

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

CENTRE FOR SOCIAL STUDIES, COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES



**CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) AND THE LIVELIHOODS OF  
INFORMAL WORKERS: THE CASE OF HEAD PORTERS IN THE  
GREATER ACCRA REGION OF GHANA<sup>2</sup>**

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**JANUARY, 2023**

Declaration

I, the undersigned candidate hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work towards the award of Master of Arts (MA) degree, and that no portion of it has been previously published or submitted for the award of another degree of this University or elsewhere. All works of other people have been cited and acknowledged.

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my late mother, Hon. Hajia Mary Nakobu. I owe a special debt of appreciation to my dad and siblings whose words of encouragement and insistence on perseverance still sing in my ear. I also dedicate my effort to any one struggling with grief and figuring out life and working hard to overcome it. I respect your courage and want you to know you are awesome and blessed beyond imagination.



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## Abstract

This study examined the effects of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on the livelihoods of head porters and the coping strategies employed in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The study adopted a qualitative research methodology involving semi-structured interviews and participant observation with 30 head porters at the Agbogbloshie and Makola markets and Tema station in order to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their livelihoods and the coping strategies employed in mitigating the effects of the pandemic. The study found that head porters went through different experiences including cases of depression and anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic particularly when lockdown measures were implemented in Ghana. The findings also revealed that as part of their experiences, given the precarious nature of their work, many head porters were faced with financial difficulties and became susceptible to COVID-19 infections. Notwithstanding, the study showed that the head porters were proactive in adopting coping strategies, prominent among them included reliance on their social networks particularly family and friends while others resorted to mitigating the effects of the pandemic on their livelihoods by drawing from their personal savings and seeking support from government agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Generally, the findings in this study indicate the lack of effective social protection mechanisms for vulnerable groups in society including head porters in Ghana. The study therefore recommends the need for provision of skills training and enactment of laws and policies to promote the wellbeing of head porters.



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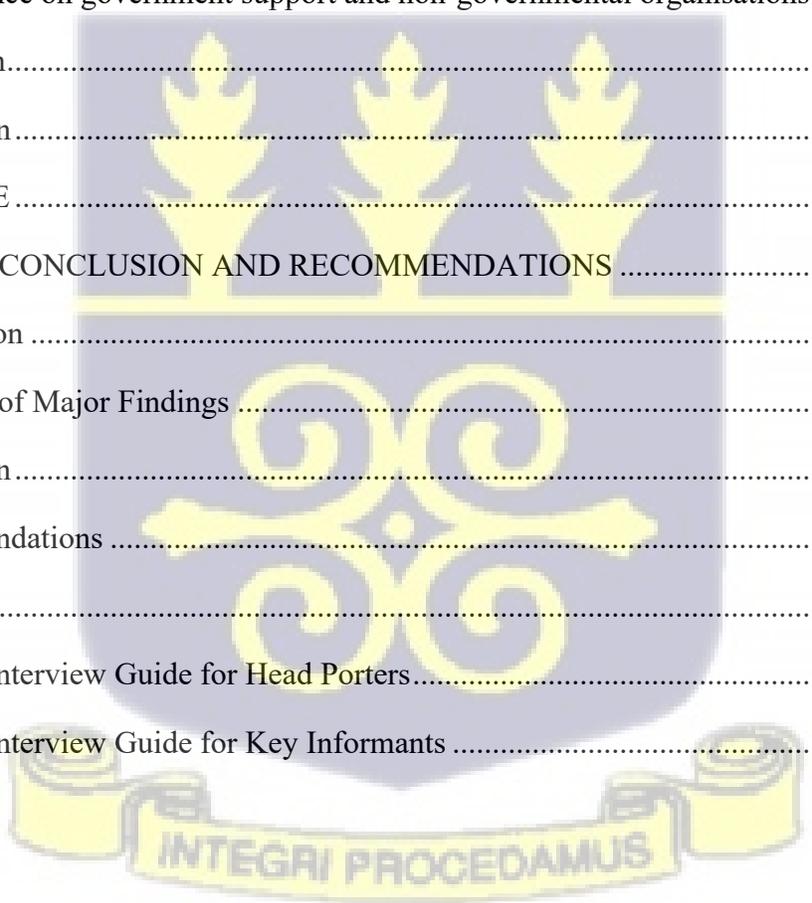
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## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0 Introduction

This study is about understanding the effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on the livelihoods of informal sector workers with a focus on head porters (*Kayayei*) in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. This study sought to understand the perspectives of the *Kayayei* with respect to how they frame and ascribe meanings to the effects of the pandemic on their livelihoods and the coping mechanisms or strategies they have adopted in mitigating the effects of the pandemic. It is worth mentioning that the focus of the study is not on examining the direct impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as a health crisis, but rather the effects of the government's responses particularly the policies that restricted movements which affected the work of head porters and their livelihoods. This chapter therefore sets out the background of the study, the statement of the problem, objectives and research questions, significance and the organisation of the study.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Since the beginning of the year 2020, the world has witnessed the ragging impacts of COVID-19 with dire socio-economic consequences on the global economy (Dentico, 2021). Countries in sub-Saharan Africa and the West African sub-region have not been spared of the impacts of COVID-19. Many countries in West Africa including Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone are still suffering from the Ebola epidemic (Murray et al., 2021), and the spread of COVID-19 continues to worsen the socio-economic crises already existing in some of these countries (Taboe et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic is not the first global health crisis or pandemic to have ever hit the world. The world has battled with some previous pandemics including smallpox, black plague, tuberculosis and influenza which killed many people (Arnold, 2019). Consequently, pandemics result in loss of lives and disruptions in socio-economic activities and its antecedent hardships

(Agbawodikeizu et al., 2021). COVID-19 which emerged from China, in the Wuhan province is no exception (Hu and Sidel, 2020: 1175).

The COVID-19 pandemic has attracted global attention due to its rapid geographic spread and devastating impacts (Capano et al., 2020). In particular, it has attracted much attention from scholars and social policy analysts whose particular focus is on the welfare of minorities and vulnerable groups such as informal sector workers, the homeless and disabled persons (Bear et al., 2020; Capano et al., 2020; Abdulai and Ibrahim, 2021).

Across the globe, governments have ensured that the general welfare of citizens is catered for amidst the ragging impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Abdulai and Ibrahim, 2021: 3). However, as part of efforts by governments to contain and manage the spread of the pandemic, pragmatic measures including instituting strict social distancing policies, wearing nose masks, practicing improved hygienic conditions, the use of sanitisers and, in some extreme cases, lockdowns and curfews were implemented to safeguard citizens (Fetnani, 2020). The policy responses adopted by governments across the globe focused on three main areas namely: health, economic and social wellbeing (Hale et al., 2020). Among the health-related policies include practicing of social distancing, bans on social gathering and contact tracing. On the other hand, the socio and economic policy responses focused on the provision of social welfare for citizens as well as stimulus packages for businesses and individuals (Antwi-Boasiako et al., 2021, Hale et al., 2020; 2021, Greer et al., 2020). Among the policy measures adopted, lockdowns in particular have had significant effects on the lives of the homeless, disabled persons and some informal sector workers (Bassier et al., 2021; Lenshie et al., 2021; Lourens and Watermeyer, 2021).

In the case of Ghana, following the first two reported cases of COVID-19 on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the Government of Ghana introduced legislations such as the Imposition of Restriction Acts, 2020

(Act 1012) and the Imposition of Restrictions (COVID-19) Instrument, 2020 (Abdulai and Ibrahim, 2021). This led to the implementation of COVID-19 inspired policies such as partial lockdowns in Accra, Kumasi, Tema and Kasoa, and a ban on social gathering among many others (Abdulai and Ibrahim, 2021; Addadzi-Koom, 2020). The implementation of COVID-19 inspired legislations has had dire impacts on the informal economy (Asante and Mills, 2020; Akuoko et al., 2021; Schotte, 2021a).

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the informal sector revolve around its economic and labour market issues especially on informal employment. Employment in the informal sector is one that is “not covered, or is insufficiently covered, by formal arrangements through work - such as contributions to pensions and medical insurance or entitlement to paid sick leave or annual leave” (Baah-Boateng and Vanek, 2020:1). In Ghana, the informal sector is made up of owners and workers of small-scale and micro enterprises whose businesses are rarely registered at national or regional levels and do not have formal arrangements with employees (Akuoko et al., 2021). They include producers, wholesalers, retailers, head porters, food and street vendors, market traders and shop keepers who usually provide intermediary services to consumers on contractual basis (Anku-Tsede and Arthur, 2021).

Workers in the informal sector are segregated into low paid and insecure employment (Kapere et al., 2021). In particular, women constitute a greater proportion of informal workers (Baah-Boateng and Vanek, 2020). According to Baah-Boateng and Vanek (2020), in Ghana, 92% of all employed women are in informal employment compared to 86% for men. While the COVID-19 pandemic has affected informal workers, the effect has been highly gendered and disproportionate between women and men (Kapere et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has in fact negatively affected

particular groups of women informal workers including head porters (Kapere et al., 2021; Asante and Mills, 2021).

Head-portering generally refers to the practice where people engage in carrying heavy goods in basins or pans in principal market places as a means of subsistence (Ibrahim-Twene, 2015). However, the term *Kayayei* (plural) refers to females who carry goods for others usually in head pans for a negotiated fee (Agyei et al., 2016: 293). The term is derived from the Hausa language, “Kaya”, meaning load/goods and the Ga language, “Yei”, meaning females, as the role is almost exclusively and predominantly carried out by females (Agyei et al., 2016: 293).

Mensah (2012) notes that both males and females from less endowed families are engaged in head portering in Ghana. However, females (both teenagers and adults) from Northern Ghana feature predominantly in the head portering business in major market centres across Ghana (Mensah, 2012). Giese and Thiel (2015) posit that head portering has become the most typical form of child labour for most females because of the increasing number of underaged girls taking jobs as head porters in principal cities of Ghana. Otieku et al. (2017) therefore views head portering as a form of a nomadic movement across marketplaces, with commodities or goods in a bowl, basket or tray on the head, wheelbarrow, trolley or bicycle in search for customers. Their mode of advertisement primarily includes running towards to help persons carrying heavy goods in marketplaces for a fee (Otieku et al., 2017).

The head porters are by far the most vulnerable informal sector workers who earn the lowest income (Anku-Tsede and Arthur, 2021). Despite the low-income levels, head portering among women has become a common practice in Ghanaian markets (Otieku et al., 2017). However, the COVID-19 pandemic and its resultant legislations such as lockdowns and social distancing has had dire consequences on the *Kayayei*. This is particularly so given that the enforcement of partial

lockdown in Kumasi, Tema, Kasoa and Accra led to the initial closure of some marketplaces in March and April 2020 (Bamu et al., 2021, Kapere et al., 2021; Asante and Mills, 2021). In addition, although some marketplaces from which the *Kayayei* earned their living were opened because they were considered as essential service providers, reduced pedestrian traffic in the markets prevented many *Kayayei* from working and also reduced their income. This had implications on their wellbeing, hence worsening their already precarious situation (see for example, WIEGO, 2020; Schotte et al., 2021a).

However, it is important to mention that head porters are without agency. In fact, existing studies have documented the resilience of informal sector workers amid economic uncertainties by adopting several strategies to manage the shock on their wellbeing (Resnick et al., 2020). Against this background, this study sought to examine the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the wellbeing of head porters and the coping strategies adopted to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been severely felt by workers in the informal sector including *Kayayei* in the Greater Accra region (Mbamba et al., 2021; WIEGO, 2021) which have the tendency to further exacerbate the already existing socio-economic plights and challenges of the *Kayayei* (Otieku et al., 2017) in most principal market centres such as Makola, Agboglobshie and the Tema station in the Greater Accra region.

Empirically nonetheless, some scholarly works including Asante and Mills (2020), Schotte et al. (2021a, 2021b), Mbamba et al. (2021), WIEGO (2021), and Webb et al. (2021) have been recently carried out to explore the possible effects of COVID-19 on workers in Ghana's informal sector. For instance, whereas Asante and Mills (2020) explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

on market centres in Ghana and how it affected the livelihoods of traders, Schotte et al. (2021b) explored the effects of COVID-19 on the Ghanaian labour market especially for informal sector workers. Similarly, the studies of WIEGO (2021) and Webb et al. (2021) focused on COVID-19 crisis on the informal workers in Accra and the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment in the economy respectively.

While these studies provide useful insights into the nexus between the COVID-19 pandemic and the informal economy in Ghana, only Mbamba et al. (2021) explored the impacts of COVID-19 on teenage head porters in Ghana. It is worth mentioning that while the study by Mbamba et al. (2021) offer some insights into how the pandemic affected head porters, it failed to examine its effects on their livelihoods and the coping strategies they employ to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. For this reason, there are limited studies explore how the COVID-19 pandemic affects the livelihoods of head porters and the coping strategies they employ in addressing such impacts. This represents a gap in knowledge to which this study sought to fill. In doing so, this study sought to extend the existing study on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on teenage head porters to cover the wellbeing of all head porters qualified to work under the laws of Ghana located at the Makola and Agboghloshie markets as well as Tema Station in the Accra Metropolitan Area.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The main objective of this study was to examine how government's responses particularly the policies that restricted movements affected the livelihoods of head porters in the Greater Accra Region and the coping strategies they adopted in mitigating the effects of the pandemic.

The specific Objectives were:

1. To document the experiences of head porters during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To assess the effects of COVID-19 on the livelihoods of head porters.
3. To examine the coping strategies employed by head porters in navigating the effects of the pandemic.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

Informed by these objectives, the study sought to address the main research question: What are the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihoods of head porters in Ghana? In answering the main question, the study also focused on the following sub-questions:

- i. What have been the experiences of head porters during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana?
- ii. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the livelihoods of head porters in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana?
- iii. What specific coping strategies or mechanisms are employed by head porters in sustaining their livelihoods amidst the COVID-19 pandemic?

