

THE GIRL-CHILD VULNERABILITY IN FOSTERING PRACTICES: EVIDENCE FROM SELECTED BUSINESS DISTRICTS IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Fostering children has been an age long affair in African culture where family members who are incapable of providing for their children send them to relatives in better positions economically and morally to provide support, skills as well as cementing familial ties. Traditionally this was the case. In modern times, economic constraints and the need for survival in the cities have affected this practice, for which the demand for the girl child has soared. Disadvantaged adolescent girls carry a range of burden derived from vulnerability associated with child fostering. In this regard, this study investigated the vulnerability of the girl child in fostering practices in selected business districts in Lagos State, Nigeria by exploring foster female children's routine activities, education and social well-being as well as the agency of their biological parents on foster parents. The study indicates that a significantly large number of girls between the ages of 9-17years (observed to be economically active) were children living with a foster parent. Often they are over-laboured at home with domestic chores as housemaids and on the street searching and attending to customers for their foster parents' businesses. As a result, many are de-motivated and eventually drop out of school. This study recommends that all effort should be placed on deck by biological parents to practically and emotionally invest on their children by regularly visiting them to reduce the risk associated with fostering a girl child by foster parents that are actively engaged in the city centres and the informal sector at large.

Keywords: Fostering, informal sector, de-motivation, vulnerability, emotional investment

INTRODUCTION

The homogeneity of research findings about child fosterage in Africa is often worrisome, with less emphasis on the peculiarity of the girl-child (Eloundou-Enyegue & Stokes 2002; Goody, 1973; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1985; Martin, 1993; Verhoef & Morelli 2007). Doing and understanding gender constitute a complex mix that unravel not only the variability, challenges and uniqueness of the girl child in foster care but also the ability of foster parents to provide them with a sensitive and growth-promoting environment. Describing the uniqueness and ills of West African fostering, in terms of its tradition, prevalence and the early age at which children are sent out, Isiugo-Abanihe (1985), noted that: 'fostering is practiced by both stable and unstable families, married and single mothers, healthy and handicapped parents, rural and urban homes, as well as wealthy and poor parents' (p.56). In recent times however, the quest for house helps, expanding crèche facilities, urban upbringing, educational needs, temporary and long-term migration and economic crisis, often overshadow and prompt parents to foster out more their female children than the male (Ikuomola & Okunola, 2016; UNICEF, UNAIDS, & PEPFAR, 2006).

The process of child fostering is an age-old mechanism in Africa for reducing uncertainty and realizing opportunity, especially when parents die, children are necessarily placed in custody of relatives. Fostering therefore is expected to serve as a means to buffer economic and demographic inequalities (Alber, 2004; Eloundou-Enyegue & Shapiro, 2004; Vandermeersch, 2002). Fostering is often one of the ways some young couples and African women particularly, are able to combine labour force participation with motherhood (Ikuomola & Okunola, 2016). This has led to reducing the ages at which children are fostered as a result of new parental roles in households and urban economies under transformation (Bledsoe 1994; Evans & Miguel, 2007; Fiawoo 1978; Ikuomola, 2014).

The transformation of urban economies have been linked with the myriads of vulnerabilities accompanying child fostering practices, for which the girl child is mostly affected as regularly portrayed by the media (Bradshaw & Fordham, 2013). Notwithstanding, the views and opinions about the girl-child continue to be un-projected and often at best captured as homogenous with children generally in fostering/fosterage literature, having great implication on risk reduction policy and praxis (Bradshaw & Fordham, 2013; Plan International, 2013).

It is critical to understand the girl child vulnerability in fostering practices, with evidence from selected business districts in Lagos State Nigeria. There are several problems associated with fostering practices and its outcome on the girl child, regarding their schooling. In extreme cases, their physical and mental load and development may be compromised. It must be noted that fostering as a socio-cultural practice is not inimical in itself, but the act of exploitation in diverse forms needs to be addressed and continually researched.

METHODS

Design and Procedure

This paper draws information from a mixed method descriptive and qualitative interviewing (in-depth semi-structured interviews and observations) among a cross section of fostered children (all girls) with a convenient sample size of 230 respondents between the ages of 9 and 17 years, drawn from a larger data set on 'child fostering practices in Lagos State'. The study was conducted over a five year period between the 2014-2018, in Lagos State as part of a CODESRIA (2014) Child and Youth Institute Programme. The study employed the grounded theory approach where research questions emerged from interviews (Wengraf, 2004). Through key informants and market-heads in various lines of business, the participants were discovered, recruited and engaged.

