

This Place is better than my Home': Anecdotes on child fosterage and child domestic work in three Districts in Northern Ghana

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Abstract

Fosterage in West Africa is peculiar and has key benefits. This study, which was conducted in three districts in the Upper East and Northern regions of Ghana, uses qualitative in-depth interviews to fill some essential gaps in the study of fosterage. Unlike most studies on the phenomenon, ours provide perspectives from both the foster children and the receiving parents, and employs cultural relativism to analyze the data. The findings supported several past studies on the subject--fosterage was being done as a social service within the context of the extended family mainly and nearly all the foster children were girls. Crisis fosterage was predominant. Although both children and foster parents/guardians seemed to have some challenges, all the children said that they fared better in the foster homes, compared to their biological homes. This was not without financial strains to the foster parents. We found an eclectic mixture of previous explanatory frameworks proposed for child fosterage in the sub-region. Policy implications of our findings are given.

Key Words: Child fosterage, child domestic worker, co-wife rivalry, polygynous marriage, northern Ghana, qualitative in-depth interviews

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Introduction

Child fosterage refers to the transfer or relocation of children from their biological or natal homes to different households where they are cared for by foster parents (Goody 1973). Isaac and Conrad (1982: 243) consider a child to be fostered if he or she is not residing with both natal parents but has not been adopted by the residential household. Besides being a demographic phenomenon, child fosterage is important because it has a plausible bearing on many aspects of family behavior, including decisions on child care and rearing, the education of children and labor force participation of both the mothers and children (Isiugo-Abanihe 1985), as well as the organization of resources in the receiving households.

Even though much of this article focuses on child fosterage, child domestic work is also covered, since some of the respondents used in this study were engaged in child domestic work. We refer to children who were moved mainly to provide domestic assistance to the receiving households as child domestic workers (CDWs). Another characteristic of child domestic work (CDW) which distinguishes it from typical child fosterage is that CDWs are mostly not blood relatives of the receiving households, and are mostly paid some form of remuneration for their services, either in cash or kind. While CDW could broadly be classified as child fosterage, in this article, when necessary, distinctions are made between the two social phenomena for purposes of emphasis.

Child fosterage is fairly common in Africa south of the Sahara (Isiugo-Abanihe 1983; 1985; Notermans 1999a, 1999b; Page 1989; Silk 1987). Typically using data from two or more decades ago, the literature placed the figures on child fosterage at up to about 30 percent in Ghana, nearly 40 percent in Liberia, up to about 33 per cent in Nigeria and close to 50 per cent in Sierra Leone (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1983; 1985). However, not much is known of the conditions under which such foster children live. In fact, much of the literature on child fosterage in West Africa has been done from the perspective of social anthropologists, most of whom centered their studies on their personal observations rather than collect original in-depth data from the parties involved. In addition, a search of the literature on child fosterage in West Africa reveals three shortcomings of the previous literature which makes our study imperative. First, the literature

on child fosterage is mostly dated. Second, the past studies seem to mostly have been conducted by Westerners and others whose perspectives may not employ cultural relativism. Third, the previous literature lacked information on the views of the foster parents. Besides these, Ghana has acquired an unenviable image of late, of being a hub for child labor and child trafficking (Republic of Ghana 2007; US States Department 2007). This has highlighted the need to distinguish between child labor/trafficking and socio-cultural practices such as child fosterage.

The primary objective of the study on which the article is based was to fill some of the above-stated gaps in the research on fosterage, and to contribute to the on-going policy decisions on children in Ghana. Isiugo-Abanihe (1985) documented the difficulty with pinpointing child fosterage, making information on it very valuable. More specifically, first, we attempt to bridge the time-gap on the issues of fosterage and provide data based on field interviews. Second, we present a more holistic view of fosterage by breaking the status-quo of mostly presenting a one-sided view on the topic, to incorporate information from both the children and their guardians. Third, the study aimed at unveiling the circumstances under which the children lived, through the use of qualitative in-depth studies to provide evidenced based information to unearth some of the child-related social problems in Ghana. Fourth, with our advantaged position as indigenes, we attempt a more culturally relative view of fosterage, and to provide an answer to the question "in what context does fosterage prevail?" against a background of changing extended family relationships (Owusu 2007).

