hard child labor, working as prostitutes, not having much to eat, stealing to survive, eating from dustbins, wearing tattered and dirty clothes, and even children who purchase second-hand clothes, etc. are all perceived characteristics of children from poor backgrounds.

Children also perceive poverty as a phenomenon that shapes an individual's thought patterns and behaviors (Hakovirta & Kallio, 2015). They attribute poverty to physical and intellectual factors. A child with a disability combined with the inability to do anything by themselves, those with a swollen stomach, one who cannot think combined with poor judgment, one who is always sick, a child with AIDS and/or has a big head compared to the rest of the body are some perceived characteristics of children from poor contexts (Ozoemenam, Ekanem & Delamonica, 2021; UNICEF, 2007). Such children are not fed the right amount of nutrition that their body requires for optimum growth and mental development (Hakovirta & Kallio, 2015). As a result of their

inability to access quality education combined with a conducive environment, their academic performance and thought patterns may not be at par with that of their age mates (Ratcliffe, 2015).

Some researchers also mentioned that child poverty among girls meant being seen as women and thus given out into marriage, as they are seen unworthy of education (Ozoemenam, Ekanem & Delamonica, 2021). As young as they are, these girls are subjected to responsibilities that are expected to be performed by older adults (Hardgrove, Enenajor & Lee, 2011). These young brides are given out to bring bride prices to the family (Baba, Salifu Yendork & Atindanbila, 2020). Such girls are forced to assume adults' responsibilities and thus denied their childhood experiences (UNFPA, 2012). Edmeades and Hayes (2014) found that these girls suffer from isolation as they are separated from their parents and siblings. These deprivations and many others affect the subjective well-being of children from poor contexts.

### **2.2.3 Lived experiences of poor children**

What exactly do poor children experiences? Using UNICEF's definition of child poverty, a greater number of children fall victim to poverty and its implications. This is evident in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (2017) study which revealed the rate of childhood poverty as of 2014 to be 13. 5%. In a study among children in Hong Kong, it was found that children living in poor contexts experienced poor psychological consequences such as reduced levels of life satisfaction, low self-esteem, and increased levels of hopelessness and stress (SOCO & HKCCR, 2011). These children mentioned that poverty affected their self-efficacy levels compared with non-poor children. Cai and Smeeding (2018) found that children raised in poverty were 10 to 20 percent more likely to exhibit psychological stress and

difficulties than non-disadvantaged children. These stressors tend to damage their emotional regulation abilities when they become chronic (Kim et al. 2013).

Jones and Summer (2011) revealed that childhood poverty was massively felt in children's interaction with others, especially with their peers at school. During interactions with their peers, children tend to sense differences among their peers. In a study by Salva (2016), it was revealed that the concept of inequality and subsequent feelings of shame was considered a characteristic of children from poor contexts. Children from poor environments believed the stigma and shame attached to poverty is more of a problem compared to the deprivation of material needs (Hakovirta & Hallio 2015). Kim et al. (2013) emphasized that childhood experiences of poverty were correlated to maladaptive behaviors such as depression, panic attacks, anxiety, etc. affecting the individual's interpersonal relationships.

Childhood poverty in Ghana and other countries is not exclusive to rural communities (Ozoemenam, Ekanem & Delamonica, 2021; Rutstein, Staveteig, Winter & Yourkavitch, 2016). In a Situation Analysis report (2011), increased levels of rural-urban migration have generated rising slum communities within towns and cities. The report revealed that a significant number of children within the country faced severe deprivations such as the civil right to develop, survive, be protected, and even fully participate in communal or national activities that they were entitled to as Ghanaians (Situation Analysis Report, 2011). As a result, children may be compelled to migrate to other locations, increasing their exposure to chronic poverty, trafficking, and exploitation (Akansale, 2018; De La O Campos, Villani, Davis & Takagi, 2018). Poor diets have also been found to be associated with poverty. Children from poor households are usually disadvantaged in terms of their food (Akansale, 2018). For instance, inadequate iron is associated with poverty (Hartline-Grafton, 2017). Such children suffer from over-consumption of

carbohydrate foods (UNICEF, 2007). Usually, children from poor contexts lack a well-balanced diet as they are forced to consume what they have instead of what they choose to enjoy and what is relevant to their well-being (Hartline-Grafton, 2017).

Poverty also leaves children worried about the physical and psychological well-being of their parents. In a study by Quint et al. (2018), children reported that they preferred not to stress or worry their parents when they knew their parents could not afford certain things. In severe instances, feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem led to self-harm among children from poor contexts (Doi, Fujiwara, Isumi & Ochi, 2018; Poorgholami et al. 2015). The anxiety and depression associated with asking parents things they could not afford created insecurities among children who hold their parents in high esteem (Manani & Sharma, 2016).

Many studies have focused on the negative experiences of poverty in children (Hardgrove, Enenajor & Lee, 2011; Treanor, 2012), with only a few focusing on the positive experiences of children from poor urban contexts. In a study by Quint, Griffin, Kaufman, Landers and Utterback (2018), children living in poor households mentioned that they appreciated the sense of cohesion and solidarity that existed in their neighborhood. Individuals mentioned that though they lived in a poor environment, their sense of belonging to a family and a community was an experience some children from rich homes never had (Agbenyo, Galaa & Abiuro, 2017; Quint et al. 2018). Also, emotional support and care received from people within the family and society were some positive experiences respondents raised. These support systems came from parents, teachers, community members, and peers. Machell, Disabato and Kashdan (2016) argued that feelings of love and acceptance compensate for the presence of poverty.

#### 2.2.4 How perceptions of child poverty affect well-being

Child poverty has implications for the child's well-being. Poverty affects the sense of belonging of the child as they are usually stigmatized and badly labeled (Jones & Summer, 2011). The adverse influence of poverty affects the esteem levels of children destroying their present and future goals (Addaney, 2016; Jakovljevic et al. 2016). Jones and Summer (2011) and Ratcliffe (2015) revealed that living in low-income households affected children's plans for the future. Such children find it difficult to hold onto their dreams and aspirations as poverty may affect their prospects for the future (Addaney, 2016). For instance, in a study by UNICEF (2007), children from poor contexts regardless of gender and age reported lower levels of life satisfaction and happiness. The fewer ones who stayed in school were usually driven by optimism toward their future. Ratcliffe (2015) noted that upon sensing massive differences between themselves and their peers, children feel intimidated and thus lose their levels of assertiveness.

Poverty is the largest determining factor in children's physical and psychological health (WHO, 2016). It is one of the risk factors of mental illness that affects early cognitive development (Jakovljevic, Miller & Fitzgerald, 2016). Poverty is usually associated with impaired cognitive development and poor academic attainment (Kayode, 2019). Experiences such as trauma, child abuse, and stress may negatively impact the child's behavior and development (Jakovljevic et al. 2016). Kayode (2019) mentioned that children from poor families are three times more likely to suffer psychiatric disorders, which include externalizing conditions such as conduct disorder, ADHD, oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), and internalizing conditions such as poor coping skills, anxiety, depression, etc. These psychiatric conditions may extend into their adulthood (Jakovljevic et al. 2016).

Poverty has been found to also affect the brain development of children (Kolb & Gibb, 2015). In a study by Hair, Hanson, Wolfe and Pollak (2015), children living in poverty exhibited deficits in their language abilities, working memory, and also difficulties with cognitive flexibility. These deficits are ascribed to the underdevelopment of the hippocampus and both the temporal and frontal lobes, as it accounts for 15 to 20 percent of achievement deficits (Kindg, 2016; Luby, 2015). Persistent exposure to poverty leads to the development of depressive symptoms and the damage of hippocampal neurons (Duncan, Kalil & Ziol-Guest, 2013; Kolb & Gibb, 2015).

Anasuri (2017) revealed that both working memory and language abilities are the most delicate neuro-cognitive systems in connection with early childhood deprivation. This makes poverty biologically rooted as it leads to structural and functional changes within the evolving brain (Kolb & Gibb, 2015). De La O Campos, Villani, Davis and Takagi (2018) cited that the longer children lived in poverty, the higher the chance of performing poorly academically and thus reduced occupational attainment.

Poverty also has a tripling effect on the child's future. In a study by Lynam, Caspi, Moffitt, Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber, (2012), it was revealed that poor mental health in the course of adolescence leads to a greater probability of psychopathology during adulthood. Experiences at such a tender stage of development are known to be unique and thus difficult to forget (Hardgrove, Enenajor & Lee, 2011). Child poverty tends to lower the self-esteem of the child, leading to a carry-over effect into adulthood (Doi, Fujiwara, Isumi & Ochi, 2018). Furthermore, the stigma associated with childhood poverty creates feelings of inferiority complex and subsequently the development of psychopathological symptoms (Ratcliffe, 2015). Children from poor contexts are usually branded as criminals, gangsters, teenage parents, and drug abusers



(Ratcliffe, 2015). This negative labeling affects the confidence levels of the child, leading to poor psychological health of the child (Lai, 2014).

Poverty has also been found to be associated with adolescent risk-taking and violent behaviors (Jakovljevic et al. 2016). The adolescence period is characterized by activities and experiments that are dangerous. Adolescents' exuberance combined with poverty perpetuates risky and violent behaviors among adolescents as they are compelled to exercise their autonomy (Jakovljevic et al. 2016). They may engage in socially unacceptable behaviors such as substance abuse, tobacco smoking, unsafe sexual behaviors, alcohol consumption, etc. In another study by Main (2019), children reported that deprivation such as decision-making involvement was associated with lower levels of subjective well-being.

### **2.2.5 Coping strategies adopted by children in poor contexts**

This sub-section reviews studies on the coping mechanisms that children in poor contexts adopt in dealing with poverty. In coping with child poverty, children are not passive in the process. In a study by Stubbs, Ledic, Rubil and Zrinscak (2017), it was discovered that children can develop solutions to their problems. Individual differences may however exist in the various coping mechanisms that children living in poverty adapt, as they are not affected by poverty in the same manner (Stubbs, Ledic, Rubil & Zrinscak, 2017). Thus, considering all poor children as a homogenous group may be detrimental (Arye, 2016).

Most children relied on the support of their families as a coping mechanism against childhood poverty (Akansale, 2018). As the child's first primary social group, the child relies greatly on the family for all of his/her needs. Having a family creates a sense of belongingness and also increases one's quality of life (UNICEF Montenegro, 2021). Even with lower economic status,

children can appropriately adapt and thrive when they have the support of their families (Usrey, 2021). Lack of a support system may lead to isolation which can negatively affect the mental health of the child. Individuals experiencing isolation are at a greater risk of alcohol or drug misuse, stress, self-harm, and suicide (UNICEF Montenegro, 2021).

Children also run errands to cope with poverty. According to Afriyie, Bashiru and Abubari (2019), children make up about 32% of the workforce in Africa. In Ghana, about 13.7 million children are engaged in the workforce (Afriyie, Bashiru & Abubari 2019; Samantha et al. 2020). In a study by Ozoemenam, Ekanem and Delamonica (2021), children from Nigeria mentioned that they would rather run errands and often spent the monies on food, and water. Most children who engage in work-related activities, do so to support their families while combining it with their school (Bukari, 2022). For other children, working helps them gain an identity, and vocational skills and also improves their self-esteem (Bukari, 2022; Jijon, 2020), as it complements what they learn in school.

Religious coping, particularly reliance on God is another coping mechanism children adopt in poor contexts (Bryan, et al. 2016). Religious coping has been found to decrease negative feelings associated with poverty. According to Okoro (2017), religious coping strategies minimize socially deviant means of solving social problems, such as prostitution, gambling, drinking, etc., and subsequently alleviate the negative emotional consequences of stressful life events. Reliance on God promotes meaning in life, self-development, hope, and personal restraints (Wortmann, 2013).

### 2.2.6 Existing interventions for children in poor contexts.

Children within poor contexts see themselves to be excluded from society. In many instances, they are deprived of the necessities needed for survival and optimum growth and development (Agbenyo, Galaa & Aiiro, 2017). This creates marginalization and social exclusion, making them more vulnerable. In 2004, Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler developed a social protection framework to explain the various ways children are disadvantaged within society. They include social assistance (i.e., LEAP etc.); social welfare (i.e., protection against child labor etc.); and social insurance (i.e., NHIS etc.). In the bid to overcome this social exclusion within society, government, and corporate organizations put in place programs and interventions to protect and rescue the vulnerable. These interventions serve as a social network to escape the adverse effects of poverty by way of integrating them back into the functioning areas of the community (Agbenyo, Galaa & Aiiro, 2017).

One of the mechanisms put in place by the Government of Ghana is the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) launched in 2008 (UNICEF, 2009). The main beneficiaries of the LEAP program are the extremely poor individuals within the society, including children. In Agbenyo, Galaa and Aiiro's (2017) study, beneficiaries of the LEAP programs mentioned that the cash received was used for education, medical care, and feeding. Some respondents opined that the money was however not enough, nonetheless, they could not complain as it was gifted to them (Agbenyo, Galaa & Aiiro, 2017). Even with unintended consequences such as envy, stigma, and poverty labeling, the presence of LEAP made accessing quality healthcare and food possible among beneficiaries (Handa & Park 2012).