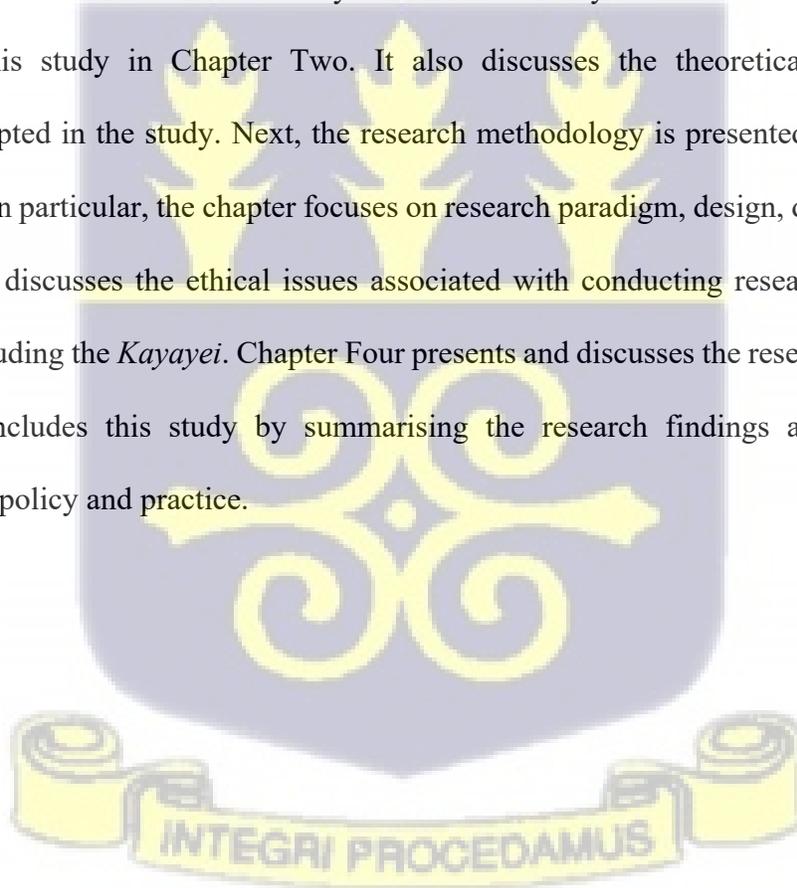
#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study will contribute to the emerging literature on the COVID-19 pandemic and informal sector by providing empirical evidence on how the pandemic has affected the livelihoods of head porters and the coping strategies adopted to ensure their survival. While existing studies have provided some insights into COVID-19 pandemic and the informal sector (see for example, Asante and Mills, 2021; Schotte et al., 2021a; WIEGO, 2021), the finding of this study will further provide rich empirical insights into the dynamics of COVID-19 and informal sector workers with particular

reference to head porters. Secondly, the empirical findings from this study suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has had dire consequences on head porters who are mostly vulnerable to shocks. For this reason, the findings from this study will be relevant in informing policymakers and stakeholders in formulating policies aimed at providing social protection for informal sector workers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **1.6 Organisation of the Study**

The study is organised into five chapters. Chapter One sets out the background of the study with particular focus on the research problem, study objectives and questions, and the significance of the study as well as the structure of the study. This is followed by a review of the relevant literature underpinning this study in Chapter Two. It also discusses the theoretical and conceptual frameworks adopted in the study. Next, the research methodology is presented and discussed in Chapter Three. In particular, the chapter focuses on research paradigm, design, data collection and analysis. It also discusses the ethical issues associated with conducting research on vulnerable populations including the *Kayayei*. Chapter Four presents and discusses the research findings. The last chapter concludes this study by summarising the research findings and discussing its implications for policy and practice.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter reviews the literature on the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on informal sector workers with particular focus on head porters in Ghana. The chapter also presents and discusses the conceptual framework guiding this study. In doing so, the chapter reviews existing empirical and theoretical literature on the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the livelihoods of head porters as well as the coping strategies employed. The chapter also discusses and contextualises the phenomenon of head portering in Ghana. It also reviews literature on the concepts of wellbeing and livelihood which inform the design of the conceptual framework guiding this study. The last section concludes the chapter.

#### **2.1 Overview of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Ghana**

The novel coronavirus, also known as Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) or COVID-19, emerged from the Wuhan Province in China in December 2019 (Acter et al., 2020). In January 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the outbreak of COVID-19 as a public health emergency of international concern. On 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the WHO declared the COVID-19 a pandemic. COVID-19, like every other infectious disease is characterised by some symptoms, prominent among them include cold and fever (Sacco et al., 2020: 46). These symptoms could be grouped into three main categories: i) respiratory signs such as difficulty in breathing and cold; ii) gastro-intestinal signs such as diarrhoea and stomach pains; and iii) geriatric syndromes such as frailty and dizziness (Sacco et al., 2020: 47).

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all countries across the globe. In Ghana, the first two cases of COVID-19 were recorded on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020 (Ministry of Health, 2020). These were imported

cases by two individuals who returned to Ghana from Turkey and Norway. As of December 14, 2021, there were 147, 203 confirmed cases, 1309 deaths and 132, 869 recoveries in the country. In terms of pattern of infection, the Greater Accra region and Ashanti region have the highest cases with North East and Savannah regions recording the least cases (UNICEF, 2022).

Following the first two reported cases, the Government of Ghana (GOG) introduced COVID-19 restrictive legislations in order to contain the spread of the pandemic. In particular, the government declared the COVID-19, a public health emergency in line with the Public Health Act, 2012 (Act 851). Again, the government introduced the Imposition of Restriction Acts, 2020 (Act 1012) and the Imposition of Restrictions (COVID-19) Instrument, 2020 (E.I. 64) in controlling the spread of the pandemic (Haider et al., 2020; Addadzi-Koom, 2020). The COVID-19 inspired legislations led to the introduction of partial lockdown in Kumasi, Kasoa, Tema and Accra over a three-week period in April 2020 and the closure of schools and places of worship (Haider et al., 2020; Addadzi-Koom, 2020).

The imposition of COVID-19 legislations such as lockdown and social distancing has affected workers particularly in the informal sector in Ghana (Schotte et al., 2021a). The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the informal sector in Ghana is discussed in the next section.

## **2.2 Overview of Ghana's informal sector and the COVID-19 pandemic**

In Ghana, workers in the informal sector are separated into low-wage and precarious jobs with no social security (Kapere et al., 2021). Women, in particular, make up a larger proportion of the informal sector workforce in Ghana (Baah-Boateng and Vanek, 2020). Women make up 92% of all employed people in the informal sector, compared to 86% of men (Baah-Boateng and Vanek, 2020). While the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted informal labourers, the impact has been

strongly gendered and unequally distributed between men and women in Ghana (Kapere et al., 2021).

In Ghana, the informal sector has been greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, informal sector workers who are mostly self-employed are vulnerable to shocks due in part to the absence of social protection systems and the majority earn their livelihood from irregular incomes (Schwettmann, 2020). For this reason, the COVID-19 pandemic increases the risk of having devastating effects on the wellbeing of informal sector workers.

In particular, some existing studies have examined the effects of the pandemic on informal sector workers such as market women in Ghana (see for example, Asante and Mills, 2020; Schwettmann, 2020). For instance, in their analysis of the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on marketplaces in urban Ghana, Asante and Mills (2020) pointed out that COVID-19 restrictions such as lockdown and social distancing slowed down the activities of traders and businesses. Similarly, Webb et al. (2021) explored the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the informal sector and asserted that despite the fact that the pandemic tends to afflict those in informal work disproportionately, they generally receive less government assistance than those employed in the formal sector. They therefore recommended that governments channel attention to providing substantive assistance to workers in the informal sector if they wish to improve the wellbeing of their citizens. Narula (2020) also opines informal employment and businesses have particularly become vulnerable to the economic shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. He therefore suggests the need for continuous and effective interdependency between the formal and informal sectors as a way of mitigating the effects of the pandemic. Additionally, Schotte et al. (2021b) explored the immediate and near-term effects of COVID-19 on the labour market in Ghana. They found that the imposition of partial lockdown had dire consequences on employment opportunities especially for those in

the informal sector. For example, they pointed out the collapse of some informal sector businesses due to the reduction in the patronage of their services. Notwithstanding the negative effects, Schotte et al. (2021b) further found that the pandemic created opportunities for new jobs in the informal sector such as selling of nose masks and sanitizers among many others.

### **2.3 Contextualising the drivers of head portering in Ghana**

Ghana like other developing countries is faced with a myriad of development challenges (Issah, 2018). This is clearly evident in the differences in the levels of development indicators such as poverty and unemployment rates between Northern and Southern Ghana. For example, poverty is pervasive in the Northern part of the country (hereafter the North). According to the 2021 International Poverty Rate Statistics Forecast, the national poverty rate of Ghana stands at 11.3% (Sasu, 2021). However, poverty level in the North (i.e., Northern, Savannah, North East, Upper East and Upper West regions) is the highest in the country with an estimated poverty rate of 56% compared to 20% for Southern Ghana (Bukari et al., 2021). In fact, the incidence of poverty in the country is highest in districts in the North such as East Gonja (84.2%), Bole (79.4%) and Kpandai (76.9%) (Bukari et al., 2021).

In addition, most people from the North, particularly women are either unemployed or under-employed (Issah, 2018). The unemployment situation coupled with high poverty levels make most women susceptible to the lures of rural-urban migration as an escape route to raise extra income for their survival (Agyei et al., 2016). Unfortunately, some of these women who do not find decent employable opportunities upon their arrival in Southern Ghana engage in head portering for survival and subsistence (Owusu and Yeboah, 2018).

Similarly, it is worth mentioning that existing studies have highlighted that not all female migrants from Northern Ghana engage in head portering mainly because of poverty, rather, some school

going female teenagers engage in head portering as a means of generating revenue during vacations to support their education (Awumbila and Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2008; Akabzaa et al., 2010). Moreover, the phenomenon of head portering is not limited to migrants from Northern Ghana. In fact, extant literature has established that there are other southern ethnic groups that also engage in head portering (Yeboah et al., 2015; Agyei et al., 2016).

Otieko et al. (2017) indicated in their study that the driving factors of head porting in Ghana is classified into pull and push factors. The pull factors include household poverty, unemployment, quest for personal independence and sustenance, provision of financial support for family. On the other hand, the push factors include regular income, employment, peer influence, sustenance and lack of skills requirements for head portering. Also, Opare (2003), asserted that the high influx of young women and teenage girls from Northern to Southern Ghana is driven by push factors such as high level of poverty. Furthermore, Baah-Ennumh et al. (2012) attributed the rising influx of female head porters to the south-north development dichotomy. They argued that this in turn results in rural-urban migration where many female youth migrate from Northern to Southern Ghana in search of greener pastures (see also Awumbila et al, 2014; Agyei et al., 2016; Darkwah et al., 2016; Bangura, 2020). More importantly, in Northern Ghana, employment avenues especially for females could be described as limited, therefore, many tend to resort to migrating to cities in Southern Ghana to engage in *Kayayei* as means of survival (Bangura, 2020; Yeboah et al., 2015). Therefore, poverty and economic hardships have been identified as one of the underlying causes of the increasing incidence of *Kayayei* in Ghana (Yeboah et al., 2015; Boateng, 2018; Kuyini, 2020).

Peer pressure also a contributory factor to the increasing number of head porters in Ghana (Komatsu et al., 2018). According to Komatsu et al. (2018), most parents in Northern Ghana

usually spend more time on the farm or at the marketplace, and their concern is about how to provide food for their household. For this reason, the emotional needs and development of their children are sometimes neglected. As a result, many children spend most of their days with their peers and then copying them as negative role models in the community (Dietz et al., 2013). In the case of head porters, existing studies have highlighted that many are either lured or convinced by their peers to migrate and engage in head portering in the major market centres in Southern Ghana, particularly Accra (see Dietz et al., 2013). Such female youth perceive head portering as a lucrative livelihood strategy and means of employment than to stay unemployed in the North, which has triggered the increasing phenomenon of *Kayayei* (Agyei et al., 2016).

Another contributory factor accounting for the migration of the head porters is urbanisation. For instance, Issahaku (2016) argues that Ghana like many African countries is experiencing rapid urbanisation, which means that an increasing proportion of the population resides in urban areas. The rate of urbanisation is partly explained by the expansion and development of urban areas, and by high birth rates in these areas (Issahaku, 2016). According to the World Bank (2020), the urban population of Ghana stands at 55% with annual urban growth rate at 4%. This means that there is an increasing population growth in cities and towns which creates readily available market for trading businesses to thrive. Consequently, most females from Northern Ghana including children have taken the opportunity of the readily available markets in urban centres to engage in head portering (Issahaku, 2016; Agyei et al., 2016). However, although north-south migration of head porters in Ghana has received much attention in literature in terms of their potential benefits and challenges (see for example, Huijsmans, 2012; Yeboah et al., 2015, Agyei et al, 2016, Nyarko and Tahiru, 2018), limited studies have been conducted to assess how the engagement in head portering

affects the subjective wellbeing of head porters. The next section discusses the effects of head portering on the wellbeing of the *Kayayei* in Ghana.

#### **2.4 Implications of head portering on the wellbeing of *Kayayei***

According to Otioku et al. (2017), attempts to address the plights of porters have received much attention among policy makers at the national and local levels, including providing shelter facilities and encouraging children of school-going ages to enrol in education. However, these interventions have not yielded the needed results as the ratio of head portering among women and female teenagers still remains high, which have a lot of implications on the wellbeing of porters.