Research Design

The study was conducted in three districts in two regions in northern Ghana, based on purposive criteria. Of late, a peculiar child-related social problem has put northern Ghana into the limelight. Locally known as the phenomenon of *kayayei* (meaning female head porters in the *Ga* language), it is the situation where teenage girls mostly leave communities in northern Ghana and migrate usually to the southern parts of the country in search of greener pastures only to live under austere conditions for most of the time. Specifically, the Tamale and the then Tolon-Kunbungu

districts in the Northern Region and Bawku in the Bawku East district in the Upper East Region of Ghana were studied because of their perceived importance to the study. The then Tolon-Kunbungu district for instance is the main district in the northern part of Ghana where most *kayayei* migrate to southern parts of the country.

The respondents were purposively sampled initially, using key informants and also, snow-ball sampling. Later, random sampling was used to select 15 children, comprising nine foster children and six CDWs, and ten adults who acted as foster parents or employers of the CDWs. Due to the international definition of children, and for ethical reasons, the children in the study were aged between ten and 17 years. The consent of the foster parents was sought before the children were interviewed. The latter were interviewed in isolation. The data were collected in January 2006, using qualitative in-depth interviewing techniques. Table 1 provides additional information on the children.

TABLE 1: Groups of children interviewed and their home districts

<i>District</i>	<i>Number interviewed per district</i>	<i>CDWs</i>	<i>Foster Children</i>
Bawku East	5	3	2
Tamale	6	3	3
Tolon-Kunbungu	4	0	4
Totals	15	6	9

Analytical framework

Various theories, concepts and models have been advanced in explaining and elucidating child fosterage in West Africa. Using the 'value of children' approach, Ainsworth (1992), Isaac & Conrad (1982) and Oppong & Bleek (1982) explain fosterage as a social security strategy to share the cost of a child's upbringing and the expected benefits with a large number of people. Other researchers have used the pronatalist framework to explain fosterage as a strategy women use to achieve high fertility even if the financial means to care for large numbers of children is non-existent

(Isiugo-Abanihe 1985; Oppong & Bleek 1982). Also, according to an anthropological perspective, fosterage is a refuge for women who do not succeed in raising their children themselves (Notermans 1999a).

Isiugo-Abanihe (1985) coined the term '*crisis fostering*' to describe several scenarios in which child relocation is precipitated by several difficult situations in the natal family which serve as push factors for moving the children for out-fosterage. Primarily, there is dissolution of the nuclear family through divorce (also documented by South et al., 1999), separation or death of a spouse (also in Adunyame 1999). Crisis fosterage also applies in instances when children are born out of wedlock, especially when such births are stigmatized and in most remarriages where it is feared that the welfare of the children from previously dissolved marriages may be compromised (Notermans 1999b).

Additionally, crisis fosterage could result from apprehension over the survival of the child(ren) attributed by the fear of witchcraft from a neighbor or someone within the family, for instance co-wives in polygynous marriages. Fear of reprisals by the spirits of an unappeased dead kinsman or ancestors in which case the child is relocated till the crisis has passed or sending a child away due to previous repeated history of infant or child mortality give room for crisis fosterage. Madhavan (2004) also noted that the advent of HIV/AIDS offers plausible reasons for fosterage, when one or two parents or guardians have died from the disease. Interestingly, Isiugo-Abanihe (1985) acknowledged that the issues underlying crisis fostering may be real or imagined, yet crisis fostering is thought to improve the chances of survival of the children involved by relocating them.

Notermans' (1999a) study in some communities in eastern Cameroon revealed that women in polygynous marriages preferred to separate their children and sent them to foster parents who are mostly their kin. A local saying in Mbondossi, one of the districts studied by Notermans has it that children cannot develop in the hands of their stepmother(s). Stepmothers were said to derail stepchildren's educational development by using them as slaves who can be sent on errands or forced to do jobs. Due to co-wife rivalry, co-wives believed each other has the tendency and actually could employ sorcery and other means to harm the other's children. Thus, co-wife rivalry forces women to send their children to their kin

where their educational and physical development is somehow assured. Notermans (1999a) documented, interestingly, that in situations of polygynous marriages, children are mainly seen as an extension of their mother. This may cause the mother to focus on the wellbeing of their children and decide what they have to do to get them out of undesirable situations. This tendency for women to move their children away from their co-wives has been well documented prior to Noterman's study (Goody 1982; Isiugo-Abanihe 1985 and Silk 1987).