Another intervention by the Government of Ghana is the School Feeding Programme (GSFP). This program was introduced in 2004 with assistance from the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) to achieve the Millennium Development Goal regarding poverty reduction. The major goal is to increase school enrolment, including retention by way of providing at least one meal a day to deprived communities (UNICEF, 2007). The Government of Ghana also hopes that GSFP will increase the production of domestic foods. With the presence of GSFP and Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), children can complete their education without any form of barriers (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018).

The National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) was also established by the Government of Ghana in 2003 under Act 650. The scheme was introduced to provide basic healthcare services to individuals within the country (UNICEF, 2007). The NHIS was established to replace the previous cash-and-carry system that made people pay money in cash whenever they needed to visit the hospital. To benefit from the scheme, beneficiaries needed to get a card to enable them to go to the hospital without payment (UNICEF, 2007). The hospital sends the bill to the scheme provider who in turn pays for the services delivered. The NHIS creates an all-inclusive environment for easier accessibility and financial coverage of basic healthcare and a pathway to achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) (Adonteng-Kissi, 2018).



The above and many others established by the Government of Ghana have helped minimize the rate of childhood poverty. However, more is yet to be done in its implementation. Also, the psychological implications of childhood poverty within the Ghanaian community and their coping mechanisms are limited (Lai, 2014). Thus, this study hopes to unravel the positive experiences of poor children in urban contexts if some exist. In addition, this study hopes to find out the interventions available to children from poor contexts from the views of social workers in Ghana.

### **2.3 Rationale**

The distinction between child and adult poverty is usually ignored and thus many overlook some salient implications of poverty on the child (Arye, 2016; Elliott, 2016). The prevalence of child poverty is significantly higher than adults (Stubbs, Ledic, Rubil & Zrinscak, 2017). In 2019, an estimated 386 million children lived in poverty (United Nations, 2020). The presence of COVID-19 has been found to add an estimated number of 42-66 million children to the already huge crisis (United Nations, 2020). Devereux et al. (2018) added that the rate of poverty among children in Ghana is 37 percent higher than that of adults. Nonetheless, studies that focus on child poverty, usually fail to focus on the subjective experiences of such children. Also, the costs of living in urban sectors are much higher than in rural sectors and thus children from such households may not be able to afford basic utilities and services for their survival as compared to free or cheaper services within the rural areas.

Moreover, exposure to persistent poverty exacerbates the already vulnerable nature of children (Arye, 2016). Such children are likely to be depressed compared to their age mates. Gentilini (2015) revealed that children from poor contexts are 22 percent likely to be pessimistic about their future as they see themselves as useless. In addition, 1 out of 40 children between the ages

of 5–10 years from lower socio-economic backgrounds engages in suicidal ideations and self-harm, compared to about 1 in 100 children from high socio-economic backgrounds (Arye, 2016). Also, there exist limited studies that focus on the protective factors both within and outside adolescents that enable them to surmount the adverse effects of poverty.

Therefore, this study seeks to gain an insight into what poverty means to children, and the nature of their experiences and uncover information about their coping mechanisms and their aspirations for the future. Additionally, the study will explore interventions available to poor children in urban poor contexts in Ghana. Focusing on the lived experiences of children from poor contexts promotes children's voices and visibility through empirical and theoretical lenses. It also gives a better understanding of how such children cope or deal with poverty, as the way children deal with poverty influences the way it is experienced (Stubbs, Ledic, Rubil & Zrinscak, 2017). In addition, assessing child poverty and their experiences at the individual level may reveal significant findings (Ozoemenam, Ekanem & Delamonica, 2021).

Also, a significant number of interventions have been laid down by the Government of Ghana. Some include NHIS, Free Universal Basic Education, free SHS, and many others to aid children in poverty. Nonetheless, children in Ghana continue to suffer in the cruel hands of poverty. The study sought to explore the various interventions that are available to poor children and the effectiveness of these interventions in improving the lives of every child.

#### **2.4 Research questions**

The study seeks to explore the following:

1. What are the perceptions of children about poverty?
2. What are the positive and negative experiences of being a child from a poor urban setting?

3. In what way do children's perceptions of poverty affect their psychological well-being and their aspirations?
4. How do they cope regardless of these challenges?
5. What are some existing interventions for these children?

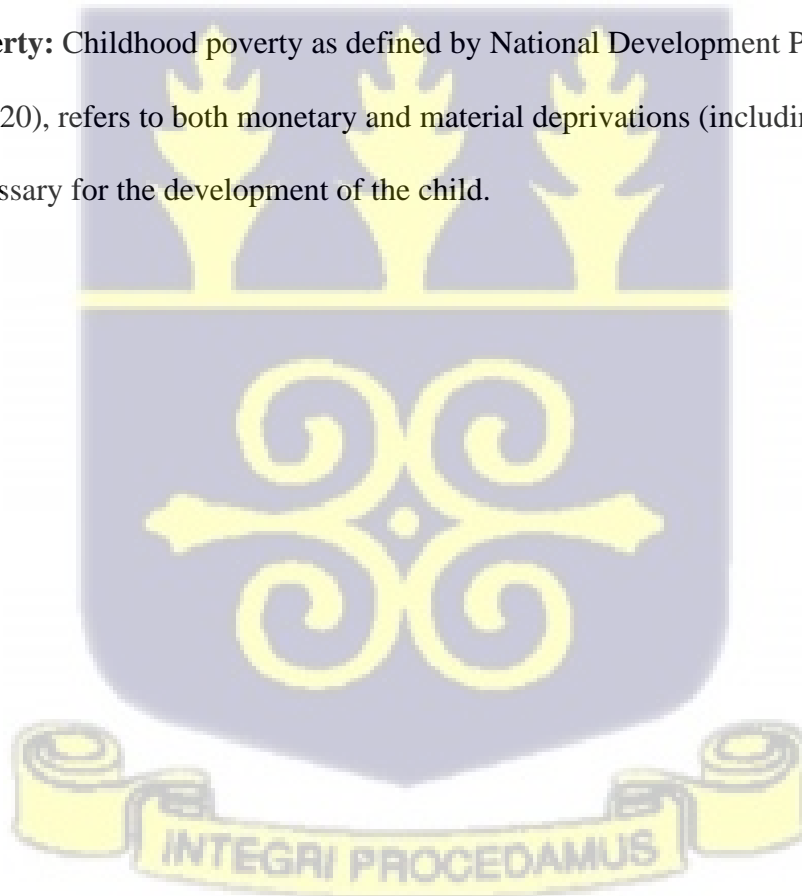
## 2.5 Operational definition of terms

This study conceptualizes the following terms:

**Child:** A child within this study is defined as both males and females from 12 to 17 years old.

**Poverty:** According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2018), poverty is defined as the state whereby one's standard of living is inadequate to meet their basic needs and survival.

**Childhood poverty:** Childhood poverty as defined by National Development Planning Commission (2020), refers to both monetary and material deprivations (including the living conditions) necessary for the development of the child.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the various methods and procedures that were used in this study. The research design adopted and its appropriateness are discussed. Also, the setting within which data was collected, in addition to the reasons for selecting the setting are discussed. Detailed demographic information regarding the participants (sample) and the population are discussed. Furthermore, the sampling techniques and the reasons for using such techniques are discussed. Finally, ethical issues that were observed during the research and how data were analyzed are discussed.

#### 3.2 Design

Singh and Chaudhary (1986) defined research design as a plan that ensures a systematic organization of data collection. Thus, to gain first-hand information about the experiences of children from poor urban contexts, the appropriate research design for this study is qualitative, specifically the phenomenological approach. The qualitative research design provides a detailed explanation and understanding of individuals' subjective experiences (Creswell, 2014).

Rahman (2017) mentioned that qualitative studies provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon experienced by individuals being studied and hence may not necessarily aim to generalize results to other populations. Eyisi (2016) also mentioned that the qualitative research design is used to research people's feelings; behaviors and emotions, and lived experiences. Also, with the phenomenological approach, data is gathered from the individual experiencing the phenomenon under study, usually with the help of an interview guide (Qutoshi, 2018).



### 3.3 Population/sample/ sampling techniques

This study included twenty adolescents from James Town between the ages of twelve and seventeen. Most of these adolescents were selected while they were in their various schools, with two adolescents selected while at home (particularly after school hours). They were interviewed using convenience and purposive sampling techniques. Convenience sampling because respondents were chosen based on their readiness and accessibility. On the other hand, the choice of purposive sampling was because children from poor urban contexts were purposively selected. As a result of urbanization and the cosmopolitan nature of James Town, participation in the study was not restricted to only individuals from the Ga ethnic group.

With social workers, ten participants (seven males and three females) were sampled using snowball sampling and purposive sampling techniques. The purposive sampling technique was used because the study targeted social workers working with children. With the snowball sampling technique, some existing participants provided referrals for recruiting other participants. All but one participant were government officials. This participant is a private practitioner working with a private Non-Governmental Organization in the Greater Accra region of Ghana.

### 3.4 Inclusion criteria

This study included children between the ages of 12 and 17 years who resided in James town. For social workers, participants who worked with issues related to children were included in the study.

### 3.5 Exclusion criteria

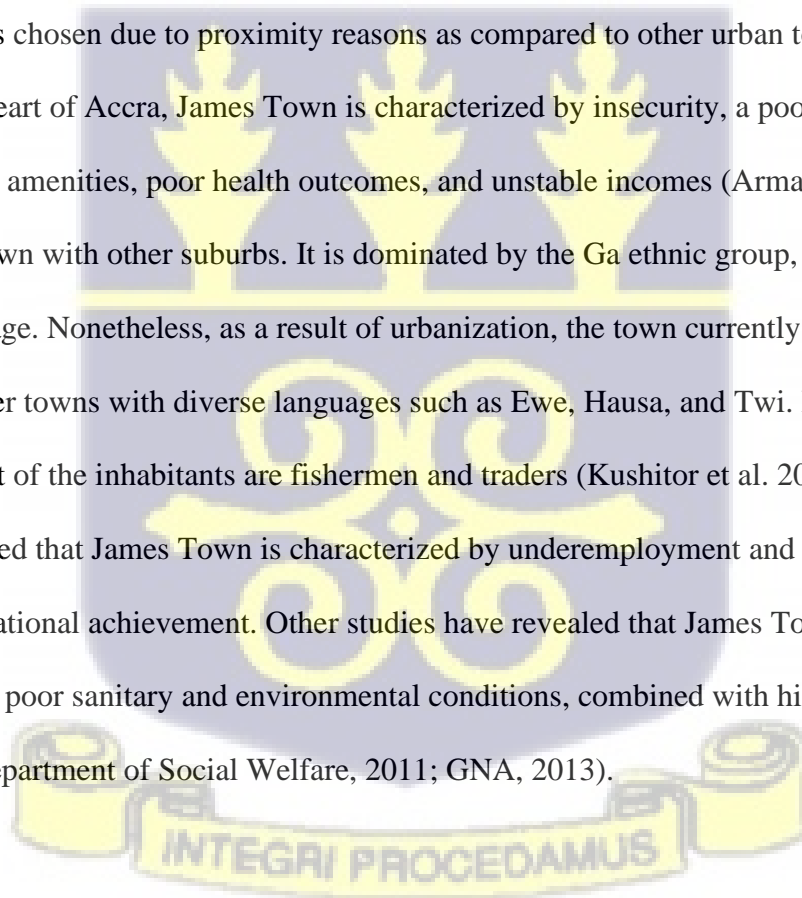
Individuals below twelve years and those above seventeen years old were exempted from the study. Regarding social workers, service personnel and students were also exempted from the study as these individuals had limited experiences and were not fully employed.

### 3.6 Research settings

James Town, a constituent of "Ga- Mashie" is located on the Atlantic Coast of the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. This area is also called Old Accra as the original Gas initially settled there.

Ga-Mashie, the oldest community in Accra covers an area of about 100 hectares along the southwestern part of Accra (Armah, 2014). According to Mahama et al. (2011), Europeans from Britain, Denmark and the Netherlands were permitted to build trading lodges in the seventeenth century within these areas. As such, during the 20th century, James Town became a densely populated town for both commercial and residential use.

James Town was chosen due to proximity reasons as compared to other urban towns in Ghana. Located in the heart of Accra, James Town is characterized by insecurity, a poor housing system, inadequate basic amenities, poor health outcomes, and unstable incomes (Armah, 2014). James Town is a big town with other suburbs. It is dominated by the Ga ethnic group, with Ga as the dominant language. Nonetheless, as a result of urbanization, the town currently inhabits other people from other towns with diverse languages such as Ewe, Hausa, and Twi. In terms of occupation, most of the inhabitants are fishermen and traders (Kushitor et al. 2018). De-Graft et al. (2018) revealed that James Town is characterized by underemployment and unemployment, with lower educational achievement. Other studies have revealed that James Town is characterized by poor sanitary and environmental conditions, combined with high population growth rates (Department of Social Welfare, 2011; GNA, 2013).