The market heads were identified through a pilot study embarked upon earlier to ascertain the presence of foster children in the selected business districts. They were also instrumental in directing us to key informants that aided in the identification of key subjects of the research. Sixty respondents were selected in Oshodi business district, fifty-six from Lagos Island, fifty-eight from Surulere, and fifty-six from Ikorodu CBDs, all in the three senatorial districts in Lagos State. In the current study we focused on three important issues in fosterage and asked about their consequences in relation to the children's level of engagement and vulnerability. The first dimension is to understand the status of fostered children's biological parents (either dead or alive), that is, the relationship it has on reasons why they are being fostered vis-à-vis the ability to 'see things from the child's point of view'. Studies conducted with fostered children –parents dyads often tend to neglect the nuances relating to parental background of fostered children (Dozier, Grasso, Lindheim, & Lewis, 2007; Ikuomola, 2014).

This is quite insightful in understanding the concept, for which the persistence and choices made in fostering practices become the second issue addressed in the study. In addition, the study examined the role of biological parents visits (regular or irregular) on fostered children's welfare which is very much related to the psychological construct of parental emotional investment on children (Ackerman, & Dozier, 2005; Bates, & Dozier, 2002; Bernard, & Dozier, 2011; Dozier & Lindheim, 2006; Dozier, Stovall, Albus, & Bates, 2001). Dozier, Grasso, Lindheim, & Lewis, 2007). In this study, parental emotional investment was examined in relation to foster parents, as an integral and implicit aspect of parenting that guides against abuse and abnormal behaviours either on the part of foster parents or/and the fostered children, and behavioural adjustment and outcomes generally (Lindheim, & Lewis, 2007).

Participants

Participants in the study were below the age of 18 years. In terms of their religious affiliation, 48.7 percent were Christians, 30.9 percent Muslims, and 20.4 percent animists. The majority of them were 14 years old (27 percent) while 23 percent were 17 years old. Other age categories were 9 years (3.5%), 10 years (4.3%), 11 years,

(21.2%), 12 years (13%), and 13 years (8%). The age distribution reflects the usual ages at which children are most likely to be given out in fosterage (Bebbington & Miles, 1990; Ikuomola, 2014; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1985; Verhoef & Morelli, 2007).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Preliminary analyses

Table 1:
General Background of the Respondents

Age	Respondents	Respondent in school	Respondents out of school	Average working hour per day
9	15	9	6	3
10	25	16	9	5
11	48	30	18	5.8
13	33	19	14	7.4
14	56	33	23	11.8
17	53	14	39	13.5
Total	230	121(52.6%)	109(47.4%)	

Approximately 40 percent of children in the study were from the South-East region of the country which is populated mostly by the Igbo; 36.5 percent were from the South-West, predominantly populated by the Yoruba; 5.5 percent were from the South-South populated by the Ijaw, Ogoja, Ibibio and Efik, while 17.5 percent were from the North-Central, also populated mostly by the Hausa and Tiv. Since the study was conducted in Lagos, it is not really surprising that the majority of the participants were from the Southern part of Nigeria. The Igbo, the largest group in the study, are known for their entrepreneurial skills and propensity to employ close relatives, usually from the hinterlands, as shop assistants at a very tender age (Ebigbo, 2006).

Fifty-two percent of the respondents were still attending school as against 47 percent who were out of school. Of the out-of-school respondents, 24.7 percent had stopped schooling at the secondary level, 18.3 percent at the primary level, while 4.0 percent had never been to school. This is consistent with earlier empirical evidence that the average age of the youngest child in a foster family was ten, and only one in eight families had children under five (Bebbington & Miles, 1990). Similarly majority of foster children and child labourers are likely not to be educated and found to be easily drop out of school (Ikuomola, 2014; Isamah & Okunola, 1997).

The high number of out-of-school children in the study implies that a good number of children in Lagos State and probably other cities in Nigeria are unable to fully enjoy their right to education as specified in Goal 4 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as the United Nations

Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is pathetic that the girl child constitutes bulk of the 750 million adults who remained illiterate in Sub Saharan Africa in 2016 and the 262 million children and youth aged 6-17 out of school (United Nations, 2019). It has thus become difficult to meet this goal of education for all in the year 2020.