Lastly, the theory of kin selection predicts that unreciprocated altruism will only be favored among kin, and that as the cost of altruism increase, altruistic acts will be increasingly related to close kin (Hamilton 1964). This theory, thus predicts that as the cost of fostering children increases, the practice will be restricted to people within the kinship network. Silk (1987) further employs the theory of kin selection to explain that natural children in a fosterage home would receive preferential treatment from their biological parents. Indeed, Silk (1987) quotes several accounts from Goody (1982) and Bledsoe (1985), among others, to support the latter argument. These accounts documented that foster children were generally required to work harder than natural children, although this was not necessarily viewed as a negative outcome of fosterage. At the same time, Silk (1987, p. 43) acknowledged that "the normative pattern of fosterage transactions itself appears to reduce the probability that children will receive poor treatment in their foster households."

The literature, however, has documented points of continuity and change in the patterns of fosterage (Fiawoo 1978; Madhavan 2004). With time, however, the major motivating factor for fosterage in West Africa is the desire to give children the best of education (Fiawoo 1978). Children are therefore sent to their kin or friends and acquaintances of their biological parents who live in urban areas where the best of educational facilities are located. Goody (1978) noted that in Ghana, educational fosterage provides a changing paradigm in fosterage because such young children may more commonly reside with non-relatives, with nearly all parents realizing that education is a major source of social mobility. When such children are given to relatives, the latter may provide all their educational and other needs (Isiugo-Abanihe 1985; Notermans 1999a) and is usually not without its attendant financial burdens for the receiving fami-

lies. However, it is not uncommon that such relatives have themselves benefited from educational assistance from other kinship members and may be returning the investment made in them (Fiawoo 1978; Goody 1973; Isiugo-Abanihe 1985).

Findings

The findings are merged for both the children and the foster parents, particularly where they corroborate. Where the two parties differed or provided additional information, these are highlighted.

Background characteristics of respondents: The foster children we studied were young, ranging from age ten to seventeen, with a median age of thirteen and a half years while the CDWs were older. The latter were aged between eleven and seventeen years, with a median age of 15.6 years. Only one child respondent was a male. Five of them had no formal education, five others dropped out of school after primary three. The remaining five were either in school or had completed Junior High School; only one of these was in Senior High School. All those who were in school were foster children.

The biological parents of most of the children were farmers and lived in villages. Three of the children had lost their fathers. The mother of one of the children was petty trading in Kintampo, an urban area in central Ghana. Thus, she had to stay with her paternal aunt. Two other children said their fathers were in Kumasi (the second largest city in Ghana) but they were not caring for them. One child said her mother left the polygamous home for Kumasi over ten (10) years ago when she was only three years old. The father had four wives at the time of the interview. Although most of them said they came from poor families in villages, they said there was enough food in their households of origin, although the food may lack quality. However, a few of them said their previous homes experienced food shortages during the dry season, which is fairly common in northern Ghana. According to the children, relations in the previous home were cordial, although there were quarrels sometimes. A child domestic worker who was interviewed in Tamale revealed that her

father who was a chief died when she was eight years old. He left behind over seventy children. The wives used to quarrel among themselves. Family disputes on whom to succeed the father brought division, hatred and mistrust among the wives and children. The result was untold hardship and food shortages. Another child said she had sixteen siblings, only three of whom were in school.

The ages of the foster parents ranged from thirty-three to sixty-three years. The average age was nearly forty-four (43.7) years. Three of the respondents were males. Four of them were teachers and one was a school matron. The others were a cattle dealer, a driver, farmers and petty traders. Few of them had tertiary education, with three of them having no formal education. The majority of the rest had basic school education (Middle School Leaving Certificate). Whilst few of the foster parents could not specify their incomes, they all admitted that they earned higher than the most recent upper poverty line of cedis 3,708,900 per annum (Ghana Statistical Service 2005/06). Four of them who could specify their annual incomes earned between cedis twenty million and forty million in 2005. The slight majority of both the children and foster parents said they were Christians. Traditional religion and Islam were the next two main religions they professed to. Some of the foster parents took care of a high number of children; with two of them taking care of as many as twenty-one children each. Others had eight dependents. On the other hand, one foster parent was staying with only the CDW.