While head portering may be perceived as a lucrative economic activity to some migrants who have no qualified skills and knowledge to be readily employed (Iddrisu, 2020), most *Kayayei*'s are either ignorant of or overlook the negative implications head portering has on their wellbeing including health and security (Buske, 2013). Head portering does not only have implications for children but also female adults, and can affect every aspect of the *Kayayei*'s well-being. For example, many *Kayayei*'s who do not find the perceived greener pastures in the cities often end up on the streets (Oteng-Ababio et al., 2019). For this reason, Ofosu-Kusi (2017) argues that head portering sometimes distorts the social orientation of especially female teenagers who think that life on the street is the ideal form of socialisation. More importantly, many *Kayayei*'s also become detached from their family, peers, school and the society which are the primary agents of socialisation (Oteng-Ababio et al., 2019). Some existing studies have also observed that there are potentials for head portering to increase the rate of suicidal thought among *Kayayei*'s because they feel lonely, disappointed and abandoned by their families, friends and society at large (Benneh et al., 2016; Adomako et al., 2019). Thus, many *Kayayei*'s usually experience emotional frustrations in their lives which have the potential of causing some form of depression (Amoah, 2020). Also,

many young children engaged in *Kayayei* are found to be less likely to develop relationship skills (Benneh et al., 2016). This could have significant implications on their general welfare and personal development. During early childhood, children learn the basic skills, values and norms needed to create meaningful relationships and to co-operate with others. If children are detached from their primary sources of socialisation, it can result in them being less responsive particularly during infancy when attachment and bonding is necessary for their development (Narvaez, 2013). Additionally, females who engage in head portering occasionally experience physical strain in carrying loads which leads to tiredness, anxiety and depression due to the stress and pressure they encounter (Benneh et al., 2016), whereas Some are exposed to rape, accidents, poor health conditions and sometimes death due to regularly carrying heavy goods (Agyei et al., 2016).

Again, another potentially negative effect of engaging in head portering is that children often become exposed, and they tend to join their peers to engage in social vices such as armed robbery, smoking and peddling of other hard drugs (Onyango et al., 2017). Some young *Kayayei* girls are also known to engage in prostitution as a survival means which often ends up in them getting pregnant (Boateng, 2018). Some also experience several forms of vulnerability including rape while others die at early ages because of health problems and poor nutrition (Ziblim, 2015). However, it is worth mentioning that the severity of the effects of head portering on the wellbeing of head porters depends on a number of demographic features such as age. For example, the younger the age of the head porters, the greater the strain they would have to endure in carrying loads which leads to stress, fatigue, waist, neck and spinal problems (Boateng, 2018).

Notwithstanding the potentially negative aspects of head portering on the wellbeing of the *Kayayei*, some scholars have highlighted that it provides livelihoods which in turn improves their wellbeing (see for example, Agyei et al., 2016; Awumbila et al., 2008). For example, Awumbila

et al. (2008) argue that female head porters work consistently for years to gather resources in order to study a trade and acquire some skills. Those who are unable to learn a trade continue to engage in head portering to accumulate some wealth and assets while others support their families back home (Awumbila and Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2008; Oberhauser and Yeboah, 2011; Agyei et al., 2016).

Notwithstanding the plethora of literature on head porters, existing studies have focused on their migration patterns, vulnerabilities and survival strategies (Yeboah et al., 2015; Agyei et al., 2016; Adomako et al., 2019) to the neglect of how pandemics including COVID-19 affects their livelihoods. More importantly, the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated how informal sector workers including head porters are exposed to risks and shocks which tend to affect their subjective wellbeing. The next section reviews the literature on the concept of wellbeing.

## **2.5 Conceptual Framework of the Study**

### **2.5.1 Conceptualising Wellbeing**

The concept of wellbeing has been defined in different contexts and it is multidimensional in nature (Copestake, 2008; White, 2010). According to White (2010), wellbeing is the culmination of all efforts made to raise the standard of living for all people in a way that won't leave the next generation unable to meet their demands. White (2008) further explains that wellbeing is about all-inclusive efforts geared towards ensuring an improvement in the quality of life of the current generation, without jeopardising efforts of the future generation to meet their needs or address their development challenges.

Copestake (2008) goes on to say that improving wellbeing requires a paradigm shift that broadens the definition of development to take into account factors like education, equitable resource distribution, access to high-quality health care, improved housing systems, and other necessities,

particularly utilities like water and electricity, which collectively improve living conditions and quality of life. For this reason, the concept of wellbeing is viewed as a process of advancement, where improvement in the lives of people is generated through strong partnerships between all sectors, corporate bodies and other groups in meeting the needs of the current generation (Copestake et al., 2009). To this end, wellbeing transcends beyond economic progress to include all aspects of the socio-political and cultural capabilities and opportunities for people.

Given the multidimensionality of wellbeing, measuring the concept is not an easy task. However, according to White (2008: 2), wellbeing has some key distinct features including its holistic outlook, people centred, with a particular focus on the perspectives and priorities of individuals and it is grounded within a social and cultural context or location. With regards to the holistic outlook of wellbeing, the concept of wellbeing seeks to connect the mind, body and spirit of the individual which runs contrary to the “post-enlightenment modernist understanding of a person”. In doing so, the concept of wellbeing seeks to move away from the categorisation of the individual from an outsider’s perspectives towards an actor-oriented view, where emphasis is given to the strengths rather than the needs of an individual (White, 2008). On the other hand, the people centred approach to wellbeing is far away from an external objective measurement of welfare towards the individual’s own perceptions and experiences of life. Thus, it tends to focus on the subjective understandings or dimensions about how an individual feels about his/her health or economic status in society (White, 2008; Copestake et al., 2009).

For this reason, the concept of wellbeing could be conceptualised using dimensions such as subjective wellbeing, relational wellbeing and material wellbeing (White, 2008). The material dimension focuses on the practical welfare and standard of living of the individual such as income levels, assets, employment and livelihood activities among many others. It is worth mentioning

that livelihoods represent an aspect of material wellbeing because of its focus on welfare and standard of living. On the other hand, relational aspect of wellbeing is about personal and social relations including network of support and relations of love and care. Subjective wellbeing is about values, perceptions and experiences of individuals such as their sense of meaning, hopes, fear and aspirations (White, 2008). It is important to mention that the different dimensions of wellbeing are not mutually exclusive but rather interdependent and interrelated in nature. For this reason, Rath et al. (2010) argue that approaches to promote wellbeing be inclusive in nature to cover even the deprived and less privileged. In addition, these efforts should address challenges of inequality and poverty that threaten the physical security and self-esteem of people (Steptoe et al., 2015). The concept of material wellbeing is therefore applied in this study to examine the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihoods of head porters and the coping mechanisms they employ in mitigating the negative effects of the pandemic.

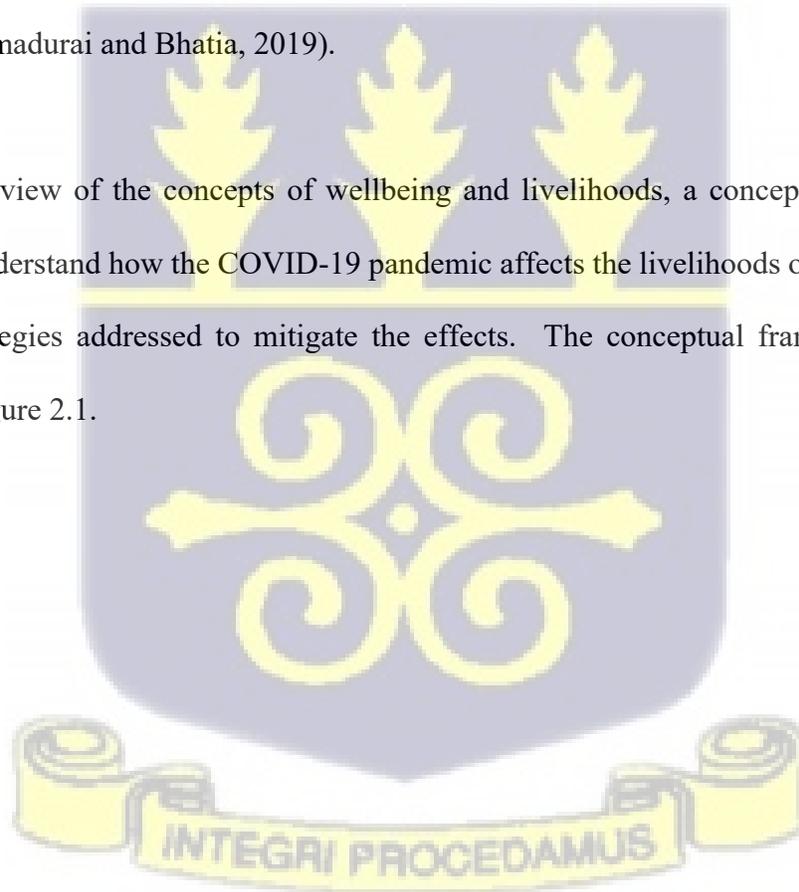
### **2.5.2 Conceptualisation of Livelihood**

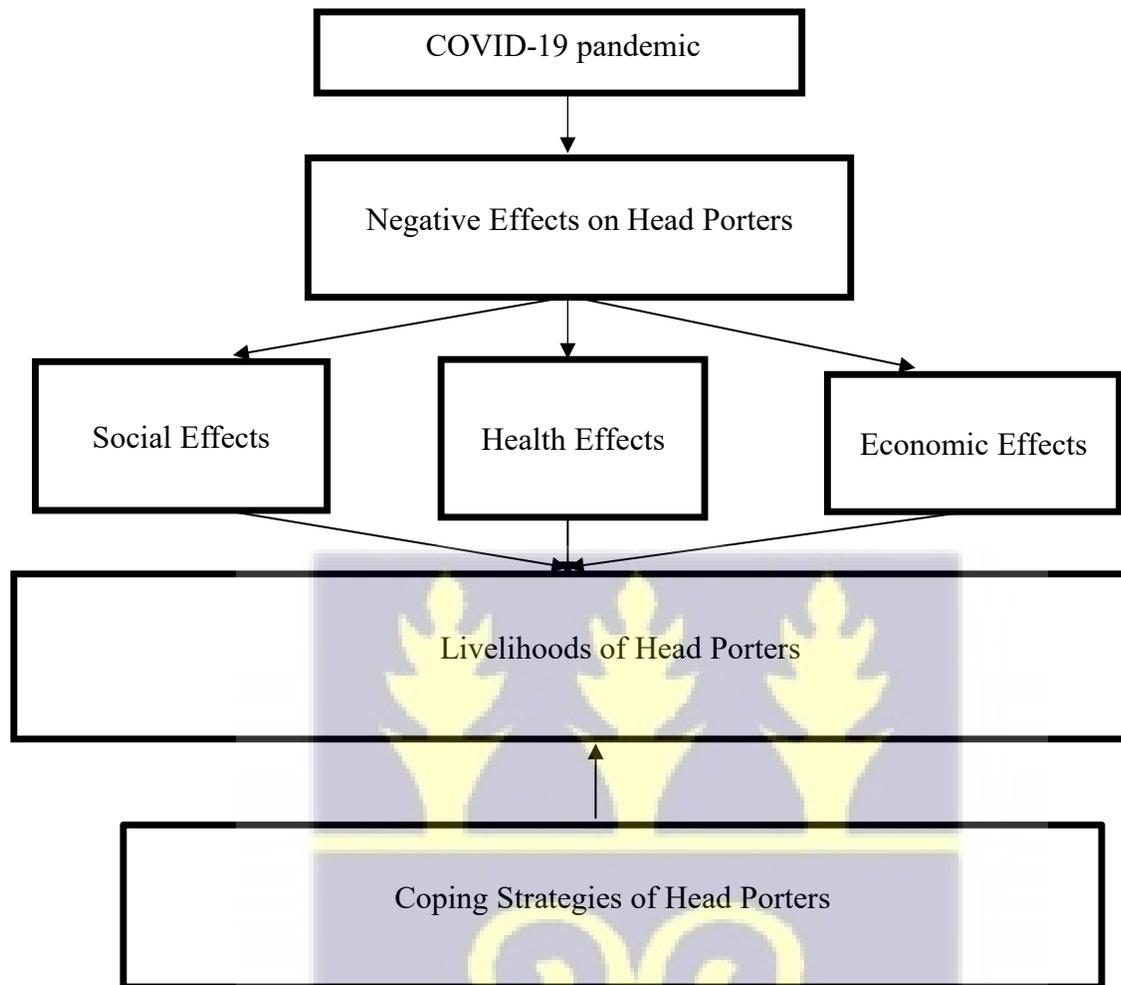
According Morse and McNamara (2013), livelihood refers to the means of ensuring the basic necessities of life. Thus, it refers to a person's means of securing the fundamental essentials of existence which include water, food, medication, shelter and clothing. Bohle (2009) also conceptualises livelihood as the protection of individual from pervasive and critical threats, as well as circumstances which pose threats to their fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Livelihood is people-centred, promotes rights and developments and collectively prioritises the individual and the society in terms of defining their needs and vulnerabilities and in acting as agents of change (Giardina and Fullwood-Thomas, 2021). The concept of livelihood was embodied and articulated under the Human Development Report of 1994. Two issues were considered with regards to livelihood: i) freedom from fear which focuses on protection from

harmful and sudden distortions and interruptions in the patterns of daily life whether at jobs, homes, or in communities; and ii) freedom from wants which addresses safety with regards to drastic threats such as pandemics, hunger and repression (Ul Haq, 1994). The 1994 Human Development Report therefore conceptualises livelihood as safety from chronic dangers and protection from sudden frightful interruptions in the pattern of daily life (Ul Haq, 1994). The concept of livelihood deals with the security, rights and human development and it is an interdisciplinary concept which is context-specific (Ramadurai and Bhatia, 2019). As a people-centred concept, livelihood puts the individual at the focal point of analysis. Consequently, it considers an expansive scope of security issues which undermine and threaten human existence and dignity (Ramadurai and Bhatia, 2019).