### 3.7 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The adolescent sample was made up of twenty respondents sampled for individual interviews living within James Town and its suburbs. The adoption of this sample size was due to the realization of the same themes running throughout participants' responses (homogeneity of participants' responses). According to Boddy (2016), to justify sample size, the researcher must take into consideration the scope and nature of the study, the contact time to be spent on each participant, and the homogeneity of the population under study.

Ten of them were males, with the remaining being females. Participants were between the ages of 12 and 17 years old. A majority (N=7) of participants were 15 years old. Individuals who were 14 and 17 years old were both four in number. Participants who were 16 years old were three in number; while those who were the ages 12 and 13 years, were one each. Sixteen (16) respondents were in Junior High School three (JHS 3), one in JHS 2, two in JHS 1, and one person in Grade six. Eighteen (18) participants mentioned that their school was a government school, while the remaining two mentioned their school is a private school. Out of the respondents who mentioned that their school was a government one, nine revealed that their school was a poor one; seven mentioned their school was an average school; one participant said her school was a rich one; while the last participant did not respond.



**TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC TABLE OF ADOLESCENT SAMPLE**

ID	gender	age	residence	Type of school	Status of school	class	Caregivers	Caregivers' socio-economic status
1	Female	13	Abola	government	Poor	six	grandmother	poor
2	male	17	Atupaim	government	Poor	Form 3	grandparents	average
3	female	14	Alata	government	Poor	Form one	parents	average
4	female	12	James Town	Government school	Poor school	Form one	mother	rich
5	female	15	Arena		Poor school	Form 3	parents	poor
6	male	15	Sempe	Government school	Poor school	Form 3	parents	average
7	male	14	Palladium	Government school	Average school	Form 3	mother	poor
8	male	15	James Town	Government school	Average school	Form 3	parents	rich
9	Male	14	Akwetey-lante	Government school	Average school	Form 3	parents	poor
10	male	15	Adedekpo	Government school	Poor school	Form 3	mother	poor

**EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF POOR CHILDREN IN JAMES TOWN**

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11	male	15	Bukom	Government school	Average school	Form 3	grandmother	poor
12	female	17	Swalaba	Government school	Average school	Form 3	parents	average
13	female	15	Korle-worko	Government school	Average school	Form 3	siblings	poor
14	male	17	James Town	Government school	Average school	Form 3	parents	poor
15	Female	17	Cow lane	Government school	Poor school	Form 3	grandmother	rich
16	Male	16	Palladium	Private school	Rich school	Form 3	mother	poor
17	male	16	James Town	Private school	Rich school	Form 3	mother	poor
18	female	15	Akotey-lante	Government school		Form 2	mother	average
19	female	14	Zongo-lane	Government school	Poor school	Form 3	parents	poor
20	Female	16	Ashaibu	Government school	Rich school	Form 3	parents	rich



**TABLE 2. DEMOGRAPHIC TABLE OF PROFESSIONAL SAMPLE**

<b>ID</b>	<b>GENDER</b>	<b>YEARS OF SERVICE</b>	<b>CURRENT POSITION</b>
1	Female	13	Principal Program Officer
2	Male	24	Head of the research unit
3	Male	39	Retired Deputy Director
4	Male	6	Senior social worker officer
5	Female	19	Program Head
6	Male	12	Development Officer
7	Male	33	Deputy Director
8	Male	8	Senior program officer
9	Male	4	Head of Department
10	Female	35	Deputy Director

A majority (N=11) of the respondents were in the same school: X JHS; five were from Y Basic School; two from Z Academy; one from T Academy; and the last participant from M Basic School. Overall, a majority (N=9) of the twenty respondents revealed that their school was poor. In terms of persons these adolescents were living with, nine adolescents lived with both parents; six with their mothers; three with their grandmothers; and one each with their siblings and both grandparents. Exploring further about the socio-economic status of their caregivers, eleven (11) adolescents revealed that their caregivers were poor, five of them said the socio-economic status of their caregivers was average, with the remaining four adolescents describing the socio-economic status of their caregivers as rich.

Regarding social workers, seven respondents were males, while three were females. The years of service ranged from four (4) to thirty-nine (39) years. Among the ten participants, six were from the Department of Social Welfare, three from the Department of Children, and one was a private practitioner. In terms of current positions, four out of the ten respondents were Program Officers, three of them were Heads of units and the remaining three were deputy directors (including a retiree).

### **3.8 Data collection materials**

To investigate the experiences of children from poor contexts and the interventions available to these children, a semi-structured interview guide that was developed by the researcher was used. Interviews were conducted face-to-face with all thirty participants in their various preferred settings, to allow them the chance to express themselves without restraint. Each interview was done with a recorder after sorting the permission of the interviewees. All participants agreed for them to be recorded.

### **3.9 Trustworthiness of the results**

According to Polit and Beck (2014), trustworthiness is the measure of confidence in data, methods, and interpretation used to ensure the quality of any study. It is often described as the most important criterion (Polit & Beck, 2014). Shenton (2004) highlighted four criteria that can guide researchers in qualitative studies. They include a) credibility. The credibility of the study is referred to as internal validity; b) transferability is usually referred to as external validity or generalizability; c) dependability is ascribed to the reliability of the study, and d) confirmability pertains to how objective the study is.

In promoting the credibility of the study, participants were debriefed on the right to decline or withdraw from the study to ensure that participants' participation in the study was voluntary (Shenton, 2004). There were regular debriefing sessions between the researcher and the supervisors of the study by way of checking the researcher's biases. The researcher ensured that developed codes, themes, and subthemes were examined by her supervisors and peer-checked by colleagues to ensure conclusions were participants-based accounts (Erlandson et al. 1993). In addition, the researcher has provided some narratives in the result section of the study to ensure credibility.

To promote transferability, the researcher ensured the collection of substantial data from participants, hence documenting comprehensive information about the study procedures, including information regarding the number of participants, the number of data collected, the study area, and the duration of the interview. True transferability may be difficult to achieve, nonetheless, studies that provide a thorough description of the study, including observations and data interpretations, affords other researchers to replicate the study (Gertz, 1993).

To ensure dependability, the researcher ensured that the research processes were reported as they occurred (Shenton, 2004). Finally, to promote confirmability, the researcher recorded the responses of participants with a phone recorder. Collected data was later manually transcribed by the researcher.

### **3.10 Data collection procedure**

To commence the study, the researcher obtained clearance and introductory letters from the University of Ghana's Ethics Committee for Humanities (ECH 098/20-21) and the Department of Psychology respectively, introducing the researcher as a student from the



University of Ghana to be presented to heads of study sites. In consultation with supervisors, a semi-structured interview guide was developed.

To aid the collection of data, the researcher trained a research assistant especially in communicating in the local dialect of participants (Ga). Also, to familiarize and create a rapport with the society, the researcher's first point of contact was the Heads of schools (eleven from X JHS; five were from Y Basic School; two from Z Academy; one from T Academy; and the last participant from M Basic school). For adolescents interviewed outside schools, consent was sought from their parents, and assent was obtained from adolescents.

Adolescents were interviewed individually in languages fluent to them (English, Twi, and Ga). For participants who were fluent in Ga, the research assistant assisted in translating oral consent and assent, and items on the interview schedule into Ga. Adolescents who preferred Twi and English were interviewed directly by the researcher. Gatekeepers such as teachers and religious leaders also aided in explaining the purpose of the study to these adolescents and parents respectively before obtaining their accents and consent. With their full permission, participants' responses were audio-recorded and each interview lasted between fifteen to thirty minutes. Data collection lasted for two months i.e., from April to July 2021.

Regarding social workers on the interventions available to children from poor urban contexts, an introductory letter from the Department of Psychology was submitted to the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection. The researcher was given an approval letter with the approval number MOGCSP/FA.1/16/10/V.2 and was directed to the Department of Children. Three officials within the department participated in the study, including the Head of the Department.

Another introductory letter was taken to the National office of the Department of Social Welfare. At the department, the researcher met and interviewed the National Director, who later introduced the researcher to another colleague. Also, the researcher was directed to the regional office of the Department of Social Welfare in Accra. Presenting an introductory letter to them, the researcher was privileged to interview two social workers. At the Ledzokuku District Assembly, two staff were also interviewed at the Department of Social Welfare.

In addition, the final social worker was interviewed online through telephone calls as a result of proximity. In all, respondents' permission was sought before being recorded. Collected data were transcribed and later analyzed with Braun and Clark's (2006) six stages of thematic analysis.

### **3.11 Ethical consideration**

The researcher sought ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee for Humanities (ECH: Reference Number ECH 098/20-21) of the University of Ghana. Written informed consent was taken from the Heads of schools, however, for adolescents and guardians, oral informed consent was taken after the contents of the informed consent and assent documents were explained to the participants. Oral consent was sought because of their low educational background. Participants were briefed on the purpose of the study and assured of the non-violation of their rights. Respondents were also assured of confidentiality and anonymity with the use of pseudonyms. However, they were informed of the limit to this confidentiality. Also, collected data was made available only to the researcher, research assistant, and supervisors. In addition, participants were made aware of their rights to withdraw from the study, thus, preventing all forms of coercion. Lastly, psychological services were made available should participants need them due to the sensitive nature of the research. However, no participant requested such services.

### 3.12 Data analysis

Collected data was analyzed manually with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages of thematic analysis. The stages included familiarizing one's self with the data, generating initial codes, looking for themes, reviewing these themes, defining and naming the themes, and finally producing a report. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this thematic analysis was chosen because it provided the researcher with the needed flexibility in analyzing data. In addition, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages of thematic analysis helped capture responses that were not even anticipated.

In familiarizing myself with the data, the researcher transcribed the interviews herself and endeavored to study transcribed data, and listened to the recordings over and over again. Subsequently, the transcribed data was proofread by two different colleagues of the researcher. This was to avoid personal bias and thus promote insight and understanding of responses, and to make sure responses were appropriate to questions. This way, the researcher immersed herself in the data for the next stage of action.

The next stage was generating initial codes. In generating codes, words and/or phrases were used to code responses, taking into consideration their meaningfulness and how interesting it was to the present study. The researcher ensured that these codes represented the exact responses of participants, thus their true feelings. Initial codes were however proofread and edited by the supervisors of the researcher.

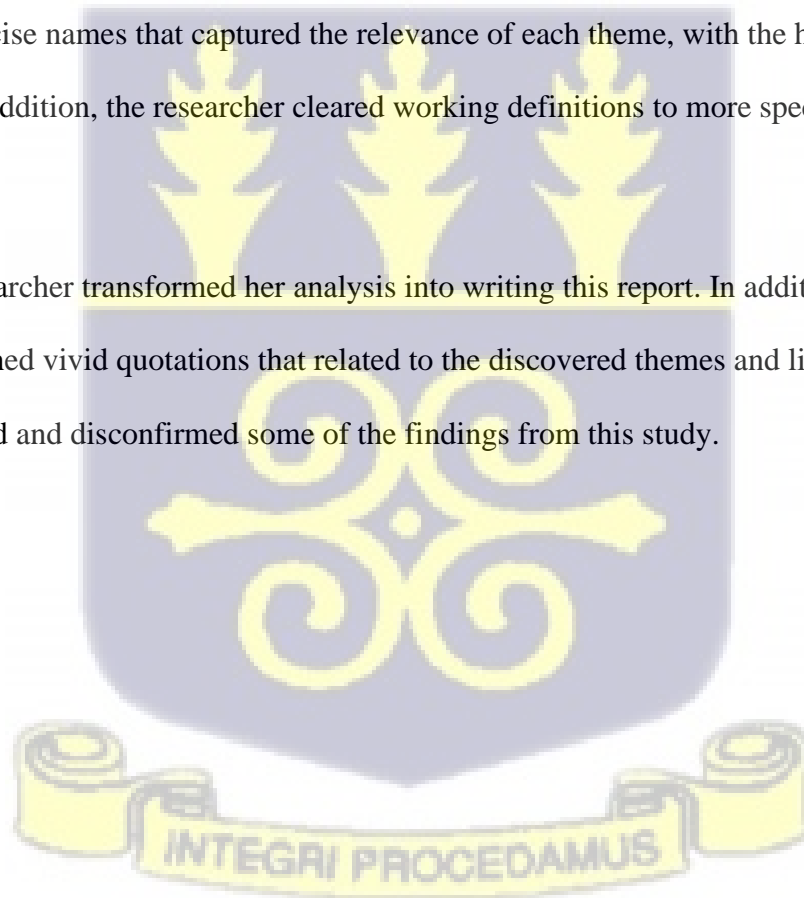
After generating preliminary codes, the next stage was looking for themes. Using the objectives of the study as the major themes, similar codes were grouped which became the sub-themes. The

researcher separated relevant data excerpts according to overarching themes. This aided in reviewing and defining these themes.