Reasons for fosterage: For almost all of the children, the decision to move them from their biological parents' homes was somebody else's; it was more likely to come from the child's parents although in some cases extended family members took the decision. In general, several push and pull factors were antecedent to the children's fosterage/CDW experience. These can be grouped into three main issues – poverty, family disruption, and the death of a parent. Primarily, poverty in the household of origin leading to the need to seek better opportunities was the major underlying push factor for relocating the children from their biological homes. For instance, all of the CDWs interviewed said they went into child domestic work because their parents were poor and they needed to try their luck in a new environment, preferably the city. This is partly linked to the desire for a child living in poverty to continue his or her education in a bigger

community because there is no secondary school in the village or the parents cannot afford to pay for the schooling. The child is therefore sent to a relative who works in the city or town so that he or she can help.

My mother took the decision because she could not cater for me due to poverty. The intention was that I will earn some revenue. I was interested in the idea because of the new clothes that I would obtain and the money I expected to receive.

--Female CDW

My older brother who is a teacher decided to take me from the village to the town as a domestic assistant. Initially I was not happy because I wanted to stay with my parents but my brother promised to send me to school and I was to undergo some skill training. Unfortunately as of now [time of interview] my brother has failed to send me to school.

--Eleven-year-old female, illiterate CDW who was moved at seven years of age

Secondly but of equal importance and magnitude is family disruption. Basically, the homes of origin of most of the children who were interviewed were dysfunctional. A major explanatory factor for this was polygamous marriages of the parents involved, coupled with its associated rivalry, quarreling and mistrust amongst the co-wives and step-siblings, and broken homes. For a few of the children being idle because they were school drop outs or had never been given the right to education necessitated being sent into child fosterage/CDW.

My parents were almost always quarrelling. My siblings were in the village helping our mother to farm and were not attending school. My mother's sister decided to take me to Tamale to take care of their sick mother (the child's grandmother). I was happy about the decision because I was given the opportunity to go to school.

--Thirteen-year-old female foster child, Tamale

My aunt adopted me at the age of three. My father took the decision when my mother left the matrimonial home for Kumasi to seek employment opportunities. I was then too young and was indifferent to the decision.

--Female foster child, 14 years old

My parents are separated and my father does not care for his children. My mother decided that I should join my [maternal] uncle in order to continue my education at the secondary school level.

--Seventeen-year-old female foster child

My father has three wives. He sacked my mother from the matrimonial home for three years so I was compelled to stay with my aunt. My father is a chief. He is rich but does not want to spend on education. My father took me to his niece when my mother lost her first born due to strange circumstances. When I also became sick my parents were scared and they took me out of the house. They believed that the rivals (the three other wives of her father) who were always quarreling were bewitching one another.

--Sixteen-year-old female Junior High School foster child

The death of a parent, mostly the head of the household, was the third most important push factor.

I lost my mother and father and was lonely. My junior father decided to send me to my father's sister. I was happy because I was moving to a town from a village.

--Female foster child, orphan

My father was a chief with over seventy children. After his death, the question of who should succeed him brought conflict among the children and the rivals. This led to food shortage and neglect, so I had to stop school. I needed money to buy a sewing machine and therefore I decided to be a domestic worker. I was inspired by some girls in my village who went down to the south [of Ghana] to do 'kayayo' (female head porter). They were trained by an NGO and they were given sewing machines free of charge. I came to Tamale on my own, moving from 'chop bar' (indigenous restaurant) to 'chop bar', looking for a job.

--Female CDW, Tamale

It was only one person among the fifteen children interviewed who considered witchcraft as the primary factor for leaving her parents' home. More importantly, there would be serious interaction effects between the main push factors discussed above. As is obvious from the findings, abusive and dysfunctional families breed poverty and food insecurity.

Although death is imminent, one cannot discount the possible effect of stressors from abusive, dysfunctional and subsequently insecure families on the health of the parties involved. As in the case of the child respondents, the family disruption that occurs after the demise of a father who is surrounded by quarreling co-wives and sometimes dozens of surviving children who may not be on good terms with one another also created conditions that made it necessary for the children to find refuge elsewhere. In the face of such insecurities, the rights of children such as the right to education are ignored.