Based on the review of the concepts of wellbeing and livelihoods, a conceptual framework is developed to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic affects the livelihoods of head porters and the coping strategies addressed to mitigate the effects. The conceptual framework is further illustrated in Figure 2.1.





**Figure 2.1:** Conceptual framework for understanding the effects of COVID-19 on the livelihoods of head porters

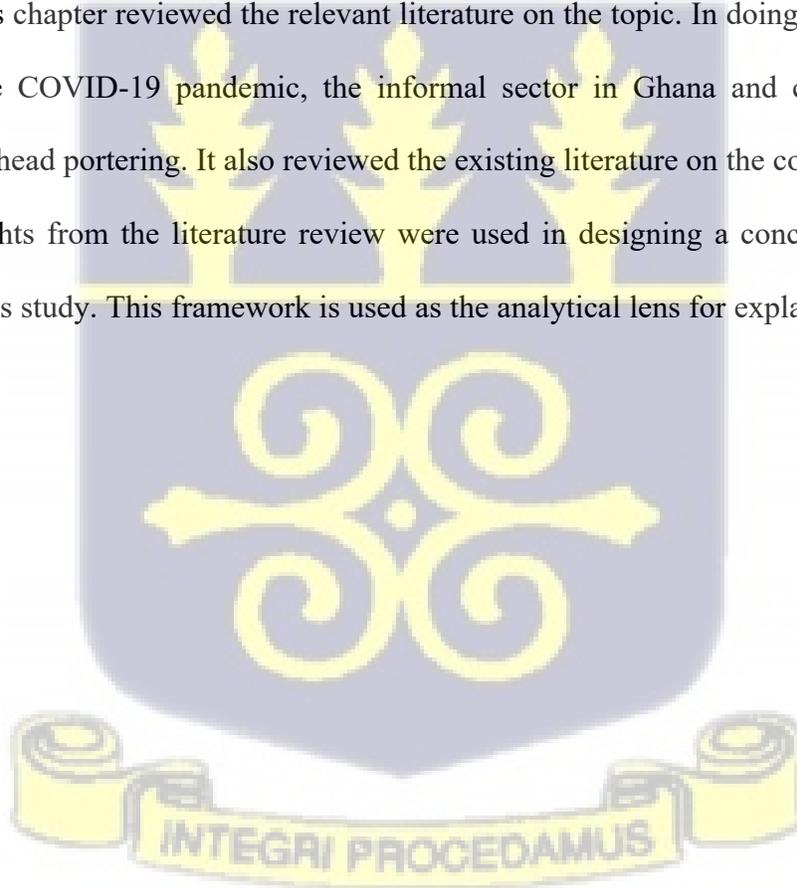
**Source:** Author's Construct, 2021.

As illustrated in Figure 2.1, the conceptual framework indicates how COVID-19 has dire effects on head porters as it exposes them to risks and economic shocks or vulnerability (see for example, Abdulai and Ibrahim, 2021; Asante and Mills, 2021; Schotte et al., 2021a) which negatively affect all spheres of the life of the informal sector workers including the social, economic and health life.

The ruining of all these aspects of the lives of *Kayayei* implies that the entire outlook of the *Kayayei* is affected; thus, the general livelihood of the *Kayayei*. Notwithstanding the negative impact the COVID-19 pandemic could have on their livelihoods, the head porters are not passive agents but rather active and agile agents, able to employ a number of strategies to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. The findings from this study could provide policy-relevant evidence to influence policy makers by providing insights into how the pandemic has affected the wellbeing and livelihoods of head porters.

## 2.6 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter reviewed the relevant literature on the topic. In doing so, it provided an overview of the COVID-19 pandemic, the informal sector in Ghana and contextualised the phenomenon of head portering. It also reviewed the existing literature on the conceptualisation of wellbeing. Insights from the literature review were used in designing a conceptual framework underpinning this study. This framework is used as the analytical lens for explaining the research findings.



## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology employed in answering the research questions in this study. In doing so, the chapter focuses on the research paradigm or philosophy, the research approach, design, sampling, data collection instruments, data analysis, ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

#### 3.1 Research Philosophy or Paradigm

In this study, an interpretivist or a social constructivist paradigm was chosen as the underlying research paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm highlights that there are many truths and multiple realities, therefore, subjective meanings about a phenomenon or an object being studied can be established by providing the participants with the chance to express their opinions (Ngai et al., 2015).

The choice of the paradigm is informed by the fact that the study sought to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the wellbeing of head porters and the coping mechanisms they adopt to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. The interpretivist or social constructivist paradigm assumes that the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals (i.e., the *Kayayei*) who are part of the ongoing action being investigated (Pham, 2018). The choice of interpretivists' paradigm is also based on the fact that knowledge is socially constructed between the researcher and the researched. Therefore, the interpretivist paradigm was selected with the aim of understanding the phenomenon under study from the subjective viewpoint of the respondents.

### 3.2 Research Approach

Research approach applies to the means through which a researcher goes about discussing and analysing a research data (Stacks and Salwen, 2014). There are basically three main types of research approaches namely qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods.

This study adopted a qualitative methodology in understanding the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the wellbeing of head porters as well as the coping mechanisms employed in mitigating the effects of the pandemic. The rationale for the choice of qualitative research methodology is to provide an in-depth and subjective understanding of the perspectives of the *Kayayei*'s on how the pandemic has affected their wellbeing. Thus, the use of qualitative methodology helps in attaining an insider's perspectives or views about a given phenomenon (Saldaña, 2021). In addition, it allows the researcher to immerse herself/himself into the world of the respondents or the research subjects in order to explore and understand their perspectives and how they frame and ascribe meanings to the effects of the pandemic on their wellbeing. This supports the assertion by Saldaña (2021) that qualitative research approach produces general understandings of rich, contextual, and unstructured, non-numeric data through conversations with research participants in a natural setting. Moreover, the personal experiences of the '*Kayayei*' cannot be captured numerically and therefore qualitative research is the most preferred research approach for a study of this nature.

### 3.3 Research Design

Research design refers to the practical procedures a researcher follows or adopts in investigating a social or scientific problem. There are various types of research designs including case study, ethnography and phenomenology employed in qualitative methodology (Goulding, 2005).

Informed by this, this study adopts a case study research design. A case study research design is utilised extensively in qualitative research to understand the lived experiences of a particular social group within a given context (Merriam and Grenier, 2019). To this end, Parker et al. (2015: 77) asserted that a case study is a specific phenomenon occurring within a bounded context and its importance in qualitative research lies on its emphasis on ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions. It is therefore suitable for descriptive and exploratory studies. Woodside (2010: 1) also argues that a case study focuses on describing people, groups and processes in a context or the sequence of events in which an action occurs. In addition, case study research design supports both theory building, particularly where existing theoretical and conceptual frameworks are inadequate and acts as a guide to empirical research (Hyett et al., 2014).

According to Baskarada (2014), there are four main types of qualitative case study. These are: i) pilot or exploratory case study; ii) illustrative case study; iii) critical or theoretical case study; and iv) cumulative case study. For the purpose of this study, an illustrative case study design is chosen in order to understand the lived experiences of head porters on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their wellbeing, and the strategies adopted to mitigate the effects. An illustrative case study is a descriptive study that focuses on studying a particular lived experience within a given context (Baskarada, 2014). The choice of case study is also informed by the interpretivist or social constructivist paradigm underpinning this study where knowledge is socially constructed between the researcher and the researched.

### 3.4 Study Area Profile

This study is undertaken within the Ashiedu Keteke Sub Metropolitan District Council in Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA), with specific focus on the Tema station, Agbogbloshie and Makola markets. The study area shares boundaries with Okaikoi North to the north, Gulf of Guinea

to the south, Accra Central Business District (CBD) to the west and Osu Klottey to the east (AMA, 2020). The study area has become the most vibrant markets and commercial centres in the CBD within the AMA (AMA, 2020). This has attracted a lot of people to the area including *Kayayei* who work in these market areas.

Notwithstanding the economically vibrant nature of the study area, it is characterised by poor sanitation, poor drainage and flooding due partly to improper disposal of waste in the area (AMA, 2020). This is partly due to the increasing levels of population. According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census, the population of the Ashiedu Keteke sub metropolitan area is 88,633 comprising of 40, 423 males and 48,210 females. The sub-metro has a population density of 23,166 with a household population of 85,368 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). Therefore, population concentration in the area has led to the developments of some pockets of slums (AMA, 2020). However, given the commercial significance of the area particularly the Tema station, Agbogloboshie and Makola markets, it has attracted many head porters who work in these market centres for their livelihoods. Given the high influx of head porters in the study area, it presents a suitable location to explore the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their livelihoods and wellbeing and the mechanisms adopted to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

### **3.5 Study Population**

Bhattacharjee (2012) defines study population as the whole set of elements that are selected by the researcher for investigation. The population of interest for this study include all *Kayayei* in the Ashiedu Keteke sub metropolitan area of AMA. It is important to mention that comprehensive data on the number of *Kayayei* operating in the AMA is lacking. However, Amankwah et al. (2021) have estimated that there are over 17,000 *Kayayei* in Accra. Aside from the *Kayayei*, the study population also include key informants such as officials from the Ministry of Gender, Children

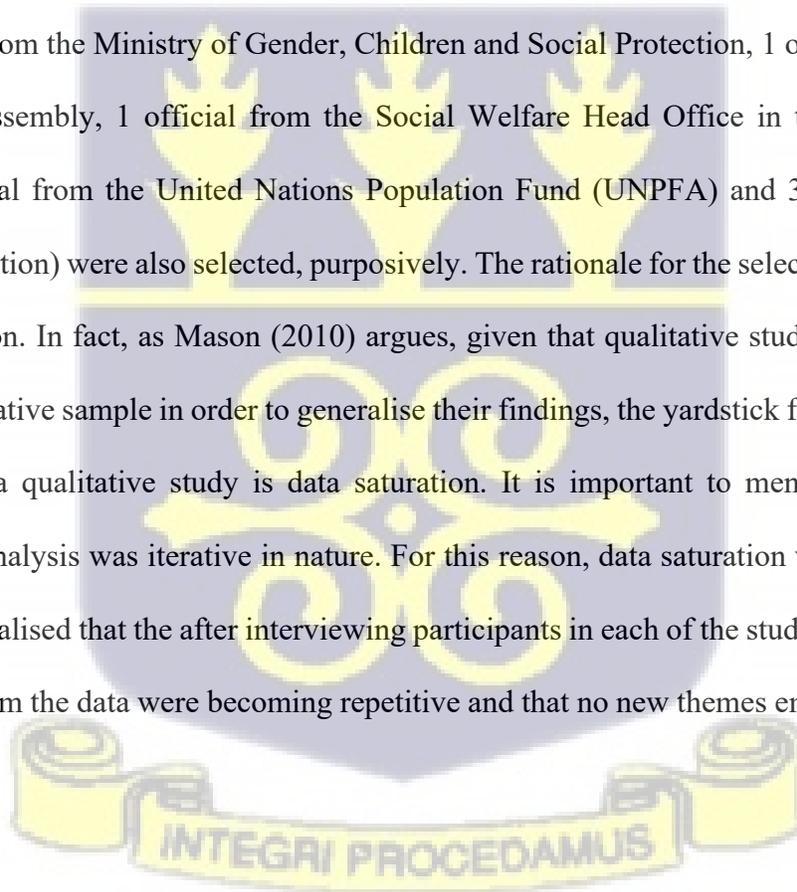
and Social Protection (i.e., the Department of Social Welfare), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and leaders of the *Kayayei* Association who have in-depth knowledge about the topic under study.

### 3.6 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

This study employed purposive sampling technique in selecting the participants. A purposive sampling technique according to Cohen and Arieli (2011) involves intentionally selecting units of the sample population based on the purpose of the research study. To this end, the selection of the key informants was informed by their experiences, knowledge and expertise on the topic under study. The key informants included officials from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Accra Metropolitan Assembly, Social Welfare Head Office in the Greater Accra Region, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and leaders of the *Kayayei* Association. This helped in providing nuanced perspectives into the research topic. In particular, for the *Kayayei*, a snowballing sampling technique was employed. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances (Ghaljaie et al., 2017; Cohen and Arieli 2011: 426). For this particular study, a snowballing sampling was used where the researcher identified one *Kayayei* based on initial contact established from a previous work the researcher undertook on *Kayayei* at the Tema Station as part of the UNFPA *Kayayei* Assistance Project in 2020. The first *Kayayei* helped in introducing the researcher to other *Kayayei*'s. Based on the snow ball sampling, ten *Kayayei*'s were selected from each of the three areas (i.e., the Agbogbloshie and Makola markets and Tema station). Subsequently all the first respondents introduced the researcher to their other nine (9) colleagues or friends. This is due to the trust and acquaintances which exists among the *Kayayei*. For this reason, recommendations from other members helped in convincing them for their participation in the

study. The snowball sampling technique however is defective as it does not represent the true character of the population. It is noteworthy that the aside from the snowballing sampling, the *Kayayei* were selected using a criteria sampling. The inclusion is that the *Kayayei* must have consented to their participation in the study and they should have stayed or lived in the study area for at least three months before the outbreak of the pandemic. Additionally, the *Kayayei* selected for this study must have been aged 15 years and above, thus those below were excluded.

In terms of sample size, a total of 30 *Kayayei*'s (10 each from Tema station, Agbogbloshie and Makola markets) were selected and interviewed. Aside from the *Kayayei*, seven (7) key informants (i.e., 1 official from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, 1 official from Accra Metropolitan Assembly, 1 official from the Social Welfare Head Office in the Greater Accra Region, 1 official from the United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA) and 3 leaders from the *Kayayei* Association) were also selected, purposively. The rationale for the selection was informed by data saturation. In fact, as Mason (2010) argues, given that qualitative studies do not seek to have a representative sample in order to generalise their findings, the yardstick for determining the sample size in a qualitative study is data saturation. It is important to mention that the data collection and analysis was iterative in nature. For this reason, data saturation was reached when the researcher realised that the after interviewing participants in each of the study sites, the themes that emerged from the data were becoming repetitive and that no new themes emerged again from the data.