Table 2:
Current Status of Children's Biological Parents (Dead/Alive)

Respondents	Both parents are alive	One parent is alive	Both parents are dead	No Response	Total
No.	56 (24.3%)	98 (42.6%)	45 (19.6%)	31 (13.5%)	230 (100%)

Regarding parentage, ninety-eight respondents (42.6percent) had lost one of their biological parents, forty-five (19.6 percent) had lost both parents, while fifty-six (24.3 percent) had surviving parents. However, thirty-one (13.5 percent) were not interested in revealing any information about the current status of their parents, as well as others who seem not to know anything about them. Thus it is very likely that a number of the respondents may have lost their parents much earlier. Information about the status of their biological parents is critical because it provides clues and motives for foster care (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1985; Ikuomola, 2014). Possibly, fear and mistrust of strangers prevented them from opening up to the researcher in spite of the assurances given to them. The main activities the foster children engaged in were selling of sachet and table water, hawking of vegetables, and grinding of ingredients like pepper and tomatoes. The daily incomes arising out of these activities ranged between ₦2,500 and ₦8,000.

Why the Increase and Persistence of the Girl Child in Fosterage?

Bebbington and Miles (1990) found that the average age of the youngest child in a foster family was ten, and only one in eight families had children under five, which a number of literature suggest that parents make a rational and conscious decision on age and gender in child fosterage just like in formal adoption processes in the United States and Europe (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1985), of which the girl child is often prioritise by mothers as housemaids and assistants in the informal sector, while most fathers who foster are often of the opinion that the girl child is often less problematic and easier to handle (Ikuomola, 2014).

Nevertheless, the traditional reasons for fostering vary widely but the most common are long term illness of parents, death, divorce, and parents' separation. On the positive side, the reasons could be mutual help among family members, socialization and education and the strengthening of family ties. It is for these reasons that child circulation has become a characteristic feature of African family systems. For instance, Ikuomola (2014), Isiugo-Abanihe, (1985),

and Spears and Crosse (2003) note that child fostering serves not only as a reinforcement mechanism for social bonds, but also helps to maintain the high fertility rates through the redistribution of the economic burden of child rearing. It is therefore an integral part of the extended family structure in African societies. Notwithstanding it provides insights into the adversity many people face and the girl child in particular in relation to understanding a foster child's behaviour and mental load.

Table 3:

Reasons for Fostering

Reasons for living in a foster home	Frequency	Percentage
To attend school and learn a trade	42	18.3
To serve as house help and learn a trade	36	15.7
Parental needs/Poverty	31	13.5
Death of Parent(s)	29	12.6
Marital problems (Separation/divorce)	24	10.4
To escape rural life	21	9.1
Migration/Instability of parents work location	29	12.6
I don't know	18	7.8
Total	230	100

Table 3 outlines the reasons put forward by respondents why they live in foster homes rather than with their biological parents. The paramount reason was the quest for education and to acquire economic skills (18.3 and 15.7 percent respectively). Other key reasons were marital problems between parents (10.4 percent), poverty (13.5 percent), and migration of parents to other cities (12.6 percent). The reasons that emerged from the study are not radically different from the traditional reasons adduced to explain child fostering in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Some of the reasons clearly show the positive role fostering plays in propping up the extended family system. For instance, the fourth most important reason was the death of parents which raises the issue of collective responsibility of the extended family in looking after their deceased relatives' children.

The foster parents may not necessarily be economically better off but they are obliged to show solidarity by making some sacrifices. However the strains and difficulties experienced in the foster homes and places of work undermine its role in cementing family relations in reality. It is evident that excessive household demands and mental load on foster children leave psychological scars on them and also weaken family ties in the long run (Ikuomola, 2014; Sewpaul, 2001). For respondents whose parents are dead, they frequently gain some understanding of the difficulties they have been enduring, been through and therefore learned to appreciate their own circumstances:

I have to be patient and take it as my destiny because there is no other person or home to call my own. I have to be good and keep my head high with all hopes that I will become someone great in future... These difficult situations will make me stronger and better someday (Aladi/Benue 15years/Ikorodu).