The researcher then reviewed the themes. In reviewing themes, the researcher had to combine, discard and refine initial themes. This was to ensure that excerpts or quotations within each theme were cohered meaningfully. Reviewing of themes was done in two phases: the first was to check whether the themes cohered meaningfully with the data or quotations and; the second was to check whether the themes cohered meaningfully with the overall dataset.

The next stage was to define and name themes. To do this, the researcher provided themes with precise and concise names that captured the relevance of each theme, with the help of her supervisors. In addition, the researcher cleared working definitions to more specific ones to aid in reporting.

Finally, the researcher transformed her analysis into writing this report. In addition, the researcher attached vivid quotations that related to the discovered themes and literature reviews that corroborated and disconfirmed some of the findings from this study.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### 4.0 Findings

This chapter focuses on the results obtained from the data analysis. The main themes that emerged from the data included: 1. Children's perceptions of poverty; 2. Children's lived experiences (both positive and challenges); 3. How perceptions about poverty affect children's well-being and their aspirations; 4. How children cope with challenges associated with poverty; 5. Interventions that are available to children from poor urban contexts from the perspective of professionals. The emerging themes are discussed below.

#### 4.1 Children's perceptions of poverty

One of the objectives of the study was to investigate the perceptions of children in poor contexts about the concept of poverty. To achieve this, participants of the study were asked to describe a poor person and how they recognized one. Also, they were asked to describe how they saw themselves and the reasons for such descriptions. A majority (N=16) of the participants described a poor person as someone unable to meet his/her basic needs. Participants mentioned that poor children found it difficult to survive in life and hence resorted to begging. They are usually vulnerable, deserted, and left to fend for themselves. This was accounted for in the following narratives:

*"a [poor] person [is someone] who does not have money to buy food, or dress or water... or a person who does not have somewhere, eerrmm....somewhere to sleep or somewhere to stay in..."(Abena, female, 14yrs)*

*"They don't get what they need unless [through] begging...And they like begging for food like when you go to the Korle-Bu Junction..." (Araba, female, 16yrs)*

In addition, another participant added that a poor person can be recognized by his/her parents' type of work. Parent without a well-paid job was perceived to be unable to perform their parental roles for their children. Such parent usually finds it difficult to adequately feed their children with the right amount of nutrition; provide a conducive shelter; and many others. The narrative below throws more light on it:

*"I can use his parents' work to tell... [whether he's rich or poor]" (Kwame, male, 17yrs)*

Others also reported that poor children were usually in tattered clothing. According to some of these adolescents, children from poor contexts do not have clothes to put on. As a result of their poor conditions and the need to meet basic needs, these children resort to janitorial services such as sweeping for others, washing for others, and many others for their survival:

*"...Like the dress they wear... sometimes they wear dirty dress" (Araba, female, 16yrs)*

*"If somebody finish eating, they [poor children] will wash the plates for him... they sweep for other people... They wash people's dress for them, and they pay them twenty Ghana [\$1.43]" (Ama, female, 12yrs)*

Also, some adolescents mentioned that poor individuals are also malnourished. In the words of these adolescents, poor children mostly eat the same kind of food (unwholesome foods). This may lead to underdevelopment, both physically and psychologically on the part of the child.

*"Every day, they eat one-way food..." (Yaw, male, 15yrs)*

*"[They are] suffering from malnutrition ...let's say [they] grow lean." (Asare, male, 17yrs)*

#### **4.1.1 Children's perception of their poverty status and perceived indicators**

In their self-conceptualization of their poverty status, most (N=10) of the participants indicated that they were poor, with seven (7) respondents mentioning that they were average people. The remaining three participants revealed that they were rich. Most male adolescents described themselves as poor. The reason for such a description was due to the inability of their parents to meet their needs as told by eight of the participants. These adolescents revealed that their money for upkeep was not enough to purchase the things they needed. According to these adolescents, they are thus forced to fend for themselves regardless of their young ages. Their inability to meet their physiological needs made them feel poor. This is highlighted in the excerpt below:

*"Sometimes ... I cannot eat. I don't get food to eat. Sometimes I don't get food to eat.*

*Because at times, I can't ask my mother for money... every day, they [my parents] will be asking me to go and find work to do..." (Kwame, male, 17yrs)*

*"Because it is not always that they [parents] give me money to come to school. And my money is not always enough." (Serwaa, female, 14yrs)*

On the other hand, others mentioned that their environment was not supportive enough ascribing themselves as poor individuals. One participant (a 15-year-old male) revealed that the absence of well-to-do individuals within the community made it difficult to solicit work or other forms of assistance within his community. According to this adolescent, the community lacks the avenue for him to receive material support to better his future. The participant expressed that, as a result

of the absence of influential individuals within the society, petty jobs were thus non-available for them to earn a living for themselves:

*"The community I'm living in. If I am [were] staying at East Legon [a developed area in Accra], on weekends maybe I can beg a rich man to wash his or her car for him, so that I will get something small but here I will not find anybody like that." (Yaw, male, 15yrs)*

Others also reported that they were working and never saw themselves as poor. As young as they were, they were forced to work as a result of their being poor. Poverty was seen as a motivation to work hard and hence negative feelings associated with poverty were minimal. Working served as leverage above poverty.

*"Because like me sitting here, I am a hard worker. There is nothing you [will] tell me to do that I will not do. I will do everything ... Aside that I am into my own thing as in my own career [music]." (Asare, male, 17yrs)*

Furthermore, half (N= 10) of the participants described their community as a poor one. Giving reasons for such description, littering was one important concern for these participants. The participants quoted that ignorance and apathetic attitudes accounted for high levels of littering among community members. This apathetic attitude tends to hinder the progress of the community as there were high rates of filth within the vicinity:

*"It's because they don't tidy up their place. They do anything anywhere, they litter around. They are not helping the nation to develop." (Asare, male, 17yrs)*

In addition, non-attendance of school was seen as a characteristic of a poor community. About three (3) of the respondents considered their communities as poor due to the non-attendance of



school among children. Some mentioned that a significant number of people in their communities were illiterates:

*"Because a lot of people in my community are illiterates..." (Joe, male, 15yrs)*

On a whole, children's perceptions of the indicators of poverty are predominantly non-monetary characteristics that comprised basic needs and other related criteria that contribute to the well-being of the child. Children jeopardized in any aspect of their lives such as health, education, shelter, etc. are considered poor as this tends to hinder their ability to reach their full potential.

#### **4.2 Lived experiences**

This section explored both the positive and negative experiences among children in poor urban contexts. As part of the lived experiences, the researcher also explored feelings associated with poverty.

##### **4.2.1 Positive Experiences**

Regardless of how poor the community is, participants mentioned that living within such communities has great benefits. Some of the participants cited that one positive experience they had encountered was receiving social support from community members. This included providing free food, giving out dresses to others, paying class fees for friends, etc. The nature of the support received led to a sense of belongingness among community members. This received social support neutralized negative experiences of poverty, making the lives of these children more manageable:

*"Some people here, when you ask them for something, they give it to you. Some people too when you ask for something and they don't have, they will tell you they don't have. If someone is hungry here, and someone [another person] has cooked, they fetch some for*

*all of us to eat. My friends too, some of them when they are given money to bring to school and you're not given, they give you some to go and buy food to eat." (Abena, female, 14yrs)*

*"Okay... for example, when we were robbed, our neighbors came and supported us." (Kwabena, male, 15yrs)*

Another important positive experience worth stating is pursuance of education. Notwithstanding the poor environment, participants raised pursuance of education as a positive experience given the numerous hindrances within the community. The urge to be educated regardless of one's economic status was laudable. Children within this community were motivated by their future aspirations and the significant support of their teachers which drove their desire to pursue education. Some of these children were also motivated by the fact that their friends were attending school as said by one of these children:

*"They [children] are coming to school. Our teachers [are] showing [teaching] them what they will get if they take education serious. So some also come to school because they know what they are looking for in future." (Kofi, male, 15yrs)*

*"I have seen that... most of them are attending school... Me, the place I stay all of us [there], we attend schools..." (Akua, female, 15yrs)*

On the contrary, one participant mentioned never encountering any positive experiences within her community. This may be due to high levels of unrest within that society.

*"I haven't seen any positive experience here at all..." (Akosua, female, 13yrs)*

#### 4.2.2 Negative Experiences

Also, the negative experiences of children from poor urban contexts were investigated. These experiences aimed at revealing the various challenges associated with poverty. Four key negative experiences raised by the adolescents were sleeplessness; self-blame; inability to meet basic needs and; a high rate of violence and unrest. Some participants mentioned that as part of their negative experiences, they found it difficult to sleep. They reported that the thoughts of their poor state triggered insomnia and overthinking. Uncertainties on how to survive the following day were of importance to these adolescents:

*"Sometimes I cannot sleep well." (Yaw, male, 15yrs)*

*"Sometimes if I do not eat and I am going to sleep, I feel insomnia, I can't sleep. I always think about tomorrow what I'll eat." (Kofi, male, 15yrs)*

Even with an average socio-economic status, one participant expressed that he constantly blamed himself. This negative experience worsened as a result of his father's neglect of his parental roles towards him. Resentment towards oneself is one characteristic of poverty:

*"I sometimes regret for being in between [both poor and rich]. Because my dad is in abroad, [yet] anytime I ask something he will tell me he will send it but he [won't]"*  
*(Nelson, male, 16yrs)*

Another area of concern is the inability to meet one's basic needs. These participants mentioned that physiological needs such as food, clothing, water, and shelter were quite difficult to acquire. Others quoted affording stationeries was a problem, as it created academic hindrances. Some revealed that they faced difficulties in terms of school feeding money. They were made to attend

school on empty pockets. This increased self-blame and other negative feelings among these children as they were unable to afford their needs as compared with their friends:

*"The difficult [thing] is that sometimes I don't get money to buy what I want. Something like buying clothes, buying food to eat, slippers too." (Kwame, male, 14yrs)*

*"Sometimes struggling to get money to come to school and buying clothes and other stuff" (Maame, female, 14yrs)*

Some adolescents reported experiencing high rates of violence and unrest. According to these adolescents, community members are rowdy and thus cause noise pollution. In addition, as a result of frequent blackouts, community members were constantly attacked by robbers.

*"With the light out situation, there was a lot of robbery going on. Also, we have experienced a lot of disturbance and violence." (Kwabena, male, 15yrs)*

*"They will be throwing bottles, stones, shooting at each other." (Kwame, male, 17yrs)*

On the other hand, one participant expressed that he had never encountered any negative experience within his community:

*"I've never had any experiences like that..." (Joe, male, 15yrs)*

#### **4.2.3 Feelings associated with poverty**

Among a variety of reasons highlighted by the participants, three were outstanding: hopelessness (suicidal ideations); a sense of seclusion; and acceptance of the condition. Two of the participants illustrated that they felt hopeless and discouraged. The awareness of being poor and unable to meet daily basic needs created some form of despair which in turn created a state of

confusion and hopelessness. This sometimes led to suicidal thoughts as reported by one of the adolescents:

*"Sometimes I feel that I have to end my life. There's no one to help me. If you're calling for help no one helps you. So I sometimes sit down and think about how to get money..."*  
(Kofi, male, 15yrs)

Again, participants indicated that poverty creates a sense of seclusion from one's sect of friends. Poverty decreases the self-esteem of people through their interactions with others, making them feel unaccepted among friends and families.

*"It's not good at all...Sometimes you feel like you are not among of people kwraaa [at all]"* (Maame, female, 14yrs)

Some participants felt sidelined as a result of their inability to purchase things their friends did, resulting in self-blame and self-questioning. Inability to purchase things friends did created some form of isolation as it hindered one's interaction with others. Being poor breeds lower self-esteem and self-blame.

*"I feel like "why me?" "Why me [am I] not having rich parents?"* (Kojo, male, 14yrs)

*"Okay, so when I come to school, I sit down quietly and I don't really interact with my friends much."* (Yaa, female, 15yrs)

Despite the negative impact reported, some were indifferent about their situation and hence motivated to work harder to change their situation. For example, some participants accepted their state as poor individuals. They reported that raised in poor homes, they have come to accept their

condition and hence do not experience any form of negative feelings. Compared with others, these children revealed that they were fortunate as they were better than some of their friends.