### 3.7 Data Collection Techniques and Methods

#### 3.7.1 Sources of Data Collection

Data collection is one of the most important aspects of any research study. Canals (2017) explains that research can be conducted with different methods, but every research is based on the data which is analysed. There are two main types of data for any given research: primary data and secondary data. Primary data refers to first-hand information that is collected by the researcher while secondary data refers to existing data that has been obtained by other researchers and has been published previously (Windle and Silke, 2019). In this study, however, only primary data was used through in-depth semi-structured interviews with *Kayayei*'s and key informants. In addition, participant observation was also an important data collection instrument where the researcher visited the *Kayayei* in their natural setting or environment to understand their lived experiences.

#### 3.8 Data Collection Instruments

Two semi-structured interview guides were designed and administered to the *Kayayei* and key informants (see Appendix 1 and 2). The semi-structured interview guide for the *Kayayei* contained twenty-four (24) questions, sectioned into three broad categories (i.e., experiences of *Kayayei* during COVID-19, effects of COVID-19 on wellbeing of *Kayayei*, coping strategies or mechanisms). The first section focused on experiences of the *Kayayei* prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The second section sought to explore the perspectives of *Kayayei* on how the pandemic has affected their wellbeing while the last section focused on their coping mechanisms. For the key informant interviews, the semi-structured interview guide focused on documenting their perspectives and knowledge about the *Kayayei* before and during the COVID-

19 pandemic, the effects on their wellbeing and the policy interventions put in place to address the challenges faced by the *Kayayei* (see Appendix 2).

Data collection for this study took place between November and December 2021. The interviews with the *Kayayei* were conducted in Dagbani and Twi languages because most of them could not speak English, while for the key informants, interviews were conducted in English language. All the interviews carried out in the study were conducted by the researcher without the use of research assistants. The interviews for the *Kayayei*'s lasted between 20-45 minutes while that of the key informants was about 15-30 minutes. The interviews were all recorded in digital audio with the respondents' informed consent.

### 3.9 Data Analysis

Data collected from the *Kayayei* and key informants were recorded and transcribed. Data analysis involved the use of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is one of the most common forms of analysis within qualitative research. It emphasises on identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 6). In undertaking the thematic analysis, the following steps were employed: familiarisation with the data collected, generating codes, searching for themes based on the purpose and objectives of the study, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes and finally, analysing the data thematically (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

During the familiarisation stage, recorded interviews were listened to by the researcher, transcribed verbatim and the transcripts were read repeatedly all by the researcher to identify the similar and contrasting ideas, and thoughts. Subsequently, the transcripts for the second time were read carefully by the researcher and ideas discovered were noted down and coded in a qualitative

codebook that was manually developed by the researcher relating to any idea which answered the research questions in the second stage of the thematic analysis in this study.

In the third stage, the codes were used to put similar thoughts and words within the data together to generate a number of themes manually by the researcher. After identifying a number of themes based on the manual coding, identical themes were grouped together according to the research questions and were named accordingly to complete the last stage of the analysis. The analysis was inductive and iterative in nature where emerging themes were identified.

### **3.10 Limitations of the Study**

The major limitation of this study was the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated social distancing protocols. This affected the ability of the researcher to schedule interviews at the right time which led to delays in the data collection process. In addition, some participants were unwilling to participate in the study because they had participated in earlier studies without any potential benefits. Thus, access was a major limitation for this study, even though the researcher relied on snowballing sampling. This therefore resulted in apathy on the part of the *Kayayei* which also influenced the extent of participants that could be selected for this study. Notwithstanding these challenges, the researcher ensured that the purpose of the study was well explained to the participants which convinced some of them to participate in the study.

### **3.11 Ethical Considerations**

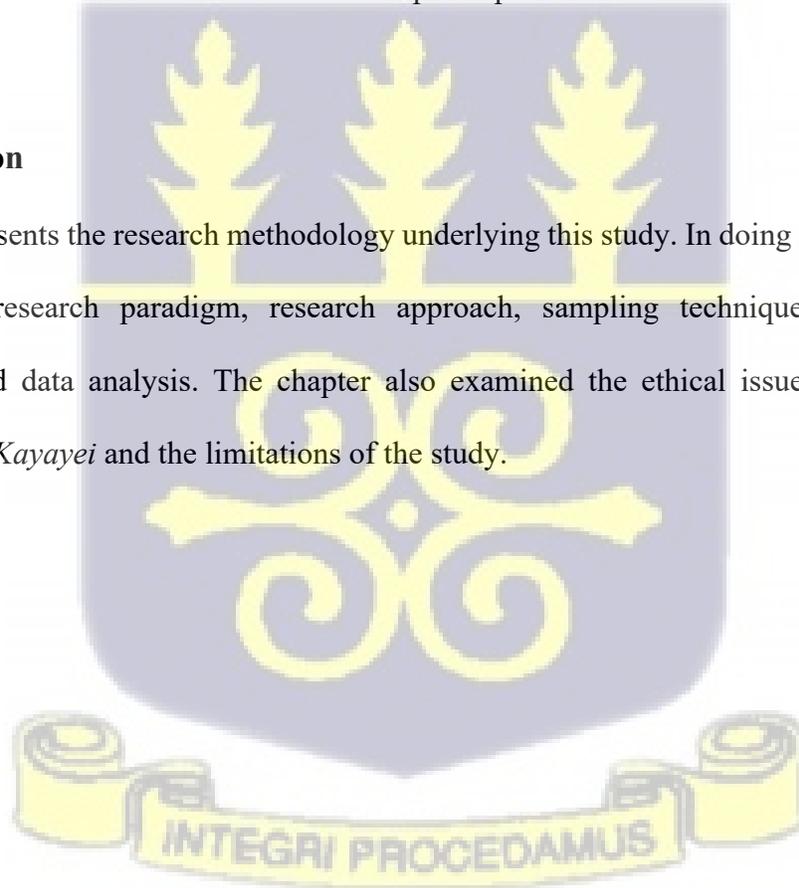
Ethical considerations are central to every stage of the research process (Creswell, 2014). As part of ethical considerations, this study was conducted in adherence to the ethical policies of the University of Ghana. In doing so, respondents were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality by indicating that their data will not be disclosed to any third party. In particular, respondents'

anonymity and confidentiality were iterated prior to and during interviews. For this reason, pseudonyms were used to represent the names of the participants in order to protect their identity.

In addition, the interview guides were designed in such a way that it did not contain personal information of the respondents and an informed consent was sought before the start of any interview. Also, during the course of data collection, respondents were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and they were therefore free to withdraw from the study at any time if they wished to do so. In addressing the problem of deception, the purpose and goals of the research was explained in detail to the respondents. The researcher explained that there were no financial or material benefits attached to their participation because it was mainly for academic purpose.

### **3.12 Conclusion**

This chapter presents the research methodology underlying this study. In doing so, the chapter has discussed the research paradigm, research approach, sampling technique, data collection instruments, and data analysis. The chapter also examined the ethical issues associated with researching the *Kayayei* and the limitations of the study.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the empirical findings of the study. A thematic analysis was conducted on the empirical data gathered through the use of semi-structured interviews and participant observations. The findings are therefore presented based on the emerging themes from the data. In particular, the specific themes include factors that drive the young girls and women to engage in head portering, the experiences of head porters prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, how the pandemic affected the livelihoods and wellbeing of head porters as well as their coping strategies or mechanisms to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. The themes were therefore structured around the research questions underlying this study. The chapter therefore presents the specific themes identified in detail. The chapter starts by presenting a brief information on the demographic characteristics of the sampled head porters followed by a presentation and discussion of the empirical findings.

#### 4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the respondents

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the head porters in terms of their age, marital status, home region, and daily income earned. A total of 30 female head porters from the Tema Station, Makola and Agbobbloshie markets were sampled and interviewed for this study. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the sampled head porters. In terms of age, the majority (10) of the respondents were aged between 15 and 18 years with only a few (5) in the age bracket of 27-30 years. The youngest and oldest respondents were found to be 15 years and 30 years respectively. This finding suggests that head portering is an occupation that is mostly engaged by young girls. This is also not to say that elderly women do not engage in the head

portering business. With regards to marital status, 16 respondents reported being single while 10 said they were married. On the other hand, 3 said they had married before but currently divorced with 1 being a widow. In terms of regions of origin, all the sampled respondents were from the Northern regions of Ghana with the majority (8) migrating from the North East Region while only four (4) reported that they were from the Northern Region. The findings suggest that head portering is particularly an occupational niche for young girls and women from Northern Ghana, especially those with little or no educational background. The empirical findings on the daily income of the sampled head porters indicate that the majority (12) earned a daily income between GH¢10.00- GH¢ 20.00 with only four (4) who reported that they earned less than GH¢10.00. A section of interviewees (8) indicated that they earned a daily income of above GH¢ 50.00 (see Table 4.1). Table 4.1 below presents the daily income earnings of head porters before the COVID-19 pandemic.

	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
<b><i>Age</i></b>	
15-18 years	10
19-22 years	6
23-26 years	9
27-30 years	5
<b><i>Marital Status of Head Porters</i></b>	
Single	16
Married	10
Divorced	3
Widowed	1
<b><i>Home Region of Head Porters</i></b>	
Northern	4

Savanna	6
North East	8
Upper East	5
Upper West	7
<b><i>Head Porters Place of Dwelling</i></b>	
Kiosk	12
Outdoors	18
<b><i>Daily Income of Head Porters</i></b>	
GH¢10.00<	4
GH¢10.00-20.00	12
GH¢30.00-40.00	6
GH¢50.00+	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>

Source: Field Data, 2021

#### **4. 2 Experiences of Head Porters in Accra, during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

This section presents the empirical findings on the experiences of head porters during the COVID-19 pandemic. In doing so, it sought to answer the research question: what have been the experiences of head porters during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. Analysis of the interview data suggests that interviewees expressed different and divergent perspectives with regards to their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, the experiences of the head porters interviewed focused on themes ranging from depression and anxiety, cases of stealing and sexual violence including rape and harassment. Additionally, exposure to COVID-19 infection and loss of job opportunities were also reported key experiences shared by interviewees. These are explained in detail below.

#### 4. 2.1 Depression and Anxiety during COVID-19 pandemic

Majority of the head porters explained that they had negative experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. These negative experiences were mainly on the psychological distress of COVID-19 such as depression and anxiety. In fact, many head porters interviewed explained that they felt depressed and anxious about the effects the pandemic would have on their lives and their families. In particular, the sources of the depression and anxiety revolved around issues such as the fear of losing their livelihoods as many shops and market centres were closed especially during the partial lockdown, fear of getting infected with COVID-19 as well as their inability to achieve their goals and aspirations in life. For instance, when asked about her experience as a head porter during the pandemic, a young lady shared her sentiment by saying:

“I noticed that ever since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana and in particular Accra, it was as if, all hopes and aspirations for me had come to an end. I am mostly depressed which was very obvious and made me moody most at times and affected my relations with people around me. Subsequently, I developed a low self-motivation and felt nothing good could happen to my life again since business was now in shambles as a result of the pandemic. This is because my whole ambition is to make money here and further my education rather than being a *Kayayei*” (Interview with Akua, December, 2021, Makola, Accra).

The statement above highlights that the pandemic had tremendous psychological effects on the subjective wellbeing of the head porters interviewed. In fact, the consensus among the head porters and key informants was that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the psychology of the *Kayayei*'s who were considered as vulnerable groups. More importantly, according to some key informants, the negative experiences related to the increasing number of death cases associated with COVID-19, hence, many feared that they could be infected or even lose their lives. This is how a key informant described the situation:

“Sometimes you could feel the anxiety on the faces of some of the female head porters whilst talking to them which makes them easily lose concentration or even become absent-minded whilst talking to them. When you make an investigation into why such female head porters seemed anxious, it was mostly revealed that they were usually worried about the rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and its increasing death rates in Accra in particular” (Interview with Abdul Majeed, December, 2021, Agbogbloshie, Accra).

Many interviewees also expressed the view that loneliness caused in part by kinship neglect and their inability to travel to their hometown also contributed to their perceived depression and anxiety. They explained that they were unable to travel to their home towns especially during the partial lockdown period as movements from Accra to other towns in Ghana were restricted. In addition, they often mentioned the case where many head porters or Kayayei were prevented from travelling to the North by government officials. In addition, while some interviewees recounted that their family members helped them by always checking up on their conditions, others explained that they felt abandoned because they had no close family relations in Accra which also contributed to them becoming anxious and depressed.

#### **4.3.2 Accusations of stealing and theft**

Many young head porters shared their experiences during the lockdown period pandemic by indicating that they were accused of theft by especially market women and shop owners that they work with. They maintained that for many shop owners, they often use the services of head porters to transport the goods of their customers. However, during the lockdown period, many shop owners for fear of contracting the virus were often not at the shops or market centres. For this reason, some interviewees explained that they mostly worked with other shop assistants in the absence of the shop owners. However, the consensus among many interviewees was that these shop owners and market women accused them of stealing their items in their absence although they denied any involvement. According to a section of interviewees, they attributed it to their

inability to express themselves and also explain issues properly to the owners because of language barriers. For instance, one female head porter shared her experience during the lockdown by lamenting that:

“Some of the local people here especially the market women, they are always accusing us [Kayayei] of stealing their things and because we cannot speak the Twi and English well, they always take advantage of that and report us to the police. Me personally, I have been to the police station to write down statements for more than four times during the COVID-19 period and truthfully, I did not commit any of those crimes they accused me of” (Interview with Shakinatu, December, 2021, Agbogbloshie, Accra).