Among the reasons given by the guardians for going in for the children were the demands of tradition; the need to keep the children of friends and relatives whilst they take care of yours in exchange to foster bonds of unity and friendship, to help the extended family, and to afford the child of a relative the opportunity to go to school. Other reasons included assisting foster parents to cope better with a pregnancy, take care of twin babies, and assist with household chores while these parents coped with the extra demands of getting further education. Another picked up a CDW because of her workload. She was petty trading and also kept a drinking bar. For one respondent, it was to train the female child of a brother since the respondent is the only female among her brothers. Besides, her husband teaches Arabic and her relatives send in their children to learn Arabic. Four other children she fosters had lost their fathers. Additional four of the foster parents had taken care of other non-biological children prior to the current one(s). One of them had taken care of three foster children who had left for marriage. Another respondent who had also fostered three children earlier said she did so as tradition demanded.

The children's initial feelings about the fosterage experience were mostly one of joy or sadness. Most of them who were old enough to realize what was happening by then said they were happy about it. Only one of them said she was indifferent to it.

I was happy when my parents asked me to go into child domestic work because I was idling at home.

--Female CDW, primary school drop out

I did not like the idea of going into child domestic work because I was afraid of the new environment. I did not know what was in store for me and how I would be treated in a new home. I, however, had to obey my parents because I could not disappoint them.

--Female CDW

Recruitment procedure, terms of contract and training: Contrary to what is frequently reported in the literature, our study did not find any person or group of persons commercially involved in the recruitment and movement of CDWs and fostered children. In that regard it was also clear that money did not change hands during the process of getting a child from the family home to the mistress/master or the foster home. This applied even in the instances of the CDWs. It was explained by the children that it was against traditional norms for one to take money before releasing his/her child to stay with or assist another person. Rather, it was perceived as a duty to the wider family for a well-to-do extended family member to pick the child of a relative to assist him/her to go to school or to learn a trade. In most cases in this study it was the parents who rather initiated the transfer of their children by deciding that their children should go and stay with their relative in the city or town, thereby requesting such favors from the extended family members involved. Typically, the children were taken to their new home by an older sister or brother, or the mistress at the receiving end who needed the services of the child. A few of them traveled to their new homes by themselves.

Both the children and the guardians said there were no written contractual agreements. The children were only told that they were going to stay with their relative. The terms were however not negotiated and not strictly binding. The children were told what they were going to do before they were taken to their new homes. On arrival in their new homes, the master or mistress also indicated what the children were expected to do, through informal orientation which were done verbally. These were primarily on what they should do or not do. Specific instructions to some of the children included "do not enter my husband's room", "do not take what does not belong to you/has not been given to you", "do not fight", and "do not handle electrical appliances in the house." Others included staying away from the couple's or the male foster parent's room, and not leaving the house whilst both guardians are away. These instructions

were perceived by the foster parents as what would ensure the smooth running of life in the households after the foster children had joined in. Other forms of training were given on-the-job. Some of the rights of the children mentioned by the foster parents included the right to three square meals a day, good bedding and clothing, and to go back to their biological parents. Others included the right of access to household facilities, and free medical care.

No initial payment was made, no promise was given as to what wages were to be paid, and most of the children were not told what they would get at the end of their services. They did not even know for how long they were going to stay in their new home. Most of them, particularly the foster children, were not receiving any regular or periodic financial reward at the time of the interview. One CDW was receiving one hundred thousand cedis a month (10.64 US Dollars equivalent by then). In addition, she would be given a sewing machine at the end of her stay. Another CDW was receiving four thousand cedis (43 US cents equivalent by then) per day, whilst another CDW was getting thirty thousand (3.19 USD equivalent by then) per month.

The recruitment procedure and orientation in the new homes enumerated by the children were confirmed by the foster parents', with the latter emphasizing that consent was sought before the children were released. The guardians/foster parents agreed that the children had no idea what was in store for them. More importantly, the foster parents/guardians said they did not know anyone who assisted people to recruit CDWs for a fee. With the CDWs, the female guardians led the negotiations. Typically, the mistresses were asked by parents to give the CDWs what the former could afford. What appeared to be unclear to the guardians was what the children were to be given at the end of their stay. The specific details had not been discussed by the parties involved. Typical with Ghanaian health care seeking patterns (Oppong & Williamson, 2001), all the foster parents/guardians said that they treat the children at home when they fall sick; mostly relying on medicines purchased from chemists or pharmacies. Serious illnesses were sent to the hospital.