*"I don't feel anything. I am a poor person." (Akosua, female, 13yrs)*

*"Because when I see some people, I can see that I am in a good condition more than them" (Maame, female, 14yrs)*

Regarding one's inability to purchase things as their friends do, five (5) participants revealed that they were driven by optimism about their future. A significant number of them related such feelings to their interactions with friends and family members. This optimism was a result of the assurance that they will be able to purchase such things in the future. In addition, as a result of the training and counsel received from their parents, most of these adolescents did not allow their poor state cause them to be greedy or covetous:

*"My mother told me that if someone goes and buy something and you want to buy some and [but] we don't have money, we shouldn't worry. But someday we can be rich ...we will get money and buy some." (Abena, female, 14yrs)*

*"I feel normal because I have been trained not to be greedy [by] my mom. ... [trained not to] love things that belong to others... if I have money to buy, I will buy, if I don't have, cool." (Nelson, male, 16yrs)*

Conversely, other participants voiced that their inability to purchase things like their friends do motivate them to work hard. That way, they will be able to purchase such things.

*"I feel like working hard to get money so that I will also be able to buy that thing." (Kofi, male, 15yrs)*

*"I'm not the type of person who is greedy. Whenever I know I don't have the money to buy something I try not to feel bad about it. I try to work hard to get money for it ..." (Asare, male, 17yrs)*

In summary, the majority of the participants opined that their inability to meet and afford basic needs was a great challenge. This left them feeling helpless and unable to help others.

Furthermore, the insult and disgrace associated with being poor, combined with the inability to purchase what friends did was overwhelming for these adolescents.

#### **4.3 Perceived impact of poverty on well-being**

A majority (N=13) of participants saw poverty to affect their aspirations and well-being. This is because these participants viewed education to be expensive and hence it interrupted the attainment of their goals in life, considering their current position and that of their parents. Seven (7) of these participants perceived poverty as an educational hindrance as seen in the excerpts below:

*"Because if there is no enough money, my education will become poor... Like without money I can't complete university to achieve my aim." (Kofi, male, 15yrs)*

*"Because for now there is nothing called free. As in the university, there is no free education. So [I] don't think I will get the opportunity to go there." (Asare, male, 17yrs)*

Similarly, other participants perceived poverty as a stumbling block. Having money is seen as a way of upgrading one's self and hence lack of it was seen as a blockage, affecting one's overall

well-being and aspirations. Money gives the individual the opportunity to rub shoulders with friends within the society and lack of it makes an individual voiceless in communal matters. Also, being poor signifies difficulty connecting with individuals who may change one's socioeconomic status:

*"Money makes you. Your money should show a different level. So if you don't have some, you cannot change your level..." (Ama, female, 12yrs)*

*"Like let me say the rich people, they have relatives related to some of the journalists and those kinds of things. But the poor person, who are you going to see for the person to help you achieve what you want to? Because everybody has a destiny helper and it will pass through someone before you become a person who you want to be, even though you are making an effort about it..." (Adjo, female, 17yrs)*

On the other hand, some of the respondents instead feared for the lives of their descendants (the carry-over effect). This is because poverty may affect one's ability to take care of their children who may also grow up within such poor contexts. Moreover, as a result of their parents' socioeconomic status, descendants may not strive to be great as there is no motivation to do so:

*"Because your generations and your offspring, if you give birth and you're poor, you cannot take good care of them and they will grow to become like you because they know that their father is not rich" (Yaw, male, 15yrs)*

Among these twenty adolescents, seven quoted that poverty cannot affect their aspirations due to their level of determination. These adolescents believed that persevering in one's education was paramount to achieving one's aspirations.



*"Because I'm good in academics... I always like learning so that I will shame my dad of thinking that I am not a good child." (Nelson, male, 16yrs)*

*"If you're focused on your education and you're doing everything to pass your exams, you will achieve what you want to become. But if you're not serious, you can't achieve anything." (Joe, male, 15yrs)*

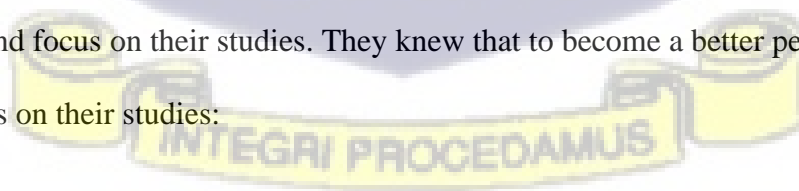
One of the respondents however raised the role of destiny as her reason for achieving her goals and aspirations in life, regardless of her socio-economic status. To her, one's success level was dependent on predestination compared to educational or socio-economic status. Hence, whatever has been predestined concerning the individual will come to pass without the effort of any human being:

*"Because when God says something in your life, He don't think about you don't have money or you have money. But it will come [to pass] in your life." (Abena, female, 14yrs)*

#### **4.3.1 Future assurance about being rich**

When asked about being rich one day, all participants stated that they will be rich one day. They were very optimistic about the future and never worried about their present socio-economic state.

Delving more into their reasons, the majority (N=14) of these respondents acknowledged the need to pursue and focus on their studies. They knew that to become a better person, they are expected to focus on their studies:



*"Like me making a budget that no matter what I will still come to school whether my dad gives me money or not, I will still come to school and make an effort about it [studies]."*

*(Adjo, female, 17yrs)*

*"And learning hard. Maybe I can earn a scholarship" (Maame, female)*

Also, participants mentioned that cultivating the habit of saving has helped tremendously. They believed that savings can help during hard and trying times:

*"And when I start working, I will save some money for myself and do whatever I want to do with it." (Joe, male, 15yrs)*

*"I can save money..." (Maame, female, 14yrs)*

Similarly, about four (4) out of the twenty adolescents revealed that it may be hard to do things on one's own and therefore acknowledged seeking assistance from others. These adolescents anticipated that they could be sponsored by a benefactor as a result of their academic performance:

*"Maybe someone can help me" (Kwame, male, 17yrs)*

*"Let's say on graduation day because of my performance, some rich man see me and said ok how [because] I am good in academics he will try helping me. It can lead me to a better future" (Nelson, male, 16yrs)*

Exploring some of the thoughts that come to mind about being poor, motivation to learn, praying and feelings of worthlessness were key points that were raised.

Two of the adolescents mentioned that their situation motivated them to rather learn hard to combat the situation. They felt they will rather learn harder than use their time and energy to think about their situation as they could not do anything about it:

*"That's [poverty] what actually motivates me to learn hard. Because thinking about being poor, it's quite a lot to think about" (Kwabena, male, 15yrs)*

*"I think about how I am going to earn money to continue my school" (Maame, female, 14yrs)*

In like manner, a participant quoted that instead of thinking and getting worried about her situation, prayer was a better option. Aside from wasting one's time thinking and sobbing about one's socio-economic status, which can negatively affect the health of the individual, they will rather pray.

*"What comes into my mind is that, my mother told me that when you don't have money and you think too much, it's not good. But you have to pray to God so that God will hear your prayers." (Abena, female, 14yrs)*

Contrary to the majority's responses, a male participant mentioned that feeling of worthlessness were associated with thoughts about being poor. As a result of the cruel treatment meted out to him by his father and being sacked for school fees several times, he felt the negative words of his father were right:

*"I think I am a worthless child. He said [father] because I am staying with my mother, I am stupid. He said I am [a] foolish [child]" (Nelson, male, 16yrs)*

In summary, the majority of these participants pointed out that they were not worried about being poor forever. They continue to have the hope that their situation was going to get better.

Focusing on education, reliance on God, and the assurance that they will be supported by an external body (benefactor) was the driving force for some of these adolescents.

#### 4.4 Coping mechanisms

The coping mechanisms utilized by these adolescents were broadly categorized into behavioral strategies, resilience attributes, social support from friends and families, and religious coping. These are discussed in the ensuing sections.

##### 4.4.1 Behavioral strategies

Behavioral strategies included problem-focused coping and appraised-focused coping. The problem-focused coping comprised taking a loan, finding a job, and re-selling personal properties. One participant, however, adopted the appraisal-focus approach of shifting focus.

To cope in a poor community, respondents mentioned that borrowing from other people was a source of survival for them. This was helpful as it allowed them to meet their daily needs. They, however, acknowledged that they re-paid these loans:

*"I will go and borrow someone's money, if I get, I will give the person's money to him."*

*(Ama, female, 12yrs)*

*"I will just maybe borrow money, then pay back" (Yaa, female, 15yrs)*

Also, seven (7) of the participants quoted that to cope with poverty, they will seek jobs. As young as they were, they mentioned that any petty job that could earn them a living was much appreciated. In this way, they were able to minimize the negative effect of poverty on them:

*"I will look for some job, so that I will make money and eat small [small]." (Abena, female, 12yrs)*

*"Maybe you can carry loads for people in the market and then be paid. And sometimes, you can wash clothes for some people and then be paid." (Yaa, female, 15yrs)*

One of these adolescents quoted that re-selling of her personal properties was a form of coping associated with poverty. She affirmed Abraham Maslow's Theory of needs that basic needs such as food, water, and shelter were more important compared to other higher needs. As such, individuals may re-sell personal properties in exchange for their basic needs. Even when personal properties are sold at a cheaper price, adolescents are aware of the significance of food and water, over physical properties:

*"If I had properties down and I don't have anything to eat, then I will say to my friends or my mother that if I sell this property, I will get something to eat" (Ama, female, 12yrs)*

Appraisal techniques adopted by some participants were the shifting of focus and overcoming with time. These adolescents mentioned that during difficult times, to avoid thinking about their inability to afford what they would eat to survive, they engaged in activities that shifted their attention. That way they do not experience the adverse psychological effect of being poor. Likewise, another participant stated the likelihood of overcoming challenges with time. The participant felt assured that she would become rich as she matured:

*"Sometimes if there isn't money you just sleep with your bare [stomach]... nothing in your stomach... sometimes if I don't get food to eat, I just go out to roam. Sometimes*

*when they sack me [from school], I sit around the gate or sometimes I stand there [outside]" (Nelson, male, 17yrs)*

*"My mother told me a story. When she was young, she got through [overcame] some things, because she prayed to God. Now she has moved from everything [upgraded] and now she's in new things [better position]. So I should believe that whatever comes, when am in such situation, I should not worry but I will pass through [overcome] all things" (Abena, female, 14yrs)*

#### 4.4.2 Resilience attributes

Regarding the resilience attribute available to these adolescents to cope with poverty, several sub-themes emerged. Some of the sub-themes included, talents; hard work and; optimism. Talent was one resilience attribute that emerged during the analysis of the data. The respondent mentioned that his talent as a musician sustained his perseverance during challenging times as an average socio-economic boy. This ability constantly gave him assurance about the future:

*"My talent... Drawing... Yeah, it keeps me moving. It gives me courage that I will become [rich]..." (Nelson, male, 16yrs)*

Another resilience attribute raised by these adolescents was hard work. About three participants stated the importance of hard work in achieving anything, especially one's career. They knew that hard work pays and hence anyone who worked extremely hard gets the benefits associated with it. According to these adolescents, hard work alone did not work magic. The individual needed to also persist in their quest to achieve their aspiration

*"I need to work hard so that I can achieve my career" (Yaa, female, 15yrs)*

*"The Bible says God helps those who help themselves, so hard work and perseverance is important. So when you work hard and persevere God tends to help you to achieve whatever you want to achieve." (Kwabena, male, 15yrs)*

Another important resilience attribute mentioned by the participants was optimism. A participant cited that as part of her resilience attributes, she preferred to be hopeful about the future as a way of dealing with poverty. These children understood that they had no control over some challenges they were encountering. As such, optimism was the only way out. This helped deal with the challenges associated with poverty:

*"Sometimes, I sit down for a while, this one I should forget it [I rethink], I will find a better one. I will be a rich person and many others (in the future). That I will be able to buy things I couldn't buy now (in the nearest future)." (Akosua, female, 13yrs)*

#### **4.4.3 Social Support from friends and families**

Another part of the interview schedule sought to know the role of friends and families in coping with poverty. Support from friends and families came in the form of informational, emotional, and tangible approaches. The majority (N=11) of the participants mentioned that their friends and families played a significant role in their coping with poverty. This social support goes a long way to help these adolescents neutralize the negative effect of poverty:

*"If I don't have enough money, they can use their money to buy what I need" (Mensah, male, 14yrs)*

*"If you don't have money for something, they sometimes pay for classes fees or lend you money. Then later maybe you pay or sometimes, they just dash it to you..." (Yaa, female, 15yrs)*

Another coping mechanism derived from friends and families is informational support in terms of advice. Two of the teenagers mentioned that their friends and families constantly advised them to desist from the company of negative influencers. This informational support served as a form of coping mechanism for these participants:

*"They tell me not to follow bad boys... don't join a bad group. Don't smoke... Don't drink alcohol..." (Kwame, male, 17yrs)*

*"My brothers. Yeah. They always advise me to stay away from guys and be careful of friends, and I shouldn't involve myself in bad peer group and those kind of things." (Adjo, female, 17yrs)*

Their emotional approach to coping was encouragement. Four of the participants quoted that they received encouragement from their friends and families. This encouragement served as a driving force in achieving their aspirations and career. Encouragement from friends and families created a conducive environment for them to accomplish their full potential:

*"My friends and the school I am attending to help. They say if you don't go to school, you'll not get good education. So it means that you have to go to school and get good education." (Ama, female, 12yrs)*



*"The big big [influential] men that they've been working in the area, they encourage me. Sometimes my friends encourage me that I should work hard. If am a footballer, I should train hard and go to school" (Kwame, male, 17yrs)*

#### 4.4.4 Religious coping

Religion was not left out in terms of coping with the challenges associated with poverty. A majority of these adolescents testified that religion played a key role in their dealing with poverty. Re-assurance about the future was a major concern for these adolescents. However, their religious beliefs gave them the chance to see the positive aspect of life and also encouraged positive affirmations among these participants:

*"They [religious leaders] tell me that there is hope. So if there is hope then it means there is a chance. So you have to have hope that maybe you will achieve something good in future..." (Tetteh, male, 16yrs)*

*"They [religious leaders] will tell me that every day if you are walking, you have to say prosperous things. 'I will be rich' ...so if you keep saying it to yourself, then you will be rich. Because you have the belief, you will be rich" (Akua, female, 15yrs)*

Another way religion served as a coping mechanism was through the provision of comfort. Religion was also seen as a comforting tool whether through scriptural means or edification because the individual gets the opportunity to voice his/her problems to God which in turn brings relief and comfort:

*"Every day, you will go to church, you will pray, God can hear your prayers to be rich. Its helps me because they say we should go to church to go and pray, whatever worries you, tell it to God." (Akosua, female, 13yrs)*

*"I've being saying in my mind that one day I will make it. At times when it [depressed state] comes, I go to the mosque and sit down and read Quran. After reading it, my mind will come down [feel better] to continue what am doing..." (Kwame, male, 17yrs)*

Nonetheless, a participant revealed that her religious leaders cannot help her financially. This may be due to the socio-economic status of her place of worship:

*"They cannot help me" (Ama, female, 12yrs)*

In summary, these adolescents relied heavily on problem-focused and appraisal-focused approaches in dealing with poverty. Others also mentioned the informational, emotional, and tangible benefits they received from friends and families. These social supports went a long way to help them deal with the negative consequences of poverty. Religion played a major role in the ability of these adolescents to overcome poverty. This came in the form of inspiration from scriptures and encouragement from religious leaders. Nonetheless, some felt their religious leaders could not help them financially.

#### **4.5 Interventions Available to Children**

The researcher also explored the interventions available to children from poor contexts, particularly from social workers and other top officials who worked with children. In addition, the study investigated the effectiveness of these interventions and; the challenges encountered as a result of the implementation of these interventions and recommendations. A few of these

professionals mentioned that these interventions were made available to all children and not secluded to only poor children:

*"There are few which target all children in the country" (Stephen, Male)*

*"Because every intervention that government does is not for only specific people, it is a national thing... If it's birth registration from Birth and death registry, we make sure that everybody who is supposed to benefit benefits." (Mercy, Female)*

One of the interventions reported by these social workers was Alternative Care. As a form of protecting children, they provide shelter and a haven to allow them [children] to grow and meet their full potential. According to some of these professionals, children who are even living with their parents and still face difficulties can be removed and placed in a safer environment. This is because there exist professionals within alternative homes who are trained to effectively care for the well-being of poor and vulnerable children:

*"In terms of protecting children, we must ensure children are given or they are in a better home where they can lay down their heads in order to have a sound sleep. A child can also be removed legally from the parents depending on the condition of the parents. Assuming you [a parent] are a prostitute, you are a drunkard, you are smoking, you know this marijuana and other things doesn't help the child, we have all the power to remove the child from the parents" (Peter, Male)*

*"In that [neglect of the child] instances, the child is removed from the place of harm to a place of safety. And the intervention here is that you remove the child from a place of harm to a place of safety where we have protective capacities, where we have trained*

*professionals, trained caregivers to be able to provide the necessary care and protection.*

*Make sure that the child is given nutritious food, the child receives healthcare, uhm the*

*child is given all the support that he/she needs to be able to survive and develop"*

*(Benson, Male)*

Another intervention raised by some of these professionals is the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP). This intervention, introduced in 2008 was targeted at helping households who lived below the poverty line (less than \$1 a day) with some monthly stipends. This way, children within such households tend to benefit from such national intervention. This intervention goes a long way to help individuals adequately meet their children's basic needs:

*"We have the LEAP where poor and vulnerable households with children who qualify are given some stipends at the end of every month" (Gloria, Female)*

*"The Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty program introduced in 2008. LEAP has also come to play its part addressing the vulnerability issue for orphans and vulnerable children" (Benson, Male)*

Similarly, the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) has come to help vulnerable and needy children in general in terms of obtaining readily quality healthcare. About three out of the ten professionals revealed that the NHIS has been of tremendous help to the less privileged who may encounter difficulties in accessing instant and quality healthcare services:

*"When it comes to national health, we say every child should be [included]. It's for every child. The Children Department makes sure every child benefits, and that every child is protected. We don't look at poor and rich children separately." (Mercy, Female)*

*"National Health Insurance...Similar to that is the hospital welfare intervention."*

*(Benson, Male)*

Another important intervention stated by five of the respondents is the National Feeding Programme. The introduction of the Feeding Programme has increased the enrollment of school-going children. This Feeding Programme seeks to provide a meal a day to school-going children within government schools across the country as a form of motivating them to attend school:

*"School feeding program" (Stephen, Male)*

*"You know the School Feeding Programme that we have currently. It is targeting areas that are finding it very difficult to get kids into the school because of poverty" (Francis, Male)*

Another intervention that was reported was the Free Education policy. As a basic right, it is the responsibility of the state to provide all children with the needed education to enable them to achieve their full potential. Free education allows every child to pursue education without any form of hindrances:

*"We have this...free education" (Mercy, Female)*

*"We also ensure that every child must go to school. So all the preschools are under the Department of Social Welfare." (Peter, Male)*

#### **4.5.1 Challenges associated with intervention implementations**

Exploring the effectiveness of these interventions, the majority of the ten respondents (N=6) mentioned that these interventions were moderately effective. A significant number of these

professionals mentioned that majority of these interventions were very effective and were benefitting the majority of children within the country:

*"Yes. Some are working, some are not working" (Peter, Male)*

*"They are working. For instance, the School Feeding Programme, they are even expanding its coverage. LEAP is also being expanded. Through assessment, it was realized that it was making an impact in the society" (Francis, Male)*

Probing the challenges encountered by these professionals that served as a hindrance to their work, several issues were discovered. The most common of all was inadequate finance. About seven (N=7) of the participants revealed that finance was a major hindrance in fully executing their duties. Some of them mentioned that they are sometimes propelled to use their income in helping poor and vulnerable children who come to their offices, as governmental support was always delayed and scanty:

*"I will say government money too is small. Because all the work we do is NGO supported. It is the international body that help us. Government money will come later which is scanty to do any meaningful advocacy" (Mercy, Female)*

*"The first challenge I will say is the financial aspect. Because government does not give us money frequently, we will have to do all these things from our pocket..." (Peter, Male)*

Some respondents also raised the issue of citizen unawareness of these interventions. The precise location of these governmental organizations such as the Department of Social Welfare, Department of Children, etc. within the local vicinity is a huge challenge:

*"People are still ignorant. About 40% of people don't know the existence of this office [Department of Social Welfare]" (Paul, Male)*

*"Many don't know that in case you face any problem in the hospital, there is an avenue for assistance [hospital welfare intervention]." (Benson, Male)*

Another challenge reported by professionals was staffing and wrongful placement of staff. About six participants cited that insufficient staff and wrongful placement of staff was a challenge impeding the efficiency of social workers. Non-qualified personnel such as national service personnel etc. are usually made to occupy the positions of social workers and may not perform their roles professionally:

*"Right now, the recruitment is done haphazardly. They can just bring somebody with Archaeology background who is just looking for job, instead of looking for somebody who has gotten a Psychology, Sociology or Social work background to be employed, they'll rather leave that person and employ somebody rather" (Paul, Male)*

*"So the issue of human resource is also there. With social welfare, we need to employ more social workers to beef out the staff trend we have so that we can do more." (Benson, Male)*

Inadequate resources and structures are other challenges worth mentioning. Participants stated that the unavailability of structures for homeless children was a problem. According to these professionals, children who are rescued from the streets usually do not have an abode to live in, as most orphanages are filled. Additionally, a lack of resources such as vehicles tends to hinder

the activities of these professionals. Some revealed that their inability to access remote areas was largely due to the unavailability of vehicles:

*"If we should pick a child now [from the street], ideally such a child should be sent to a home but as I speak to you now there is nothing like that. We don't have them [structures]" (Gloria, Female)*

*"The major thing is resources to move around. I remember when I was working in Bekwai, Asante Bekwai around 2001. We had about 600 communities in the district and it was difficult to go round. Some of the areas were difficult to reach areas...And so at times lack of resources prevents officers from doing more." (Benson, Male)*

Another challenge raised by these social workers is the lukewarm attitude of citizens. According to these social workers, the level of apathy displayed by community members is not encouraging. In most cases, citizens usually do not involve themselves in governmental programs meant to promote development:

*"Sometimes some of the people in the rural communities have lukewarm attitude towards government programs" (Gideon, Male)*

*"Sometimes you will go to a community and invite people to come for the program that will be beneficial to them, the lackadaisical attitude of parents towards it needs much to be desired" (Francis, Male)*





#### 4.5.2 Recommendations from professionals

These professionals were asked for some recommendations to promote national development.

One outstanding recommendation was stakeholders' collaboration and support. About four (N=4) of these professionals recommended a collaborative effort of institutions working with children.

This way, the overall well-being of the child will be catered for:

*"Other stakeholders are also coming in. Recently Catholic Relief Service, they've also come in to also support in our family program" (Benson, Male)*

*"We need all to support, we need you too to support, the government to put in more effort. The NGOs, the philanthropist, the other organizations have to put in more to support so that we can all build the vulnerable. So that we can put them in a good shape to be good leaders for all of us" (Peter, Male)*

Another recommendation mentioned was the provision of resources. Participants reported that the Government of Ghana should ensure adequate provision of structures and resources such as funds, logistics, etc. to enable stakeholders to carry out their duties towards poor children within the community. The unavailability of resources prevents social workers from meeting the needs of hard-to-reach populations:

*"Resource, resource, resource, I always say that, if the politicians are able to divide their allowances and their salaries into two and then we use half of it for the welfare of children we will go far, but it looks like [nobody is ready to do that]. (Gloria, Female)*

Another recommendation stated by these respondents was the need for empowerment.

Empowering these children creates in them a need for them to meet their full potential.

Empowering children can be in the form of education and awareness creation. As part of the rights of children, they are expected to enjoy free education, information, basic shelter, and clothing. As such, parents are also expected to be empowered to enable them to meet the needs of these children:

*"In order to help these children, first empower them. Apart from the education you have to empower the parents as well" (Stephen, Male)*

As part of empowering children, there is a need to strengthen the extended family system. The presence of extended families helps shape the development of the child. Extended families help in socialization and imbibing the rich culture of the society. According to this professional, strengthening the extended family creates an environment for these children to experience unconditional positive regard from their families, thus avoiding staying on the streets:

*"Gradually we are moving from the extended family system where we are concentrating on me and my family alone. In a way, the whole society is also failing in the implementation of this intervention. So if the families of these children can go a step further by being more responsible, some of these children may not be on the streets. Because there are some who have families but it looks like they have been neglected."*  
*(Gloria, Female)*

In summary, there exist several social interventions that are predominantly targeted to all children within Ghana. Some include National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), School Feeding programs, Legal Aid, social inclusion, National Feeding Programme, and many others. According to most professionals, these interventions are moderately effective as they are usually hindered by some challenges including inadequate finance, inadequate resources, and structures,

the lukewarm attitude of the citizenry, and many others. However, these social workers believe that children, in general, are likely to benefit from these interventions when some suggested recommendations are utilized: empowerment, stakeholder collaboration, support, and many others. That way, children, especially those from poor urban contexts will achieve their full potential and thus improve their well-being.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter comprises a discussion of findings, implications, limitations, and conclusions from the present study. Specifically, it throws more light on the perceptions of children from poor contexts and their lived experiences (both positive and negative). It further discusses the perceived impact of poverty on their well-being, their coping mechanisms in dealing with poverty, and finally, the interventions available to these children in poor contexts. Implications and limitations of the study are further discussed with recommendations for future research and the conclusion.

##### 5.1.1 Perceptions of children in poor contexts

Poor person was unable to meet his/her basic needs such as food, water, dress, and shelter. They are unable to take care of themselves adequately (Cooke, Hague & McKay, 2016) as they have less quality education and were usually in tattered clothing. As a result, these children resorted to begging as a way of survival. In a similar study by Watson (2018), some adolescents revealed that poor people usually struggled to meet their basic needs and often ate the same types of foods, mostly imbalanced diets affecting their health.