Another interviewee added by saying:

“We suffer as *Kayayei* especially at the hands of the shop owners in this [Makola] market, particularly during the pandemic. Knowing our background and knowing how vulnerable we are especially with the language barrier; they always take advantage of that to accuse us falsely. Just last week, one market woman accused me of stealing her things and started causing confusion at the market. I tried all my possible best to explain to her that I am innocent but still she went ahead to report me to the police. Upon investigation, the police let me go because they realised, I was innocent” (Interview, December, 2021, Makola, Accra).

Interviews mentioned that these accusations of theft negatively affected their relationships with the shop owners which also meant that they were unable to continue their work with such individuals, which had implications on their livelihoods because they were out of business.

#### **4.3.3 Incidences of sexual harassment and rape during COVID-19 pandemic**

A common concern expressed by the majority of the head porters interviewed was that they faced sexual violence particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic because of their inability to find suitable accommodation in Accra. In particular, many interviewees mentioned that incidences of rape were as one said “normal in the markets”. However, they explained that it became rampant during the lockdown period because the men who provided them with accommodation in kiosks and shelters took advantage of them which exacerbated their vulnerability as highlighted below:

“Rape is one of our biggest challenges in this market, especially during the lockdown. The boys in the market and in the community really take advantage of us because we are vulnerable and do not have any decent place to sleep. I can tell you that some of the Kayayei you see around with children were as a result of rape and we cannot report to the police because when we got here [Accra], our seniors oriented us that rape cases were normal things here and that if we wish to keep working here, then we must keep quiet” (Interview, December, 2021, Makola, Accra).

#### 4.3.4 Fear of exposure to COVID-19 infection

A key concern expressed about their experiences of COVID-19 as head porters was that the majority of interviewees reported that they were vulnerable to exposure to COVID-19. They attributed this sense of vulnerability to a number of factors, prominent among them include the nature of their work which meant that they often had close or body contacts with customers, their inability to get access to personal protective equipment and the sharing of facilities such as rooms and toilet facilities. Analysis of the interview data revealed that many head porters at the Tema Station, Makola and Agbogbloshie markets did not adhere to the safety protocols such as social distancing put in place by the Government of Ghana to contain and manage the spread of the pandemic. An interviewee put it this way:

“Frankly speaking, most of my colleagues never paid attention to the directives that we should avoid body contact and also ensure social distancing. They often had body contact with others and this always left me scared of the possibility of outbreak of the disease amongst we the head porters” (Interview with Fatimatu, December 2021, Tema Station, Accra).

According to many interviewees, the nature of their work demanded that they carry the loads of other people whose COVID-19 status was unknown. These individuals usually touch them when helping them to carry the loads in their basins. More significantly, they also reported that they practised little or no hygienic practices such as the washing of hands with water, soap and sanitizers because these facilities were not readily available to them as stated by an interviewee:

“Here in the Agboghloshie market, most of us are not able to adhere to the directives on hand washing practices in managing the spread of the COVID-19 disease. Though government has issued the directives of the hand washing practices, government has not been able to provide all the supporting equipment to practice hand washing frequently. Also, the limited ones provided, we are not able to manage them, so we usually ignore washing our hands” (Interview with Fati, November, 2021, Agboghloshie, Accra).

According to many interviewees, the lack of access to water in the markets also served as a constraint to their ability to practice hand washing as directed by the government, hence exposes them to the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, some interviewees explained that getting access to water for bathing was a challenge and therefore they considered hand washing not a priority as stated by an interviewee:

“Generally, limited water supply in the market has brought competition to water usage for bathing and other activities. My sister, imagine you have not got water to bath, how much more washing your hands? Water issue is very critical, and the lockdown has worsened the situation because we do not have money to buy water because we are not working” (Interview with Zaidatu, December, 2021, Tema station, Accra).

The use of shared facilities including bath and toilets by the head porters was also reported to have exposed them to COVID-19. It was mentioned that some Kayayei who had shown symptoms of COVID-19 continued to share the facilities with others which had the potential of triggering mass infections. The consensus among interviewees was that facilities in the markets are largely communal in nature and therefore during the lockdown period, the use of such facilities intensified:

“Over here, we have been sharing almost everything in our daily activities. We share bath facilities, toilet facilities, and even what we use to cook and eat. During the lockdown period, there was no restrictions to the use of these shared facilities amongst us. This therefore compelled me to be very careful in interacting with my colleagues in the use of those facilities, because one could get the virus through that” (Interview with Hikmah, December, 2021, Makola, Accra).

In addition, given that many of the interviewees were living in shared accommodations and some had no protection whatsoever, some interviewees mentioned that there were fears among them that they would contract the virus. In fact, the fear of death was a common experience mentioned by the majority of the interviewees which negatively affected their general wellbeing. Speaking about her experience of contracting the virus, an interviewee had this to say:

“Over those days, I had a strange feeling of nausea coupled with dry cough. I thought it wasn’t going to last, so decided to ignore it without going for check-up at the hospital. This negative feeling persisted for two weeks, before I went to hospital and it was the COVID-19 that I contracted. In fact, during the period I contracted the disease and after my recovery, there was a lot of fear of death and panic around me” (Interview, November 2021, Agbogbloshie, Accra).

The above statement highlights that exposure to COVID-19 infection through the use of shared facilities in the market places formed part of the experiences of the interviewed head porters. In fact, when asked about their overall experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, almost all the head porters interviewed indicated having negative or bad experiences. For example, many interviewees indicated that they wish to travel back to their hometowns to visit their parents especially during the lockdown period but they were prevented by government officials for fear of spreading the virus, which negatively affected their subjective wellbeing. In the next section, the findings on the effects of the pandemic on the subjective wellbeing of head porters are presented and discussed.



#### **4.4 The Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihoods of head porters**

This section presents the empirical findings on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the livelihoods of head porters at the Tema Station, Agbogbloshie and Makola markets in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. In doing so, it answers the third research question of the study. Analysis of the empirical findings indicates that the effects of the pandemic on the livelihoods of head porters focused largely on their economic, social and health life.

##### **4.4.1 Limited job opportunities and loss of incomes**

Analysis of the interview data suggests that there was a consensus among interviewees that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in limited job opportunities especially during the lockdown period. Many interviewees explained that since their job involves carrying the goods of customers, the closure of market centres and shops due to the imposition of COVID-19 legislations especially in April 2020 meant that they were unable to get customers to carry their goods in the markets. For this reason, many reported that they lost their jobs and subsequently their livelihoods. For instance, many interviewees mentioned that in between March and April 2022 when the partial lockdown was implemented, they had to stop work and stay at home because many shops at the time were closed and there were limited “human traffic” in the market as one interviewee said. Additionally, they mentioned that even when market centres and shops were fully operational in June 2020, many customers were scared of getting infected with COVID-19 through their interactions with people in the markets. For this reason, they rarely patronised the markets which meant that the *Kayayei*'s had little or no work to do. When asked about how the pandemic has affected their work and livelihood in general, this is what some head porters said:

“During the lockdown, I had little job to do and, in some cases, the whole day I won't even get one load to carry. It was because the customers were scared of the virus especially since they had been told the market areas [especially

Agbogbloshie and Makola] were the hubs for the virus. These were difficult times for us indeed” (Interview with Kusar, December, 2021, Agbogbloshie, Accra).

Directly related to the loss of job opportunities, almost all interviewees mentioned that they experienced a reduction in their daily earnings and income levels in general. In fact, they mentioned that they witnessed a fall in their daily earning since the start of the partial lockdown because there was a reduction in demand. According to interviewee, their average daily earnings prior to COVID-19 was between GH¢ 20-50 but this reduced drastically to less than GH¢ 15 while others also reported earning nothing at all. Speaking about her experience with reduced daily earning, one interviewee explained:

“The lockdown slowed down business for all of us. The customers were not coming because they were scared and also those who came too were very few. In those times, you would see competition between the Kayayei as we scramble for the few customers available at the market. The limited number of customers had affected our daily income earnings. For me, I used to get GH¢ 20-30 a day before the lockdown. But during the lockdown, I hardly get GH¢ 15 a day, and you have to eat, drink and bath from that amount” (Interview with Zuweratu, November, 2021, Makola, Accra).

#### **4.4.2 Financial difficulty and Food Security Challenges**

According to many interviewees, the COVID-19 pandemic created financial difficulties for them as they were unable to earn enough income to take care of their basic necessities. For this reason, many of them reported that they had to borrow money from their colleagues while others relied on the savings they had made. However, given their meagre earnings, the majority of interviewees mentioned that they exhausted their savings and had to struggle especially during the partial lockdown period. This negatively affected their ability to provide enough food for themselves. For example, the majority of interviewees mentioned that they had to experience hunger because they did not have enough money to buy food for themselves. For this reason, some interviewees

explained that they were living from hand to mouth which sometimes was very difficult for them and their family members:

“For me, I am really suffering with money and food. The kaya business is not paying very well now due to the COVID, so I am living from hand to mouth. The lockdown really made things difficult for me, as I wasn’t getting clients. Financially, my children and I were really suffering” (Interview with Wuriyatu, December, 2021, Tema station, Accra).

Also, given the financial difficulties of some interviewees, majority of them indicated they were unable to purchase personal protective equipment (PPEs) because they considered the prices to be too high, as individuals who were selling them had inflated their prices especially during the initial phase of the lockdown. Given the financial difficulty already faced by the head porters, many were unable to purchase the PPEs, hence became exposed to the virus:

“The kind of work that we do here does not pay very much and this makes it very difficult for most of us head porters to buy the nose masks and face shields. This is because the sellers of these items had inflated the prices too high that we couldn’t buy them. Therefore, we had no choice than to go about our business without any form of protection” (Interview, 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2021, Tema station, Accra).

“The prices of the nose masks and the sanitizers are too expensive, and looking at how much I am earning (less than GH¢20 daily) and the cost of nose mask and sanitizer combined, is more than GH¢6. I couldn’t buy any of them. So, sometimes I used handkerchiefs as nose masks while working but that one too was causing breathing problems, so once in a while, I took it off and went about my business without any protection, and this could make me contract the disease” (Interview, December, 2021, Makola, Accra).

#### 4.4.3 Stigmatisation and Breakdown of Social ties

Interviewees further mentioned that the fear of contracting COVID-19 resulted in breakdown of relations between and among themselves while others who had contracted the virus were stigmatised and often teased and labelled as COVID-19 patients. In fact, an interviewee shared her experience of how contracting the COVID-19 and its associated stigmatisation led to a breakdown of her relation with a friend by saying this:

“I actually fought with my friend on different occasions for teasing me as COVID-19 patient. As you all know how dangerous the virus was, for someone to say you are COVID-19 patient” (Interview, December 2021, Agbogbloshie, Accra).

For other interviewees, contracting COVID-19 meant that their friends abandoned them and even refused to have any relationships at all with them because of the stigmatisation associated with COVID-19 “I was isolated for two weeks, and when I recovered, my friends refused to interact with me again (Interview, 4<sup>th</sup> December 2021, Tema station, Accra).

Another interviewee added this:

“One of the girls who contracted the virus was in the same room with me and when I got to know she had contracted the virus, I was so scared, I thought I may have also contracted the virus. This situation was serious to the extent that I had to cut my relations with her in order to prevent the possibility of contracting the disease” (Interview, December, 2021, Makola, Accra).

#### 4.4.4 Child Care Responsibilities

According to a section of interviewees, another pathway through which pandemic affected their wellbeing was that it resulted in increased stress because of child care responsibilities. In particular, some interviewees with children mentioned that because schools were closed, they had to take care of their children by putting them on their backs while carrying the load of customers which increased their stress levels.

#### 4.4.5 Increased cases of homelessness

The interview data revealed that many head porters used the market centres and shop fronts as their places of abode or accommodation. However, following the Government of Ghana's directive to close down or limit trading activities in market centres that were considered as COVID-19 hubs including the Makola and Agboghloshie markets in order to restrict the spread of the virus, this negatively affected some head porters who used these places as their accommodation. For this reason, many reported that they became stranded and homeless. Some interviewees mentioned that they defied the directives by sleeping in the market at night:

“The officials of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly during the lockdown came around to close the market, which meant that those of us who slept in the market had no place to sleep at night. For me, I had nobody, so, at night I will sneak into the market and sleep” (Interview, December 2021).

However, for some interviewees, they had no choice and were compelled to seek shelter elsewhere which also exposed them to sexual violence as explained by one interviewee who said this:

“During the lockdown, there was a report that government wanted to close down the market, and this meant all of us who slept in the market were to leave the place. These times were very difficult times for us, especially since I didn't have any place to sleep at night. Eventually, I had to beg one of the local boys in the community to give me a place to sleep but it came at a cost [unwanted expectations for sexual favours]” (Interview, December, 2021, Agboghloshie, Accra).

In fact, many interviewees mentioned that they stayed in slums around the Agboghloshie markets because their kiosks and wooden structures used as accommodation were destroyed by the officials of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly because they considered them as illegal structures which rendered them homeless during the COVID-19 pandemic. This negatively affected their subjective wellbeing as they felt a sense of hopelessness and desperation. The issue of homelessness among Kayayei was a common concern raised by some key informants who argued that there have been

limited efforts on the part of government officials and organisations including NGOs in addressing the accommodation challenges faced by head porters.

#### **4.5 Coping Strategies by Head Porters in Addressing the Effects of COVID-19 on their livelihood and wellbeing.**

This section presents the findings on the coping strategies adopted by head porters in addressing the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their livelihood and wellbeing. Analysis of the interview data suggests that the head porters used their agency in devising coping strategies and mechanisms that helped them to withstand the effects of the pandemic. Analysis of the interview data suggests that head porters employed three main coping mechanisms or strategies. These are: i) Reliance on social capital especially family, friends and neighbours; ii) Reliance on personal savings; and iii) Reliance on the support of government agencies and NGOs.