Schooling and Mental Load: Impact of Household Chores on the Girl Child's Education and Well-being

The in-school foster children who were all attending public schools generally had little or no time in engaging themselves with academic work especially after school hours. This is a pointer to the number of out of school children the CBDs. On the other hand in Nigeria, public education at both the primary and secondary levels are considered as cheap, staffed with incompetent or ill-motivated teachers, and so generally incapable of providing quality education to children (Okunola & Ikuomola, 2009; United Nations, 2019).

Fifty-nine (25.7 percent) of the foster children said they were attending evening lessons instead of regular schools because they arrived in Lagos in the middle of the school year. However, they expected to be enrolled in regular schools at the beginning of the new academic year. For the in-school children, 14 years was the minimum age at which they gained admission into junior secondary school. It is evident from Table 1 that the number of hours spent working increases with age as the older the children became, the more hours they had to work both on weekdays and weekends. Jumoke, a 14-year old girl (a first year junior secondary school student) was of the opinion that she prefers not going to school anymore because of the excessive house chores and expectations.

This situation is what has been referred to as mental load and emotional torture facing most out of school children (see Foster, 2000): with the rate of increasing the risks of delinquency and crime (Ikuomola, 2014; Isamah & Okunola, 1997). Simi, a 17-year old girl from Ijesha explained elaborately the difficulties encountered as a senior secondary school student:

Lagos was very sweet when I first arrived because my aunty would pick me when primary schools closed, buy me food and take me home. But all these stopped when she started having children when I was in JSS1ⁱ, because I started work seriously. I thought it was fun assisting in carrying the baby at first, but later it prolonged, both at home and in the market, gradually it became my duty to go to the market and start selling until she joined me. It is not easy because there is usually no time to read since I am always already tired after school but have to go straight to the market (Simi, female, 17 years, Ijesha).

Similar concerns were raised by most of the children especially those privileged to be schooling.

A Descriptive Highlight of the Girl-Child's Perception of Work Predicament

True to prediction, majority of the respondents 157 (68.3 percent within the age bracket of 11 and 17 years) did not enjoy the work, especially domestic chores, that they had to do regularly and routinely because they found it to be too demanding. This was a common complaint from children who lived in homes where the foster parents were in the process of raising a family or had in the past, few years prior to the study. As for others within the ages of 10 and 11 years, (53 respondents), that is (23 %) found hawking and work in the markets interesting because it provides an avenue and ample time to play and mingle with friends in similar or worse conditions while 20 respondents (8.7%) were not interested in explaining their plights.

Apparently, the children aged between 9 and 10 years tended to enjoy work more than the other groups probably because much of their work was within the domestic domain or they had just arrived and were being introduced to life in the neighbourhood. However, as they progressed in age, they found work to be less and less pleasant. For instance, for those aged between 12 and 17 years, the working hours rose from 3.7 to 6.2 hours per day since they would have passed the stage of pampering, thus more and more of their time had to be devoted to work.

Pampering here represents a period of time when the children are introduced to their neighbourhood and surroundings and are shown the nooks and cranny of the nearby markets and selling points in the streets where they are likely to work later. At this stage they do little or no work, thus a false sense of security and freedom is created. However after this period, the children would be assigned more work and responsibilities which understandably they might find tedious and uninteresting. Apparently, as they grew older and approached their teens they gradually resigned themselves to the realities of their work and positions as fostered children. This was summarized by Aminat and Janet thus:

It was a lovely experience at first, clothes were bought for me. I was happy with the new environment, but with time these clothes became old, and today it is work and work. Not only did these clothes get torn, but I was also made to work to get them mended. (Aminat/15 years/ Oshodi).

Janet a native of Ogun State, in Bolade market at Oshodi corroborated:

The beginning is usually a nice period to be drawn closer, once I was introduced to everybody around, my duties were spelt out. Living with a foster parent who owns a restaurant, I initially thought I won't be in need of food anymore and that I would be enrolled and continue schooling in Lagos. Not knowing that I was brought from the village to work and contribute to the restaurant business... I had to wake up as

early as 3.30am to prepare ingredients for cooking, wash dishes day in day out except on Sundays (16years/Oshodi).