Also, the perception of a poor person was associated with parental attributions. Most adolescents ascribe the socio-economic status of children to the status of the parent. Thus, a poor child had poor parents, while a rich child had rich parents. This finding was similar to a study found by Nachinaab, Kumah and Yirenkyi, (2019). In their study, it was discovered that a child's economic status was dependent on the socio-economic status of the parents. This is because, the

socio-economic status of the parent determines the level of investment the parent will put into the development of the child (Al-Mataka, 2014). The socioeconomic status of the parent is determined by the school the child attended, the nutritional intake of the child, the child's ability to further education, the tendency of being involved in socially deviant behaviors, and many others (Al-Mataka, 2014).

On the other hand, in describing a poor community, most of these adolescents raised the issue of the non-attending of schools. According to Shehu (2018), a poor community has high rates of illiteracy. These children are unable to attend school due to a lack of finance, the non-involvement of their parents, or a lack of motivation on the part of the child (Shehu, 2018). In a study by Qureshi and Ahmad (2014), the absence of fathers accounted for the non-attendance of schools, leading to the non-attainment of future aspirations. This could have accounted for the non-attendance of schools among children in the present study as some of them were not staying with their fathers. Qureshi and Ahmad (2014) were of the view that fathers played significant roles in character formation and the consistent school attendance of their wards. Other adolescents within the study, however, mentioned a lack of parental care among poor communities, implying that poor parental care led to non-attendance of school (Qureshi and Ahmad, 2014).

Another description of a poor community raised by these adolescents in the current study was littering. Littering is a major challenge within poor urban communities (Brooks & Davoudi, 2017; Lissah, Ayanore, Krugu, Aberese-Ako & Ruiter, 2021). Indiscriminate littering behaviors among community members hinder the development of a country (Amankwah-poku & Ofori, 2020). This often led to flooding and subsequently homelessness among children (Brooks & Davoudi, 2017). Amankwah-poku and Ofori (2020) added that offenders continue to litter the

community as a result of failure on the part of the authority to met out punishment for these miscreants.

In terms of self-conceptualization, the majority of these adolescents revealed that they saw themselves to be poor. Some of these adolescents attributed their poor state to the inability of their parents to meet their basic needs. This finding affirms the Family Stress Model (Conger & Donnellan, 2007) which denotes that marital or economic stress harms parents and hence destabilizes family functioning. Parents' inability to consistently perform parental roles was challenging for these adolescents. Moreover, single parenting prevented mothers from performing their parental roles adequately (Osei, 2020; Wajim, 2020). Some of the adolescents in this study mentioned that their caregivers' limited income was insufficient for the upkeep of the whole family. According to Abugre (2017) and Sasmal and Guillen (2015), children were forced to work to cater for themselves as their parents were unable to meet all their needs.

The environment an individual lived in, has been found to play a major role in the development of the child (Quansah, Ohene, Norman, Mireku & Karikari, 2016). A conducive one creates more opportunities for the child to explore and become the best he/she wants to become (Lartey, Khanam & Takahashi, 2016; Rasmussen, 2019). According to some of these adolescents, the absence of rich individuals within their environment aggravated their poor state, limiting the development of their full potential. The lack of significant facilities within the environment also heightens their vulnerable nature (Hakorvirta & Kallio, 2015).

### **5.1.2 Lived experiences of children in poor contexts**

Concerning positive lived experiences, receiving social support in the form of food, shelter, encouragement, and belongingness were some experiences raised by these adolescents. Despite

their poor state, adolescents reported that their community members created an atmosphere of belongingness and acceptance. According to Doku, Dotse and Mensah (2015), the presence of friends and families annulled the negative influence of poverty, making it more conducive to living in poor contexts. Received social support improves one's ability to cope with stressful events (Haanpaa, Kuula & Hakovirta, 2019), hence reducing the negative effects of poverty.

Some of these adolescents confirmed that despite being in a poor environment, going to school was much to be desired. Poverty did not deter children from staying focused on their dreams.

Contrary to a study by Addai-Boateng (2019), a significant number of adolescents in this present study revealed that poverty served as a re-directing force, shifting one's focus to other happenings in their life. The presence of indigenes as a form of role models who have accomplished their dreams was rather inspiring and challenging to these adolescents (Kearney & Levine, 2020).

Nonetheless, the high rate of violence and other negative experiences tends to mask the existence of positive experiences. This finding suggests that while positive experiences abound in the communities understudied, it is also possible that some adolescents do not encounter any positive experiences. This may be due to the heightened nature of negative experiences, and thus their appraisal of the situation may overshadow their positive experiences (Appiah-Kubi, 2018).

In terms of negative experiences, some of these adolescents reported the issue of the inability to meet their basic needs. This experience was the most difficult and prominent challenge experienced by these adolescents. According to Cappelletti, Kreuter, Boyum and Thompson (2015) and Meyer (2014), the majority of poor children around the world are predominantly disadvantaged in accessing their basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, quality education,

quality healthcare, and many others. The inability to achieve their basic needs makes children more vulnerable to other negative experiences (Koesriwulandari, 2018). According to Abraham Maslow, the inability to meet basic needs impedes the realization of higher needs (Karpman, Gonzalez, Zuckerman & Adams, 2018).

Poverty among children has been associated with regret on the part of the child (Roelen, 2017). Usually, children feel deprived when they perceive differential treatment from loved ones as a result of their socioeconomic state (Yupita & Dewi, 2020). They tend to express shame and regret in the families they belong to. Yupita and Dewi's (2020) finding resonated with that of the current study where some of the adolescents reported that poverty made them timid in mingling with friends. Children expressed feeling embarrassed to associate with friends with higher socioeconomic status (Roy, 2018; SOCO & HKCCR, 2011). They rather preferred to mingle with those of similar status, in that way they do not feel intimidated and unwelcomed (Lartey, Khanam & Takahashi, 2016).

Unhappiness and loneliness were also associated with poverty. Haanpaa, Kuula and Hakovirta (2019) and Yupita and Dewi (2020) discovered in their respective studies that individuals raised in a poor environment usually felt lonely and hopeless. Poverty causes stressors such as housing challenges, food insecurities, and income difficulties. However, the worse form is the stigma associated with poverty (Samuel, Alkire, Hammock, Mills & Zavaleta, 2014). According to Salva (2016), children feel disgraced and embarrassed when they are overlooked and not approved by their peers. Poverty places a feeling of being out of sight amidst peers on the individual (Salva, 2016). This may be harmful to children as they may not be able to bear the shame associated with being sidelined, leading to high levels of suicidal ideations and self-harm among adolescents. Nonetheless, even in their poor states, some adolescents ensured that they



avoided greediness and covetousness. As a result of the acceptance of their family's condition, adolescents avoid being envious of their more privileged colleagues. Children's acceptance of their socioeconomic state is influenced by their socialization with their immediate families (Voss & Lenihan, 2015). When adolescents are made to understand their background and the financial limitations of their family, they turn to accept their socio-cultural status and subsequently work towards bettering their future (Yoleri, 2020).

In terms of gender differences, males were more affected by poverty than females as a majority of the adolescent female sample described themselves as rich and average individuals. Females were also more likely to have hope for their future compared to males. This may be attributed to the sensitization that young girls and adolescents are expected to be given their various rights to ensure equity (Azcona & Bhatt, 2019). This was however contrary to the study by USAID (2015) which discovered that females are more exposed to poverty because they have fewer assets and productive resources. Females are severely affected by poverty as a result of their vulnerable nature (USAID, 2015).

### **5.1.3 Perceived impact of poverty**

Poverty discouraged children from aspiring for career-related jobs as they feel hopeless and overwhelmed by their present socio-economic state (Naven, Sosu, Spencer & Egan, 2019). Ghana's drastic economic change and high cost of living, combined with the expensive nature of education worsen the conditions of children (Agyire-Tettey, Asuman & Ackah, 2021; B&FT Online, 2022). As a result, they are not able to pursue their education and future aspirations.

The presence of diverse stressors within the environment triggered suicidal tendencies among adolescents. According to Bantjes et al. (2018), a major reason for suicidal tendencies among

adolescents is upward comparison among friends. When adolescents realize their friends are in better positions than them, they are likely to develop envy and resentment towards these friends. The inability to meet or beat these targets, creates in them low self-esteem and self-dissatisfaction, leading to suicide ideations and attempts (Bantjes et al. 2018).

#### 5.1.4 Coping mechanisms

Regardless of their age, children will wholeheartedly take up petty jobs such as cleaning and carrying loads for others (Sasongko & Wijayanti, 2016). In a study by Ofori-Boateng, Adams and Ohemeng (2020), participants acknowledged running errands to earn monies for their survival and were not ashamed to do so. Regardless of the little amount earned, this problem-focused mechanism has been found to aid numerous children in poor contexts around the world (Ofori-Boateng, Adams & Ohemeng, 2020).

Per Abraham Maslow's theory of basic needs, non-attainment of basic needs prevented the attainment of higher needs (Kaur, 2013). Some adolescents in this present study noted that they would rather sell their belongings to purchase food for survival. This is quite a novel act that adolescents would engage in. According to Ofori-Boateng, Admas and Ohemeng (2020), children are likely to do anything within their power to better their lives. Most adolescents also rely on appraisal-focused mechanisms such as re-directing their energies to more productive and helpful activities (Vojtiskova, Bernard, Decker & Mikesova, 2016). This helped to deal appropriately with the adverse effect of poverty.

In terms of resilience attributes, talents and optimism were significant (Aglozo, Akotia, Osei-Tutu & Annor, 2021; Hamvai and Piko, 2011; Supervia, Bordas & Lorente, 2020). According to Aina and Atan (2020), talents enable individuals to discover previously unknown competencies.

Talent creates a form of motivation to work hard. However, talent without the combination of hard work is not profitable (Appau, Marfo-Yiadom, & Kusi, 2021; Mensah, 2019).

Social support from friends and families also served as a source of coping mechanisms (Fong, 2016). The presence of social support prevented adolescents from dwelling on their poor state. Motivational talks from friends and families boost adolescents' psychological well-being.

According to Doku, Dotse and Mensah (2015), support from significant others is key to one's confidence and self-worth. Parental encouragement especially has been found to help children make good choices and hence achieve their dreams (Ceka & Murati, 2018; Roy & Giraldo-Garcia, 2018).

Religion was helpful as it came in the form of reassurance about the future and the provision of comfort through the Holy Scriptures (Nayebare & Omona, 2021; Rackley, 2016). Chitando et al. (2019) stated that the decisions young individuals make are predominantly influenced by leaders in authority, including religious leaders. This is a result of the values placed on religious beliefs and respect for religious leaders (Heward-Mills et al. 2018).

#### **5.1.5 Interventions available to children in poor contexts**

Some of the interventions raised included the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP), National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), School Feeding Programme, Legal Aid, Alternative Care, and Free Education. These interventions are not fully implemented as they should be, hence their impact is not felt.

Of all challenges, inadequate finance was the major challenge highlighted by these professionals. Governmental supports were very scanty as a result they are compelled to carry out some of

these interventions with their monies (Sackey, 2019). Similarly, inadequate resources and structures also hindered professionals' activities. In a study by Chibonore and Chikadzi (2017) among the South African populace, findings showed insufficiency of resources impeded effective advocacy at various levels.

In addition, personnel working with children were usually inexperienced or insufficient in number, affecting the efficiency of work. According to Gricus and Wysiekierski (2021), wrongfully placed staffs are unable to carry out their duties in a professional manner. Similarly, inadequate human resource personnel inhibit the effective performance of social workers as a huge burden is placed on the limited number of social workers (Gricus & Wysiekierski, 2021). Despite all these challenges, social workers make it their duty to ensure every child benefits from all governmental interventions to ensure they reach their full potential.

Comparing the experiences of adolescents and the national interventions available to them, it is clear that these interventions are inadequate to meet the various deprivations of these adolescents. Even with the presence of Free Basic Education and other interventions, some of these adolescents are not assured about the security of their future. Most of them are not knowledgeable about some of the interventions available to them such as Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP), Legal Aid, Alternative Care, and many others. A lack of awareness of these interventions subjects most adolescents to all forms of abuse and deprivation (Sackey, 2019).



Also, there is the challenge of reaching the real beneficiaries of these interventions. For instance, even with the implementation of the Free Basic Education policy, school authorities continue to levy school children and request the purchasing of stationeries that parents are unable to afford (Brenya, 2018). This prevents the child from assessing their basic right to education. Also, as a result of the increased teacher-pupil ratio, quality teaching and learning is a challenge in most public schools (Brenyah, 2018). In addition, some health conditions are not placed under the National Health Insurance Scheme. An example is mental health cases that are still gaining ground in Ghanaian society (Fusheini, 2016). In a qualitative content analysis study of the state of the nation addresses (SONAs) conducted by Quarshie, Davies and Otoo, (2021), it was discovered that no mental health conditions have been highlighted by presidents of Ghana from 2007 to 2021. Some parents are unable to afford the little monies that are requested within the health facility and hence do not access it.