##### **4.5.1 Reliance on Social Capital**

Analysis of the interview data suggests that for many head porters, reliance on their social capital was the most widely used strategy or mechanism employed in mitigating the effects of the pandemic on their livelihood and wellbeing. In particular, many mentioned that their social capital such as family members, friends and neighbours was a great asset to them because they were the first point of call when they needed any assistance especially in times of loneliness and stress. In addition, many interviewees mentioned that their family members played a significant role by providing them advice in relation to keeping themselves safe and also overcoming their fears. According to an interviewee, her mother and brother always called her from the North to advise her on what she needed to do to prevent contracting the virus. She explained this as follows:

“I actually didn’t receive any physical support [monetary contributions] from my family; however, my mother and brother called me occasionally to advise me on

how I should conduct myself to avoid getting the COVID-19 disease. They always advised me to ensure that I used the hand sanitiser and nose mask.” (Interview with Zahiratu, December, 2021, Agbogbloshie, Accra).

According to some interviewees, their family members and friends provided them with the needed support such as accommodation, money and food during the lockdown period when they were not working. For instance, one interviewee recounted her experience by highlighting that:

“The COVID-19 lockdown period was really a difficult period for some of us; especially those of us who had just come to Accra few months before the outbreak of the virus. In fact, without my sister who had stayed in Accra for the past three years, life would have been unbearable for me during the lockdown days. She took care of my food and accommodation and provided me with money during the lockdown” (Interview, December, 2021, Tema station, Accra).

Aside from family members, friends became an important asset for many head porters in surviving the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, many interviewees mentioned that they did not have any form of personal savings or support from their family and therefore had to rely on their fellow head porters or friends to survive. Although many recounted that relying on their friends was not an easy option, they had no choice and were compelled to; in the words of one interviewee, “swallow their pride and seek help”. According to Ramatu, she supported her colleagues to cope with the pandemic especially during the lockdown:

“I had the chance to support some of my friends who did not have any form of savings to rely on during the COVID-19. Some approached me for help, and I couldn’t say no, so I had to help in my best possible way” (Interview, December, 2021, Makola, Accra).

#### **4.5.2 Reliance on personal savings**

Many interviewees explained that although they earned very little from their job, they were able to save some money prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, analysis of the interview data indicates that there were differences in the saving ability of the interviewees. For instance, head porters who had been in the business for a long time reported that they were able to save more

because they had accumulated their capital over a long period compared to those who recently joined. In addition, many interviewees mentioned that as part of efforts to ensure that they were able to save adequately, they reduced especially their food expenditure by sometimes skipping some meals. Others relied on the savings they had accumulated to acquire some assets such as sewing machine:

“Truthfully, surviving during the COVID-19 pandemic was not easy at all for me and my children. There was no work or little work and that means no money was coming. Eventually my children and I had to rely on my little savings I had made over the years to cater for our basic needs” (Interview with Humu Sulaim, December, 2021, Makola, Accra).

Another iterated that:

“Assuming I didn’t have any form of savings stacked up somewhere, I wonder how I would have survived this COVID-19. I had saved up some money to buy a sewing machine, but I was forced to use it for myself and my children to survive” (Interview with Naamawu, December, 2021, Agboghloshie, Accra).

The above statements clearly indicate that drawing down savings was an important coping mechanism that helped many head porters to withstand the negative effects of the pandemic on their livelihood and wellbeing as it provided them a window of opportunity in their desperate and uncertain times.

#### **4.6.3 Reliance on government support and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)**

The interviews conducted in the study indicated that the head porters had to rely on government and other (NGOs) for support in coping with the COVID-19. They explained that the Government of Ghana through its agencies such as the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection together with some NGOs had put in place measures to distribute food and other items such as sanitizers. According to a section of interviewees, they had to take advantage of the food distributed by the government and NGOs in feeding themselves and their family members.

However, the concern raised was that such support was ad hoc in nature and their implementation was poorly done which made some head porters unable to get access to the items distributed. Notwithstanding these challenges, the majority of interviewees had a positive experience with the support provided by the government and NGOs which they relied on during their difficult and uncertain times especially in lockdown:

“Some of us who did not have savings to rely on had to patronise the support given to us by government and non-governmental agencies who came to our aid. There was food distribution, medicine such as Vitamin C and shelter for some of the vulnerable among us” (Interview, Latifa, December, 2021, Tema station, Accra).

Amina also shared her experience about the support provided by the government and NGOs by saying this:

“Me personally, I had to rely on the support from government who came around to distribute food items for the Kayayei. But there were some days when I didn’t get some of the food and I think it was due to lack of proper planning from government” (Interview with Amina, December, 2021, Agbogbloshie, Accra).

The above findings on the reliance of the head porters on the support provided by the government was confirmed during interviews with key informants including some government officials responsible for social protection, who maintained that the government played a significant role in ensuring that vulnerable groups in society including head porters did not entirely bear the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic through some policy responses adopted by the government. A government official from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection put it this way when asked about the role of government during the COVID-19 pandemic:

“The Government of Ghana through the Ghana COVID-19 Alleviation and Revitalisation of Enterprises Support (CARES) [‘Obaatan pa Programme’] spent about 54.3 million Ghana cedis to provide cooked and uncooked food to the vulnerable including the Kayayei in the Greater Accra region during the three-week lockdown period. In addition, the Government provided free electricity and

water for the rest of 2020 and for the first three months of 2021, which also benefited largely the vulnerable including the Kayayei in the Greater Accra region” (Interview with a Government Official, 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2021, Accra).

A key informant from the office of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Ghana also explained the support schemes the outfit provided to the head porters by saying that:

“The UNFPA-Ghana through its Kayayei Assistance Project with support from Prudential Life Insurance-Ghana and the Boame Project in collaboration with DOVVSU provided shelter for some Kayayei in the Greater Accra region including Agbogbloshie, Makola or Tema station market areas. In addition, the UNFPA- Ghana provided especially during lockdown and continues to provide free food items to head porters” (Interview with Official of UNFPA, December, 2021, Accra).

#### 4.6 Discussion

This section discusses the research findings which focuses on key themes that emerged from the study. In particular, the discussion focuses on relating the findings to existing studies while using the conceptual framework developed in this study as the analytical lens. The discussions are structured around the research questions and objectives of the study.

In terms of the drivers of migration, the study has shown that the main drivers of migration from the perspective of the *Kayayei*'s included issues relating to poverty alleviation, building up of capital as well as sending of remittance back to their families. The findings suggest that most of the female head porters were of the view that there were better employment opportunities in Accra which could help them accumulate enough resources that could be sent back home to their families to help alleviate the level of poverty they were experiencing. This finding is consistent with an earlier study by Awumbila et al. (2014: 17) who articulated that the reasons for migration are mostly for employment opportunities, education as well as family-related reasons, which include accompanying parents or spouses. Furthermore, the findings in this study confirms that of earlier

studies that highlight poverty as one underlying factor driving the migration of young girls into head portering (see Otieku et al., 2017; Opare, 2003; Yeboah et al., 2015; Boateng, 2018). While acknowledging the role of poverty in influencing the migration decisions of young girls, it is also equally important to highlight that the need for capital or asset accumulation is also another key driver among young girls. In fact, as the findings in this study have demonstrated, head portering enables the young girls to build or accumulate enough capital and assets to engage in other businesses back home. This clearly shows that the young girls are proactive in thinking about their future aspirations amidst the difficulties they face in their home towns which are often characterised by limited opportunities for accumulating assets or capital. This could partly be due to socio-cultural practices that serve as a hinderance towards wealth accumulation by especially women (Lobnibe, 2008; Oberhauser and Yeboah, 2011). The findings are consistent with that of Baah-Ennumh et al. (2012) who argue that many young girls from Northern Ghana migrate to the South because of limited opportunities for wealth generation which are mostly restricted to farming. For this reason, as the findings in this study reveal, many young girls use migration and engaging in head portering to enable them acquire independent wealth or assets and also take advantage of opportunities that could help them in achieving their future aspirations including learning a trade and also furthering their education (Kleist and Thorsen, 2017; Yeboah, 2021). As the findings further indicate, many young girls engage in head portering because of the perceived positive images of migration where they would be able to send remittances to their families and also enjoy a social status in society (Agyei et al., 2016; Otieku et al., 2017).

Furthermore, with regards to the experiences of head porters during the pandemic, the study revealed that head porters went through different experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Particularly worth highlighting was the negative experience of depression and anxiety arising in

part from fear of losing their livelihood, exposure to the virus and loss of life. Existing studies have highlighted that issues of depression and anxiety have become a major concern following the outbreak of the pandemic which has significant psychological effects on the wellbeing of individuals (see Ofori et al., 2021). However, for workers in the informal sector, there is limited empirical evidence on how the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to depression and anxiety. For this reason, the findings in this study therefore adds to the emerging literature by highlighting how COVID-19 resulted in anxiety and depression among head porters in Ghana. Additionally, the findings highlight that head porters who are already vulnerable were exposed to incidences of sexual harassment and rape which exacerbated their vulnerability. In fact, the literature highlights that vulnerable groups including women in society were at risk of sexual violence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mamun et al., 2021: 1). For example, Mamun et al. (2021) found that sexual violence among women in Bangladesh increased under the pandemic where about 1093 rape cases were recorded daily between January and October 2020. Similarly, UNDP (2020) highlighted that the implementation of COVID-19 restrictions in Ghana could result in high tendencies for domestic violence including sexual and gender-based violence. The findings in this study therefore contributes to how the pandemic exposed vulnerable groups like head porters to sexual harassments which negatively affected their subjective wellbeing. As White (2009) indicated, subjective wellbeing is about the values and experiences of an individual including fear. The findings clearly indicate that the sexual harassment experiences such as rape of young girls negatively affects their health and wellbeing. The findings in this study about the experiences of head porters corroborates existing studies that indicated that the pandemic brought an unusual challenge on particularly informal workers (Schotte et al., 2021a; WIEGO, 2021).

More so, the study has shown that the pandemic negatively affected the livelihood and wellbeing of head porters through limited job opportunities, loss of livelihood, financial difficulties, increased stress from child care responsibilities and increased cases of homelessness. As outlined in the conceptual framework, the outbreak of the virus resulted in the imposition of COVID-19 legislations which negatively affected the livelihood and wellbeing of the head porters. In particular, the findings in this study highlight the weaknesses in the social protection mechanisms put in place by government and other stakeholders especially for vulnerable groups in society (Devereux, 2021). It also indicates that the pandemic affected every aspect of life especially for those in the informal sector (WIEGO, 2021; Narula, 2020; Kesar et al., 2021). However, it is worth mentioning that the COVID-19 pandemic had disproportionate effects on informal workers with particular groups such as head porters being vulnerable. According to WIEGO (2021), among informal sector workers in Ghana, head porters were the most affected by lockdown because of their inability to get customers as market centres were closed which resulted in them becoming jobless and subsequently losing their livelihoods. Similar observations about the difficulties faced by informal workers as a result of COVID-19 have been highlighted in other Sub-Saharan African countries (Schwettmann, 2020).

Notwithstanding the negative experiences and effects of the pandemic on the livelihood and wellbeing of head porters, this study has also demonstrated that they are able to use their agency in adopting strategies that help them in times of uncertainties. This demonstrates their agility and ability to withstand shocks by relying on their social networks, support from government and other stakeholders as well as relying on their personal savings. In fact, existing studies have highlighted that when faced with difficulties, many head porters tend to use a combination of livelihood strategies (Oberhauser and Yeboah, 2011; Awumbila et al., 2014; Agyei et al., 2016). Overall, the

findings in this study indicate that reliance on social capital was an important coping strategy used by head porters in addressing the negative effects of the pandemic on their livelihood. The support of for example, family members in advising young girls about the need for adhering to the social distancing protocols, cleaning of hands with sanitizers and the provision of psychological support was very instrumental in terms of how the head porters were able to withstand the shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This also helped in the curbing the spread of the virus. Additionally, some family members and friends provided financial resources and accommodation that contributed to improving the wellbeing of the head porters. This finding is contrary to a previous study by Mbamba et al. (2021) who found that many head porters felt abandoned by the family members because they denied welcoming them home for fear of spreading the virus. The findings in this study clearly shows that family members of head porters provided them with financial support during the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding further contradicts the argument by Mbamba et al. (2021) that financial support by family members was limited for head porters during the COVID-19 pandemic. This could be due in part to the different locations within which the studies took place (Accra and Kumasi). The findings therefore highlight the role of social capital that is derived from family members and friends in reducing vulnerability during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is consistent with existing studies that highlight how social capital contributes significantly to COVID-19 responses (Pitas and Ehmer, 2020).

The findings in this study further indicate that head porters relied heavily on their savings and therefore played important roles in how they responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding corroborates existing studies that highlight that head porters tend to rely on their savings when faced with uncertainties in order to meet their subsistence needs (Agyei et al., 2016; Yeboah, 2021; Oberhauser and Yeboah, 2011). Another important mechanism employed by the head porters was

their reliance on the support provided by the government and other stakeholders including NGOs. The findings therefore highlight the importance of social protection mechanisms such as the provision of food put in place by the government to help in reducing the negative impact of the pandemic (Asante and Mills, 2020). This differs to the findings by Webb et al. (2021) who indicated that informal sector workers generally received less government assistance than those employed in the formal sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Schwettmann (2020) indicated that the utmost responsibility of government to informal sector workers was the distribution of nose masks and offering directives on how to contain and manage the spread of the pandemic. The findings in this study show that government's role and support to informal workers extended beyond the provision of face masks. However, this study has highlighted that there were inherent challenges such as the lack of coordination and proper planning in the distribution of the relief items which negatively reinforced inequalities as some head porters were left out. Overall, the findings call for the need for the provision of universal social protection systems that recognises the needs of different segments of the society including vulnerable groups. The findings therefore amplify the call for providing informal sector workers with access to social protection such as health care and income security that would ensure that they are protected against risks and shocks associated with COVID-19 (WIEGO, 2020; Devereux and Cuesta, 2021).