For most of the children interviewed daily work started from five o'clock in the morning and ended at 9 to 10 in the night. Virtually they were all to assist with domestic work. Two CDWs were petty trading in

addition. The foster children performed the domestic chores when they closed from school. The only male foster child was engaged in farm work during farming seasons. This was done on Saturdays. He felt the household chores were too much; as it left him little time for studying at home, although the rest of the children said the workload was not too much and was not beyond their capabilities. It was also spread throughout the day so they had enough time to rest especially when their mistresses/masters had gone to work.

Discipline: Not much discipline or punishment had been meted out to the children. The guardians/foster parents stated that they had had no cause to punish them. Generally, the children were said to be discharging their duties well. However, the few who reported having meted out discipline to their foster child/CDW specified shouting at them ('...to go to school. '), corporal punishment ('...when he misconducts himself'), pulling of ear ('... when sluggish') and threats to send the children away. Other forms of corrections meted out to the children included, warnings, admonishments, insults and threats to send the child away, and on few occasions, caning. In an isolated instance, a child who broke a bowl was denied a meal by her mistress. Moreover, there had not been deduction from a child's pay or locking up a child. Most of the foster parents/guardians could not tell whether their CDWs had friends or belonged to an association or more but generally the movements of the CDWs were restricted although they were permitted to worship in their religious fellowships. The relatives of the children were also permitted to visit them even though such visits were rare.

Likes, dislikes and problems: Among other benefits, the children said they ate quality food and enjoyed city/less rural life, which included electricity, pipe-borne water, and access to clinics. They appreciated the most about their guardians and their new homes what they described as: "no discrimination", "the CDW, the foster child and biological children are given the same treatment", "[we] are treated nicely", "school fees were paid", and "the guardians assist with the household chores." In addition, they liked the kindness and the cooperation of household members.

Conversely, they disliked the most the angry shouts and insults poured on them, the limitation of their freedom; some deprivations they experienced such as the lack of freedom to associate with their friends

(‘denial of food and she does not want me to visit or to receive friends’), being denied money, and, household gossips. For some of them, a near constant correction and sometimes scolding (‘she talks too much when I make mistakes’), and not fulfilling promises made to some of them (‘my guardian promised to send me to school but he has failed to do so’). The CDWs disliked not having the opportunity to attend school.

The perceived problems of the children in their new homes included fear of breaking household items, loneliness and nostalgia for their biological parents, and disrespect from the biological children of the guardians, particularly for the CDWs. Additional problems narrated by the children included perceived cold attitude usually from the male foster parents, again, particularly to the CDWs (‘mistress’ husband can be scary or unfriendly...keeps angry mood’), and being, prevented from going out at night. The main problem was that they did not have the freedom they enjoyed when they were with their parents. Besides they were made to do more work in their new homes than they would have done in their previous/parents’ home. Nevertheless, almost all of the foster children regarded their new homes as being better than their previous home in terms of available facilities as already mentioned. Most of the respondents said they had not encountered sexual harassment in their new homes.

On their part, the foster parents enumerated about six issues they considered problematic in their care of the children. First, it was revealed that the children usually bring habits and characters such as stealing and fighting that are unbearable to the home. Second, having a CDW and/or a foster child entails a heavy financial burden especially when the children are in secondary school and their biological parents do not assist with the cost of educating them. Furthermore, feeding, clothing, taking care of medical bills and getting the children out of trouble were financially burdensome as it was not easy to generate enough money to meet the needs of the CDWs and other children in the home at the time. Third, they mentioned that it is dangerous and worrying if a CDW flirts. Fourth, the children might give wrong interpretation to discipline because they were not the biological children of the respondents. Fifth, the children could hide their real feelings and be pretentious. It was therefore difficult

to know when they have problems. Finally, they were dealing with parental neglect on the part of the biological parents.