## 5.2 Practical implications

Findings from the present study revealed some positive and negative experiences of children in poor urban communities. Positive experiences include receiving social support and pursuing education among children. This suggests the role of strong support systems within the community for children in poor contexts. Communal support needs to be encouraged because of its relevance to the well-being of adolescents within society. This is because, adolescents tend to look up to their significant others for emotional/psychological, physical, and spiritual support. With negative experiences, some concerns that were raised were insomnia and overthinking; inability to meet basic needs, self-blame, and high rate of violence and unrest. These negative experiences associated with poverty make it challenging for adolescents to achieve their full potential.

Also, some children stated that they experienced stigma and felt discriminated against. There is therefore the need to strengthen education and sensitization on the harmful effect discrimination and stigmatization have on the psychological well-being of children living in poor contexts.

Regarding coping mechanisms adopted by children in poor contexts, a significant number of them reported relying on substantial others within society. Others attested to shifting their focus to other things to avoid the negative effect of poverty. Children should be educated on adaptive techniques for coping with poverty to safeguard their general well-being.

### **5.3 Recommendation for policy making and clinical practice**

As per the findings from the present study of the importance of the environment to children, emphasis should be placed on the creation of an environment (both physical and psychological) that helps children better cope in poor contexts. Policymakers are thus implored to consider the importance of community-based groups such as young people's guilds as an avenue for receiving psychological support in enhancing the well-being of children in poor contexts. This will also increase the social networks available to these children for positive outcomes.

Religious leaders should also consider the importance of religion as a coping mechanism for children in poor contexts. According to findings from this study, adolescents hold religious leaders in high esteem as authority figures. Therefore, religious leaders must ensure that their actions and inactions are good examples to promote the overall development of adolescents and other age cohorts. Activities and interventions of these religious leaders should be geared towards a positive approach to help children from poor contexts build more adaptive coping skills and resilience traits.

Clinicians can also develop child-specific therapeutic interventions to help children in poor contexts gain insight and understanding of their situation. This will help adolescents appropriately deal with the challenges associated with poverty and thus achieve positive results.

#### **5.4 Limitations and recommendations for future studies**

The present study gathered data from poor children in a single town, James Town. This has limited the study to only participants in a particular locality. Future studies should consider the inclusion of multiple towns to help gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of child poverty.

Also, the researcher suggests the use of longitudinal studies to explore the various changes and development that comes with living in poor contexts. This will provide a detailed understanding of the transitions adolescents in poor urban communities experience over a long period.

Another limitation is the small sample size used for this particular study. This small sample size may not be representative of the entire population. Future studies should consider increasing the sample size to ensure it is representative of urban poor communities in Ghana.

#### **5.5 General summary and conclusion**

The definition of child poverty is different from adult poverty. The vulnerable nature of children makes describing child poverty to be significantly different from adult poverty. Moreover, perceptions and lived experiences of poor children are important in distinguishing child poverty from adult poverty. According to adolescents in this study, monetary dimensions in describing a child were insufficient. Other dimensions these adolescents included were the inability to meet

basic needs, the economic status of parents, the type of school the child attended, and many others.

Some recounted some positive and negative experiences living in a poor community. Some positive experiences included the presence of social support and pursuance of education among children. On the other hand, some negative experiences raised by these adolescents were the inability to meet basic needs and self-blame, while others were indifferent about their poor state. In addition, feelings associated with poverty were also explored. Hopelessness and loneliness; unhappiness; and acceptance of condition were some outstanding sub-themes raised.

Exploring the perceived impact of poverty, the majority of these adolescents mentioned that poverty affected their aspirations giving reasons such as poverty being perceived as a barrier, inability to pursue education, and unsecured future of descendants.

In terms of coping mechanisms, most of the adolescents sampled revealed that they would seek jobs, borrow from others and probably re-sell their personal properties to neutralize their poor state. Some resilience attributes adopted by these adolescents are reliance on their talents, hard work, and optimism about the future. Some also expressed that their friends and families contributed to their coping mechanisms, with monetary support supreme among all. Emotional and informational support was not left out. Religion was also significant in the neutralization of challenges associated with poverty.

Perceptions of professionals concerning the availability of interventions to children in poor urban contexts were the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP), School Feeding Programmes, Free Education, Legal Aid, and the availability of Alternative Care. According to these professionals, these interventions were currently working,



even though there exist some hitches that prevented them from being effectively implemented.

Nonetheless, social workers across the country endeavor to implement these various interventions for equity and the realization of every child's full potential.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ADOLESCENT SAMPLE

#### A. Demographic information

1. Gender: Male/Female
2. How old are you?
3. Where do you live?
4. Where do you come from?
5. Which school do you go to?
6. Which class are you in?

#### B. Can you please describe your school to me? Will you consider your school as a rich or poor people school? Tell me about where you live? Are you happy with where you are living? Why/Why not? *Information on family*

1. Do you live with your parents?
  - a. Tell me more about your parents
  - b. What job does your parent do?
  - c. Do you consider it as rich people's job or poor people's job?
2. Tell me about your siblings
  - a. How many siblings do you have?
  - b. Are they older or younger than you?
  - c. Are they in School? Which school do they attend? What class are they?
  - d. Describe your relationship with your siblings. Is your relationship a positive or negative one? How often do you fight? How do you resolve problems?

*C. Information on the community*

1. How do you recognize a rich/poor community?
2. How will you describe your community?
3. Is your community considered a poor or a rich one? Does both the poor and rich live together or are there divisions in the community?
  - a. Why do you say your community is rich/poor?

*D. Children perception on poverty*

1. Who is a poor person?
2. How do you recognize a poor person
3. How will you describe yourself? Will you consider yourself poor or rich?
  - a. Explain why you believe you are rich/poor

*E. Lived Experiences of poverty*

1. Describe some of the experiences you have had living in this community with your family? What are some of the positive experiences you have had?
2. What are some of the difficult experiences you've had being poor?
3. How do you feel about being poor?

*F. Impacts of poverty on children's well-being*

1. Are you happy without money?
2. Does being poor make you anxious and worried?
3. How does it make you feel when your colleagues buy things you wished you had?



*G. Impacts of poverty on children's aspiration*

1. Do you think being poor can affect your aspiration (what you want to be in future) How does it affect?
2. Do you think you can ever be rich? How is it possible?
3. Do you worry about being poor forever? What are some of the things that come to mind when you worry about being poor?

*H. Coping strategies utilized by poor children*

1. How do you cope with challenges associated with being poor?
  - i. Do you have any internal mechanisms for coping with poverty?
2. Do your friends and family help in any way to cope with poverty? In what way do they help you?
3. Does your beliefs play any role in helping you to cope with poverty? In what way does it help?

We have come to the end of the interview. How was the interview process for you? Do you wish to say anything else? Do you have a question for me? (If No) Thank you very much for your time.



## Appendix 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PROFESSIONALS

### Demographic data

- Gender
- Name of department
- How long have you worked in your department?
- What is your current position in the department?

### Social interventions that targets children from poor urban communities

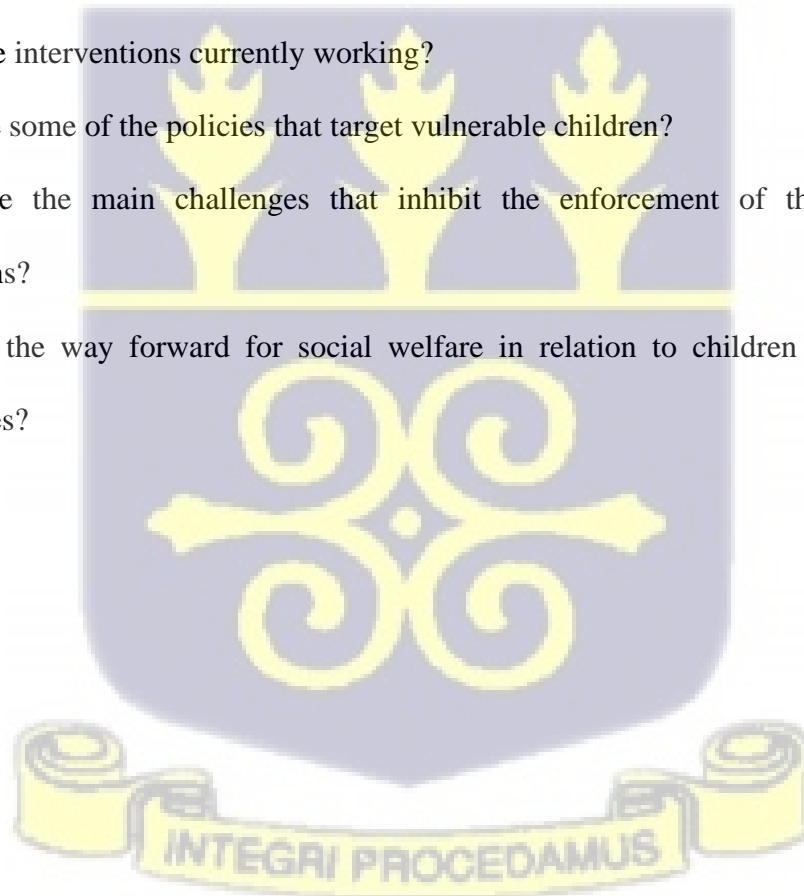
1. Are there any social interventions that specifically targets children from poor urban communities?

2. Are these interventions currently working?

3. What are some of the policies that target vulnerable children?

4. What are the main challenges that inhibit the enforcement of these policies and interventions?

5. What is the way forward for social welfare in relation to children from poor urban communities?



### **Appendix 3: INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

#### **Research title: Explorations of the lived experiences of children in poor contexts**

##### **Introduction**

The researcher would like to invite you to participate in this research. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. You can ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

##### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this project is to understand the experiences of children in poor communities and some interventions that are available to these children from the perspective of professionals. This study will help distinguish child poverty from adult poverty and explore other dimensions that determines child poverty. This will help policy makers in making the appropriate decisions that targets children in poor contexts.

##### **Voluntary participation**

Participation in this study is absolutely voluntary. Withdrawal from this study is also allowed without any form of disadvantages. Participants are free to ask for more clarifications regarding any question.

The interview will last approximately twenty minutes. The interview will be recorded with your permission. The recorded interviews will be transcribed (to help in data analysis) without any identifying information about participants.

##### **Possible risks and benefits**

Participants will be given some incentives on completion of the study.

Probing participants' lived experiences of poverty may cause some psychological stress and as such, the researcher's contact will be made available in the event of any form of psychological stress.

##### **COVID-19 protocols**

All COVID-19 protocols will be taken into consideration, i.e. both the researcher and interviewees are expected to be in face masks to prevent the spread of the virus.

##### **Data confidentiality**

The researcher seeks to protect the data of participants in accordance with the Ghana Data Protection Act 2012 and the Data Protection Act 2018. Pseudonyms will be used to prevent all form of identifying information about participants.

Any information obtained from you will be treated as confidential, and will only be shared with the researcher's supervisors. Also, audio recordings and transcripts will be kept for up to a year, after which they will be destroyed.

**Participants' statement**

I acknowledge that I have read or have had the contents of the participants' consent form read and all questions adequately explained to me in a language I understand. I fully understand the contents, including the right to change my mind (i.e. withdraw from the research) even after I have signed this consent form.

I voluntarily agree to partake in the study.

**Participants' Signature** .....

**Date:** .....

**Thank you for reading for your time.**



Appendix 4: ETHICS CLEARANCE LETTER



**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**  
**ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR THE HUMANITIES (ECH)**

*P. O. Box LG 74, Legon, Accra, Ghana*

My Ref. No...ECH 098/ 20-21 ...

March 17, 2021.

Diana Abena Ade  
Department of Psychology  
University of Ghana  
Legon

**ETHICAL CLEARANCE**  
**(ECH 098/ 20-21)**

The protocol title below has been reviewed and approved by the ECH Committee.

**TITLE OF PROTOCOL: EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN FROM POOR URBAN CONTEXTS.**

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: DIANA ABENA ADE**

Please note that the final review report must be submitted to the Committee at the completion of the study. Your research records may be audited at any time during or after the implementation. Any modification of this research project must be submitted to ECH for review and approval prior to implementation.

Please report all serious adverse events related to this study to ECH within seven (7) days verbally and in writing within fourteen (14) days.

This certificate is valid till March 16, 2022. You are to submit annual reports for continuing review.

Please accept my congratulations.

Yours Sincerely,

**Professor C. Charles Mate-Kole**  
**ECH Chair**

Cc: Dr. Joana Salifu Yendork, Department of Psychology, UG.  
Dr. Ernest Darkwah, Department of Psychology UG

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