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented and discussed the research findings on how the COVID-19 affected the livelihood and wellbeing of head porters and the coping strategies adopted in mitigating the effects of the pandemic. The empirical findings indicate that the head porters were exposed to a number of challenges which made them more vulnerable and consequently affected their livelihood and

wellbeing. Notwithstanding, the study shows how the head porters employed a number of strategies to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on their livelihood and wellbeing.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the empirical findings as well as the discussions. It also offers some recommendations for policy and practice in relation to informal workers.

#### 5.1 Summary of Major Findings

This study aimed at examining the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the of head porters in the Greater Accra Region and the coping strategies or mechanisms devised to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. The study adopted a qualitative research approach involving the use of participant observation and semi-structured interviews with 30 head porters selected from the Tema Station, Agbobbloshie and Makola market areas. Data collection also involved interviews with seven key informants from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Greater Accra Regional Office of the Department of Social Welfare, UNFPA, Accra Metropolitan Assembly and the Kayayei Association. Data analysis involved the use of thematic analysis that led to the identification of emergent themes and patterns in the empirical data collected from the field. The analysis of the empirical evidence was informed by the research questions underlying the study which are outlined below:

- i. To document the experiences of head porters during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ii. To assess the effects of COVID-19 on the livelihoods of head porters.
- iii. To examine the coping strategies employed by head porters in navigating the effects of the pandemic.

The following major findings emerged from the analysis of the empirical data. First, the study found diverse experiences of head porters during the COVID-19 pandemic including depression and anxiety, accusations of stealing and more worrying experiences such as sexual violence including rape and harassment which further deepened their vulnerability. Additionally, many head porters reported being exposed to COVID-19 and also losing job opportunities which negatively affected their wellbeing. With regards to experiences of depression and anxiety, the study found that the COVID-19 had enormous psychological impact on the sampled head porters as many of them reported feeling depressed and anxious about the effects the pandemic would have on their jobs, lives and their family. More significantly, many feared that they would not be able to achieve their goals and aspirations in life. The study further found that many head porters reported being accused of theft by especially market women and shop owners that they worked with. Furthermore, a common experience expressed by the majority of the head porters was that they faced sexual violence particularly during the lockdown period where many market centres which served as a 'safe haven' or place of accommodation during the night were closed. This resulted in incidences of homelessness with many people taking advantage of young girls by engaging in unwanted sexual favours and in some cases rape which further exacerbated the vulnerabilities of the young girls. Additionally, the communal living lifestyle of head porters meant that they shared facilities such as rooms, toilets and baths together which negatively exposed them to the COVID-19. These findings highlight that for many of the sampled head porters, their experiences of COVID-19 pandemic could be described as bad or negative in general mainly because of its effects on their livelihood and wellbeing.

The findings from this study also indicate that, economically, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the livelihood of head porters by limiting the availability of job opportunities as many shops and

market centres were closed. This in turn meant that the earnings of head porters were significantly affected. This resulted in financial difficulties as well as food security challenges as many were unable to fend for themselves. In terms of the effects of the pandemic on the health and social life of the head porters, the study findings revealed that the fear of contracting COVID-19 led to a breakdown of social relations between and among themselves while others who had contracted the virus were stigmatised and often teased and labelled as COVID-19 patients. The stigma associated with COVID-19 and the feeling of loneliness and rejection coupled with homelessness, negatively affected the subjective wellbeing of the head porters.

Notwithstanding these perceived negative experiences, the study also found that the sampled head porters were resilient in adopting a number of coping strategies or mechanisms that helped them mitigate the effects of the pandemic on their livelihood and wellbeing. In particular, the empirical evidence from this study suggests that many head porters relied heavily on their social networks including family and friends who provided them with financial and non-financial resources such as advice on adhering to the safety protocols, supporting them with accommodation and food and also providing some emotional support in times of loneliness. Another important strategy adopted by the sampled head porters was to draw down on their personal savings which they had accumulated over the years. In fact, reliance on personal savings during especially difficult financial times caused by the loss of job opportunities was a common strategy used by many head porters. The study also found that support by the government and other stakeholders including NGOs was an important strategy employed by head porters who could not afford to take care of themselves. Many reported relying on the food items distributed by government agencies and NGOs. However, a concern raised was that the support of government and NGOs was ad hoc in nature and not well coordinated, which resulted in perceived inequalities in the distribution of

COVID-19 relief items. This therefore calls into question the need for stronger stakeholder collaboration and coordination in times of emergencies especially when responding to the needs of vulnerable groups.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study aimed at examining the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihoods of head porters in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana and the coping strategies they employ in mitigating the effects of the pandemic. The study findings point to the lack of an effective social protection mechanisms for vulnerable groups in society such as head porters. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the weaknesses in the social policies adopted by governments in responding to the needs of vulnerable groups. As shown in this study, the COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in for example sexual violence which negatively exacerbated the vulnerabilities of head porters due to the absence of universal social protection mechanisms such as accommodation and social security for vulnerable informal sector workers including the Kayayei. The findings therefore call into question the need for stronger and robust universal social protection mechanisms aimed at addressing the needs of vulnerable groups in society.

## **5.3 Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are made for policy and practice. The recommendations are structured around the role of government and other stakeholders including NGOs in addressing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on informal workers including head porters.

### **Recommendations for Government**

First, the findings in this study highlight the need for the Government of Ghana to provide universal social protection for informal workers such as head porters. This social protection should focus on providing them access to healthcare and also ensure that there is income security that will help them cope in times of uncertainties and be able to withstand any shocks.

Secondly, the findings have demonstrated that for many head porters, their engagement in *Kayayei* is a stop gap measure towards the long-term achievement of their goals and aspirations. This therefore suggest that there is the need for the government to invest more in skills trainings especially in alternative livelihoods such as starting businesses and enrolling in apprenticeship. This would also ensure that government provides the enabling environment that creates opportunities for head porters to access credit that will help them establish their businesses or engage in alternative livelihoods.

Thirdly, the findings from this study suggest that the development gap between Northern and Southern-Ghana is an important contributory factor influencing the flow of young migrant girls to engage in head portering. For this reason, there is the need for deliberate intervention programmes aimed at promoting the development of the North. While acknowledging that there have been programmes such as the Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (SADA), Northern Development Authority among many others, these programmes are often embroiled in partisan politics which tends to affect their sustainability when there are changes in government. This therefore calls for the need for stakeholders to depoliticise development interventions and the spatial inequalities between Northern and Southern Ghana.

Moreover, there is the need for strengthening laws and regulations to protect the human rights and general wellbeing of head porters at the various market centres. As the findings show, many head porters are faced with the challenge of sexual violence but have no knowledge on how and where

to seek redress. This also calls for the need to intensify education on gender-based violence by government agencies such as Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVSVU) and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection.

### **Recommendations for stakeholders**

The findings in this study call for the need for active advocacy by civil society organisations (CSOs) like NGOs, in highlighting the plights of the *Kayayei*. While a number of CSOs work on issues relating to head porters, their advocacy on the impact of the pandemic on their livelihood and wellbeing has been limited. NGOs therefore need to draw the attention of policy makers and also offer possible solutions for addressing the challenges facing head porters.

Lastly, there is the need for proper stakeholder collaboration and coordination in addressing the impact of the pandemic on the livelihood and wellbeing of head porters. At the moment, many organisations or institutions working with head porters tend to work in isolation without proper coordination as highlighted in the study findings. The various stakeholders therefore need to work together in addressing the vulnerabilities of head porters who are faced with mental stress and sense of hopelessness resulting from the loss of their livelihoods as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

While this study has offered some useful insights into how the pandemic has affected the livelihood and wellbeing of head porters, it had some limitations. This study findings focused only on head porters at the Tema Station, Agbobbloshie and Makola markets in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. For this reason, the findings cannot be generalised across the entire country. This therefore calls for the need to expand the scope of the study to other regions in the country. Doing so could

provide comparable data from the other regions which could help in informing policy. Another area of research needing attention is how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the future aspirations of young head porters given the devastating effects of the pandemic on their livelihood and wellbeing.



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## APPENDIX 1: Interview Guide for Head Porters

### Section 1: Background information of Kayayei

1. Where do you come from?
2. How old are you?
3. What is your educational background/status?
4. Which factors or driver motivated or influenced you to migrate to Accra?
5. Can you please tell me how long you have been engaged in the head portage business?
6. What is the nature of Female Head portage or '*Kayayei*' business in Accra, particularly, your current marketplace?

### Section 2: Experiences of Kayayei during COVID-19

1. How did you hear or became aware of the COVID-19 in Ghana?
2. Did you fear of becoming infected with COVID-19?
3. How did this affect how you related to your customers?
4. How were you affected in terms of your wellbeing by the lockdown? (i.e., What was the nature of shelter, accommodation, access to public toilet, water, bath house before and during COVID-19?).
5. Did you suffer any psychological or emotional trauma during the lockdown?
6. Did you wish to go back to your place of origin following your experiences during the lockdown?



**Section 3: Effects of COVID-19 on Livelihoods of *Kayayei***

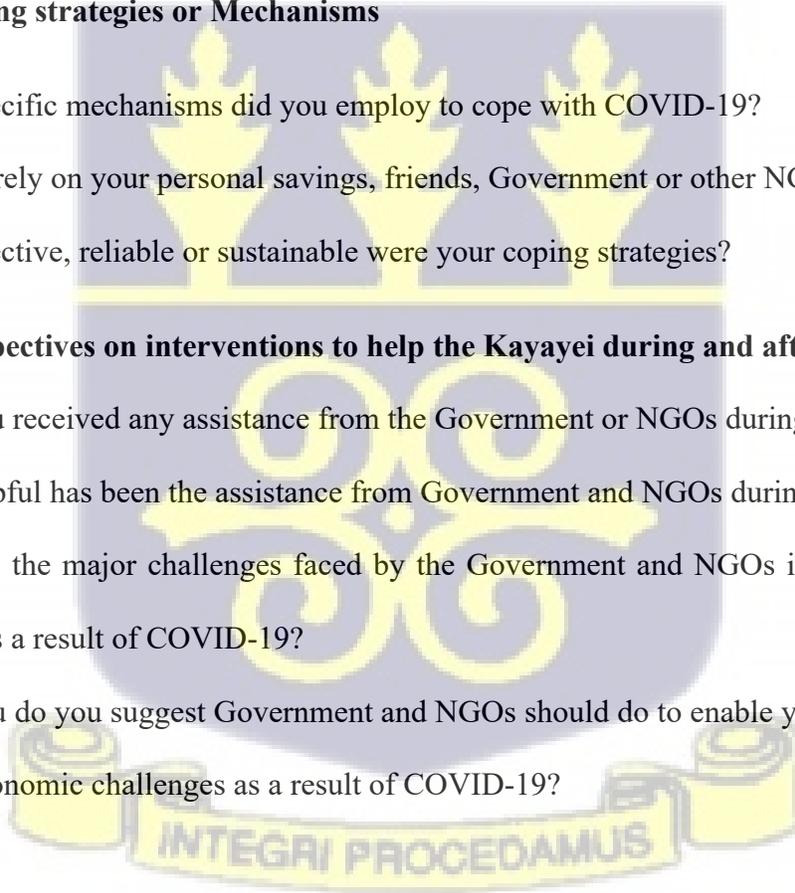
1. How has the COVID-19 affected your livelihoods?
2. How much did you earn before COVID and how much do you earn now during COVID?
3. What was your average daily earnings and spending before COVID-19 and what has been your average daily earnings and spending during COVID-19?
4. Are you able to purchase PPEs on your own?
5. How was your cost of living and standard of living during the lockdown?
6. Has COVID-19 had any effects on your revenue generation from work?

**Section 4: Coping strategies or Mechanisms**

1. What specific mechanisms did you employ to cope with COVID-19?
2. Did you rely on your personal savings, friends, Government or other NGOs?
3. How effective, reliable or sustainable were your coping strategies?

**Section 5: Perspectives on interventions to help the *Kayayei* during and after COVID**

1. Have you received any assistance from the Government or NGOs during COVID-19?
2. How helpful has been the assistance from Government and NGOs during COVID-19?
3. What are the major challenges faced by the Government and NGOs in addressing your plights as a result of COVID-19?
4. What do you suggest Government and NGOs should do to enable you cope with your socio-economic challenges as a result of COVID-19?



## APPENDIX 2: Interview Guide for Key Informants

1. Can you please tell me your current position and how long you have been serving or working with this institution?
2. What is your perception about the current status quo of Female Head portering or '*Kayayei*' business in Accra?
3. What do you think is the general status quo of socio-economic wellbeing of '*Kayayei*' in Accra?
4. What are the major causes of head portering among '*Kayayei*' in Accra?
5. What do think are the implications of COVID-19 on the socio-economic wellbeing of '*Kayayei*'?
6. Who are the major Government Social Policy stakeholders responsible for promoting the wellbeing of '*Kayayei*' in Accra?
7. Are you aware of any Social Policy programmes or intervention promoting the wellbeing of '*Kayayei*' in Accra amidst COVID-19?
8. What have been the influence/impacts of Government policies and interventions in promoting the socio-economic wellbeing of '*Kayayei*' in Accra amidst COVID-19?
9. What are the major challenges faced by the Government of Ghana in addressing the socio-economic plights of '*Kayayei*' as a result of COVID-19?
10. What social protection policies/programmes/interventions could be recommended to address the dire challenges of '*Kayayei*' particularly during pandemics such as COVID-19?
11. How bleak or bright is the future of Ghana with respect to addressing the plights of vulnerable groups such as '*Kayayei*' during pandemics such as COVID-19?