Suggestions and comments from the respondents: In the light of the above-stated aims of the study the respondents were asked to suggest ways for improving child domestic work/fosterage systems. Whilst some of the children believed that child domestic work was good and encouraged other children to go into it, others felt the children should rather go to school. They recommended that child domestic workers in particular should be well treated, and that the foster parents should be kind to them (foster children) and should give them money. They also thought that the practice where some guardians beat foster children or CDWs should be discouraged. On the other hand, they perceived that child domestic workers needed to comport themselves better and should keep their focus on what their responsibilities in their new homes were; they should be hard working and respectful. Without surprise, they had suggestions for their biological parents as well; the latter should examine the foster parents or mistress/masters before giving out their children to them.

The foster parents felt primarily that the children should go to school to at least the Junior High School level before going into CDW. Next, they suggested that child domestic work should be discouraged and all children should go to school. If the need for child domestic work arises it should be for only a few years. Also, it was suggested that the children should be given skilled training in the course of their domestic service and that Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations should assist with this. Furthermore, it was suggested that the children should not be over worked and they should be well catered for. Better still, they thought that the patrons should rather engage matured/older children for domestic work.

Alternatively, it was felt that the parents of the CDWs should rather be assisted so they can take good care of their children themselves. Some of the foster parents were of the view that while it is good to take care of relatives' children to foster unity, the children should see the foster parents as their own and show appreciation and commitment to duties in the foster parent's home. Finally, the respondents felt that foster parents or guardians of CDWs need education on how best to relate to and handle such children.

An examination of the spatial differences in our findings is worth mentioning. These include differences from different study areas, and rural-urban differences. Gender differences are not emphasized because there was only one male among the child respondents. Moreover, in the foster homes, the children related more closely to the female foster parents, as generally females do more of direct child minding. There were differences in our findings pertaining to the study sites. A broader background to this pertains to the differences in the study communities themselves and what livelihood in these communities translate into, as well as the related lifestyles that have emerged in these communities.

Being the most urbanized among the four study sites, the foster parents studied in Tamale were mostly office-based workers and were out of the house the most. Hence, in Tamale, most of the foster children we interviewed had been brought from their villages essentially to take over the responsibilities in the households when the foster parents were not in, particularly with child care. As would be expected, foster children in Tamale were thus oldest (average age was 15.2 years), and were adopted at ages ranging between eight and 12 years. Following from this, children in Tamale were more typically burdened with higher workload in their foster households and had the most pressure of work.

Bawku is an important northern-southern Ghana trading nerve center. Furthermore, Bawku is close to Ghana's border with the countries of Burkina Faso to the north, and the northern part of Togo to the east. For our study, this translated into a higher proportion of the foster children from Bawku being CDWs, and understandably older (ages 15 and 16 years); although as a group, children from Bawku were youngest (with a median age of 13.2 years). As already mentioned, the latter moved mostly to find jobs and better economic conditions. Lastly, both Tolon and Kumbungu were very small towns, and embedded within very typical rural and purely agrarian communities. Uniquely, all the foster children studied in these communities were blood relatives, a little younger than those at Tamale (average age was 15 years), and moved here to have better access mostly to schools. Nonetheless, they typically assisted with farming.

Discussion and Summary of Findings

The findings from the children and the adults corroborated each other in virtually every issue covered in this research. This implied that our findings have high validity. On the whole the children interviewed were not badly treated in their current homes. They appeared to be satisfied with their feeding, clothing and accommodation. In fact, all the children studied said that they fared better in their foster parents' homes than they did in their biological parents' homes. In the context of this study conducted with a non-representative sample from three districts in two regions in northern Ghana, the practice of fosterage confirmed several views documented in the literature. First, fosterage was being done as a social service within the extended family particularly. In fact, as mentioned above, tradition provides the main reason for child fostering in northern Ghana particularly, but also, in the country in general. Second, a new trend in fostering was confirmed; schooling was the key pull factor for the foster children interviewed. Third, the children were moved at fairly early ages—typically under six years, ranging between ages 2-12 years. Fourth, mostly girls were moved.

Fifth, some of the foster parents had several foster children, and some had had foster children serially. Sixth, the foster children were receiving training in household chores, religious training, and preparation for future life such as marriage. Seventh, the children were assisting with important household activities such as child minding, and some CDWs were enabling their mistresses to participate in the labor force outside the home. While Isiugo-Abanihe (1985) observed that working mothers tended to send their children away more than non-working mothers, our study found that working women in the urban areas studied were more likely to 'import' CDWs. However, the paucity of our data makes it necessary to view this finding with caution. More aptly, it cannot be generalized outside the study.