This knowledge and experience on and off the business districts vis-à-vis the streets (and the informal sector generally) may ultimately be converted into economic capital within various fields upon entering adulthood, thus enabling the girl child to develop survival skills and competencies in the street economy. While this is the basis of the traditional concept of fostering, that the knowledge could become ‘embodied cultural capital’ (Bourdieu, 1986), it is often exploitative hence some of the children’s negative perception of the practice. The relationship between age and social wellbeing was also found to be more favourable for younger foster children between the ages of 9 and 12 years as opposed to those from 13 years onward. The younger ones were apparently better cared for so they appeared more relaxed even while they were being interviewed; their school uniforms were cleaner and sometimes well ironed, unlike their relatively older counterparts whose school uniforms and house wears were unkempt and in some cases tattered as uncovered by Aminat due to overload of domestic activities (work).

On dietary habits, the culture of selling items for their parents as well as buying foods piecemeal from vendors were observed among a sizeable number of respondents in the mornings. More than half of the respondents, 119 out of the 230 noted that most often they ate late because by the time they finished their work in the market and managed to get home through the heavy traffic, it would already be late in the night. For those who lived around the market place, 79 of the 230 participants had the privilege of eating around normal times in the evenings. However, most of them (one hundred and forty-three) could not get regular morning meals before going to school or the business centres. The experiences of Ese reflect some of the findings of (Bledsoe 1990; Bicego, Rutstein & Johnson, 2003) to the effect that a number of foster children experience pain, more work, and less well-being.

In cases of bodily changes occurring during puberty, most especially with menstruation and menarche ‘a transition period from girlhood to womanhood, or from being a child to being an adolescent’, (Fingerson, 2005), narratives revealed that foster parents often erroneously and misconstrue this puberty signs as ‘strength and will power’ for the girl child to do more in terms of labour and domestic engagement. A trilogy of response from Catharine (14years), Halimat (16years), and Ronke (16 years) is captured in Surulere among a group of girls hawking wares:

...When something changes about our physical bodies, it changes the way we are looked at, and sometimes severe beatings when we do not make enough sales or try to take some rest.

The interpretation here is that girls who have reached menarche are biologically and sexually active adults capable of reproduction (Brumberg, 1997; Fingerson, 2005; Martin, 1993; Lee & Sasser-Coen, 1996) and the sexual meanings of menstruation often complicate their status as foster children. As a result of such developments, researchers like Foster (2000) have concluded that the fostering system in urban areas has been stressed and damaged beyond repair.

Child Fostering: Preference for the Girl Child

According to Mrs. Ekaete, a mother of four with a female foster child, the nature of the work or business activities of foster parents and the age and sex of the foster child are basic determinants in child fosterage. Invariably this will also determine the type of work the foster child will be engaged either at home or in the market place. She noted:

These days the girl child is easier to control and is more appealing and advisable if one is into business. They are soft spoken and can easily attract customers. As you can see, they are taken more seriously in the fashion business (Foster parent/ Surulere /46years).

Mrs Akomolafe noted that:

I decided to foster a girl child rather than to look for a housemaid who will certainly be on my pay roll. I thought it wise to get a relative within the family. It is economically wise to do that with someone with a known background than to a complete stranger.

For Mr and Mrs. Okoroafor, with four foster children, (two girls and two boys), all relatives of theirs 'there is always a reason to foster a child, be it a girl or a boy'

It was my needs that informed my choice of a girl child, because I operate a big supermarket and always in need of assistance; and employing sales girls was no longer profitable. The choice of a girl child was just the only way out (Mrs. Okoroafor/ 39 years/ Lagos Island).

Mr. Okoroafor elaborated further

It all started earlier when we were still young in marriage. Combining business with raising children was a whole lot of problem for my wife. Then I had to bring two of my distant relatives; all boys at first. As they became older, my wife felt they were more useful to me in my automobile (spare parts) business

line than at home and her own business of cosmetics. As her business became bigger, we both agreed to get two girls to balance the equation; and ever since, no regrets (51years/ Lagos Island).

Twenty-seven of the forty-one foster parents interviewed corroborated Mr and Mrs. Okoroafor's views that to a large extent, the age and gender of the foster child determine the duties that are assigned to them, which is also bound to change with age. They pointed out that even among their own biological children responsibilities are distributed according to gender. Mrs. Ogunbor and the Ojogbane's claimed that though a girl child is the best but caution needs to be taken regarding some of the challenges and difficulty the girl child is likely to face:

As good as the girl child is, caution should be taken to avoid them being molested and abused within and outside the home, and most especially when they assist in doing and during business transactions.

Mr. and Mrs. Ojogbane echoed with specifics:

Girls like boys are investments. But the girl child is more difficult to train, they are exposed to a lot of problems ranging from rape, molestation, harassment...From my own experience as a child, my niece was a victim, at an early age of 16, although this was partly due to my auntie's fault and neglect, she became pregnant and was eventually sent packing (back to the village). The problem it created between her biological parents and mine is best imagined (Mrs. Ojogbane, Kosofe).

The exploitative element that sometimes characterizes fostering is evident in the Ojogbane's and Ogunbor's narratives seeing fostering as an investment, something to profit from at an appropriate time. While foster children are engaged in all sorts of domestic activities, the interviews however show that functions such as babysitting are mostly reserved and combined with other commercial activities in the business districts. In addition, the foster mothers claimed that even though they preferred fostering female children at the early stages of their marriage because of the care-taking role they would assume for their little children, they would be indifferent to their gender at the latter stages when they would no longer be bearing children. With regard to commercial activities however, there appeared to be a gender preference which was not the focus of this study. For example, according to the seventeen male foster parents in the study, male children were preferred as assistants in trading activities such as wood, iron, cement, and ornaments business that are dominated by men. In contrast, female foster children are preferred in trading activities that deal with 'feminine' things like vegetables, cooking utensils, and beauty products.

Apart from the exploitative tendencies there in in fostering, it is important to note that fostering has created an avenue for occupational/labour relationship between foster children and foster parents who are economically engaged either at home or operates in a business district in the informal sector; as well as fostered children who are engaged as domestic servants. This pattern has a long tradition in society. According to Maine's 1861:

It was for a very long time a 'status –relationship and not one based upon contract'. Neither do present conditions permit a relationship that is expected to be genuine in modern society where family ties are no longer as strong as it used to be in the traditional societies (cited in Aubert, Eckhoff, & Sveri, 1952).

Thus it was not uncommon seeing a number of females serve as both apprentices and workers earning incomes for their foster parents. Evidently, most of the children are in one way or the other involved in commercial activities as confirmed by a 15-year-old female participant, Bimbo, in Lawanson market:

I have to work with my family every day in their bakery, carrying dough and water is not an easy task for the past five years under the heat. I have been promised to be placed on salary someday. I am still hoping for that day so that I can also be of help to myself and my biological parents and younger ones back home in my village and if possible leave Lagos completely (Bimbo, Female, 15 years/Surulere).

Though most of the children do not see their income-generating activities as negative, it was observed that many of them were usually not paid and overworked by the end of the day. This was even more noticeable among children who combined schooling with after-school work in the markets.

Emotional Investment: The Influence of Biological Parents Visits on Foster Parents' Responsibilities towards the Girl Child

In this study questions were raised to examine the correlation between the girl child levels of challenging behaviours and their biological parents' insightfulness and emotional investment (through visits) to determine the influence on the schooling of their children while they were with the foster parents. To begin with, of the one hundred and nine (47 percent) respondents who were not attending school at that time, seventy-six (33.0 percent) had stopped schooling altogether, while five (14.3 percent) had stopped schooling at the primary level. Apparently, children whose biological parents were from the Western part of Nigeria (Yoruba-speaking area) were frequently in contact with them compared to those from the other parts of Nigeria.

Two reasons could account for this; the first is proximity. Lagos State is situated in the western part of Nigeria, thus it was much easier for the parents to travel to visit their children or keep in touch through mobile phones. The second is the state's free education policy at both primary and secondary levels. It has also been argued that the average Yoruba family takes children's education more seriously than any other ethnic group in Nigeria (National Population Commission-NPC/Nigeria & ICF. 2019). In the case of the other participants from across the River Niger (Igbos, Calabar, Effik and Ibibio-speaking), much emphasis was placed on the acquisition of trading skills as the path to future success. There was also a widely-held belief amongst the participants that 'coming to Lagos will make them successful'. This view is common to most people in the rural areas because they see the city as a place of unending opportunities that could transform their situation in life. Those who fared worst in terms of parental influence on their education were respondents from Calabar and Akwa Ibom.