Eighth, the biological and foster children received similar punishment and disciplining as was found in the literature. Ninth, the fosterage led to economic burdens for some of the receiving parents, probably confirming the above-documented finding; the fosterage was restricted to extended family members mainly. Another key finding was that unlike

the popular literature portrays, the children involved were not trafficked, and neither was anyone benefiting financially from the process of moving them from their biological homes to the new homes. Finally, and most importantly, as found in the related literature, the children in this study mainly fitted the paradigm of crisis fosterage, primarily, the ill-effects of poverty and family disruptions resulting mainly from polygamous marriages.

Theoretically, the findings from this study support Goody's (1978) thesis of "a changing paradigm" in fosterage in West Africa, yet our findings conclude on more of an eclectic pattern than the patterns of fosterage documented in the literature. What we observed does not fit purely into any one of the different theoretical frameworks cited above to explain child fosterage in West Africa. While a great amount of Isiugo-Abanihe's 'crisis fosterage', and some level of previous researchers' 'kin selection', as well as some amount of Goody's (1978) 'educational fosterage' noted previously in Ghana are confirmed in this study, our conclusions fall short of endorsing any of these wholly. For instance, although Goody's educational fosterage could be adopted partially, it does not totally reflect a situation where the foster children who were moved for educational purposes mostly resided with non-relatives, neither does Silk's thesis of kin selection applies wholly to this study. Unlike Silk's conclusion for instance, our foster children largely did not perceive biological children in their foster homes as receiving preferential treatment from the biological parents, compared to them.

Conclusion

In the long run, the overall outcome of the movement of the children for themselves, their biological families, their 'receiving families,' extended families and society in general was more beneficial than it was detrimental, particularly for the foster children. In conclusion then, one can say that despite the inherent problems encountered by both the foster parents and the foster children in general, overall the fosterage was beneficial for the foster children particularly, compared with the 'push' factors from their biological homes and what the foster children in particular stood to gain from the fosterage in their new homes.

For the CDWs, the fosterage experience probably served more as a survivalist strategy that hopefully would lead to a desired change, where they possibly would get seed money for business or some form of acquired skill for future survival, or at least to provide an escape route, albeit temporarily, from the circumstances which necessitated their moving from their biological homes. With this perspective then, the authors argue that the CDWs' fosterage experience based on the findings from this study cannot be largely classified as being negative; it was functional.

The guardians also seemed content with the services of the children, overall. For the latter, we conclude that despite all the inherent problems they faced for being foster parents, from the social-functionalist approach, they had provided positive experiences for the foster children, the larger extended families, their households, where the children filled one household void or the other, and for the large society as a whole. That they opted to offer such social services and for some of them, do it recurrently, underscores the fact that regardless of the attendant problems, the foster parents derived some positive experiences from the practice.

Findings from this study indicate that tradition provides the main framework for the fosterage we observed. Our study endorses the changing paradigm of fosterage in West Africa pinpointed by previous researchers, but concludes that a more eclectic pattern was in operation amongst our study subjects. Theoretically, our findings indicate yet a different variant of the explanatory frameworks proposed for child fosterage in West Africa cited in previous literature; we found a mixture of some of those already proposed.

Irrespective of the seemingly overall positive outcome of the fosterage experience, certain difficult situations found by our study such as the potential for the CDWs to not gain formal education in their new homes and overworking of some of the children cannot be left unmentioned. Policy implications for our study include the need for the Department of Social Welfare, and the Children's desk under the Ministry for Women and Children to more closely monitor the well-being and activities of children vis-à-vis the tenets of the Constitution of the Fourth Republic of Ghana. Particularly, it should be ensured that primary school-going age children are appropriately enrolled and complete basic education. We endorse the need for the state to assist exceptionally financially vulnera-

ble parents with their social obligations towards their young children, such as in the recent Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) social welfare program. We recommend that a law be promulgated setting an age limit below which children cannot serve as CDWs, and equally importantly, that this law be strictly enforced.

Note

The conversion of the cedis into the U.S. Dollar equivalences was based on information from the *Business and Financial Times*, Monday, January 30, 2006.

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