The obvious explanation for this is the hundreds of kilometres that separate the children in Lagos from their biological parents back home. For example, over two-third (73.5 percent) of them had never seen their parents in the two years preceding the study, neither were they able to contact them through telephones. Of the total number of respondents who had at least a surviving parent (fifty-six with both parents alive and ninety-eight with one single parent alive), one hundred and four had not seen their parents in the past two years, as against thirty-two participants from the western state. Eighteen of the respondents could not recall when they last saw their biological parents; in response, a child said in Pidgin English "e don tai oh wen I see my family since I come", meaning he has not seen his family since his arrival. However they were in touch through phones. Loveth, a 11-year-old native of Akwa-Ibom, who was living in Ikorodu pointed out:

Ogoja is a very far place; my parents can't find enough time to visit me. I know they would have loved to; they are poor and will not be able to come to Lagos. I was brought to Lagos with the promise that I would be educated and learn a trade under the custody of my foster parents. But since I arrived I have not been enrolled in any school. All I do is to help at home.

According to Simi, a 16-year-old Yoruba girl who vends children wares in a relative big supermarket after school, her placement and continuous schooling was as result of her exceptional brilliance at school, home and business;

In my own case, I have been able to combine all chores at home and improvement at school. For this reason my biological parents made it known to them that I must be educated. Even though my foster parents won't allow me to visit my parents and siblings, my mother will always pay me a visit, at least once in a year. Whenever my other

family members are on a trip to Lagos they do send me gifts and words of encouragement from my father who lives in Cameroon (Lagos Island).

For Cynthia, a 14-year-old from Enugu, "My parents do not visit, I do not think they know what I am passing through here in Lagos, I am not allowed to discuss the realities here. Phone calls are usually not private. I have stopped schooling because I wasn't doing well, nobody could convince my foster parents. They say I am only good at domestic activities and probably will learn a trade soonest". Apart from schooling, the majority of biological parents had little or no influence on the way and manner in which their children were being raised in the foster homes.

However some of the biological parents were well-informed about the wellbeing of their children. Apparently, those who were not doing well at school or engaged in deviant and sometimes criminal behaviours were either sent back home or were cautioned by emissaries. Sometimes, people travelling to Lagos were asked to visit the children on their behalf thus maintaining some contact, and through that exerting some form of influence in the lives of their children.

CONCLUSION

As shown in this study many of the girl child in foster homes come from high-risk family backgrounds in which they were exposed to periods of adverse caregiving, especially with the overload of domestic and commercial activities in the city centres. Such experiences have long-lasting negative implications for the children's development (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2001; Dozier, Albus, Fisher, & Sepulveda, 2002) and often result in elevated levels of behavioural, socio-emotional, and educational difficulties. The differential engagement of foster children in the public as against the private domain in comparison with biological children, and in more laborious economic activities defeats the major reasons and philosophy behind fostering practices. With the varying degrees and circumstances found surrounding fostering practices in selected CBDs in Lagos State, Nigeria, the girl child can be said to be disadvantaged relatively to other children within the same household.

The study observed the engagement of children as young as 9 years hawking wares for their foster parents. There were also others whose biological parents work and live within the suburb of the foster parents but do not pay regular visit to their children. Thus unaware of the laborious, cumbersome and time-consuming economic activities foster children are engaged in outside their homes to improve their personal or familial wellbeing through schooling and learning of a trade. Unfortunately, in recent times, as with many social practices in Africa, fostering tends to negatively impact more on the girl child unlike boys since the former usually have to sacrifice their education for the wellbeing of the foster family because of the domestic responsibilities they are assigned to do.

According to Verhoeff & Morelli (2007), the cooperation between the donor and recipient family colours the experience and outcomes of children in their foster home. This means that the true extent of the girl child's experiences is difficult to ascertain, since it is shrouded in family relationships. Even though child fostering has always been an integral part of African culture, it was never intended to be an avenue for foster parents to exploit the child for their economic gains.

The study therefore recommends that it is imperative for biological parents to emotionally invest by paying regular visits to foster parents and their children to know and moderate the adverse realities therein regarding the ups and downs of their children wellbeing, and to help the foster parents provide positive experiences and motivation for sensitive parenting to their children, who need these for their development.

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