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Foster care ontologies: A qualitative study in Zimbabwe

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Both the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child place premium on having children grow up in families. Foster care is one of the opportunities that can be used to ensure that children grow up in families on the African continent and Zimbabwe in particular. There are however some minefields which have to be explored carefully. The paper dedicates some attention to inhibitive cultural dimensions that have to be tackled delicately in promoting foster care. The paper also debunks the thinking that foster care is a destination in itself by showing the lived realities of children in foster homes. This has been done by exploring ontologies of foster care in the context of Zimbabwe. General typologies of foster parents are given showing the nexus between quality of life for children and the types of foster parents. A qualitative research design was employed, where the data were collected through exploratory tools namely focus group discussions, key informant interviews and in-depth interviews.

Key words: Quality of life, child right, foster care, children, foster parents, child protection.

INTRODUCTION

The preambles of both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) place premium on having children grow up in families. The African Children's Charter, in particular, notes that 'the child occupies a unique and privileged position in the African society and that for the full and harmonious development of his personality, *the child should grow up in a family environment in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding...* [Emphasis added].¹ This paper is premised on this aspiration. Foster care is one of the

instruments that can be used to ensure that children grow up in family environments. There is an expectation that the family environments that children find themselves in have atmospheres of happiness, love and understanding. Both the UNCRC and the ACRWC as the normative frameworks on children's rights posit that the protection of children is to be covered by the *'parens patriae'* authority of the state.

At national level, Section 19 of the Zimbabwean Constitution is dedicated to national objectives that are specific to children. The national objectives are supposed

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to guide the State and all institutions and agencies of government at every level in formulating and implementing laws and policy decisions that will lead to the establishment, enhancement and promotion of a sustainable, just, free and democratic society in which people enjoy prosperous, happy and fulfilling lives.²

In consonance with the preambles of the UNCRC and the ACRWC, the Zimbabwe Constitution places premium for children to grow up in a family environment. Chapter 2(19) of the constitution posits that:

The State must adopt reasonable policies and measures, within the limits of the resources available to it, to ensure that children:

- (i). *Enjoy family or parental care, or appropriate care when removed from the family environment;*
- (ii). Have shelter and basic nutrition, health care and social services;
- (iii). Are protected from maltreatment, neglect or any form of abuse; and
- (iv). Have access to appropriate education and training [emphasis added].³

Foster care presents an opportunity for the fulfilment of the objectives as set out in 19 (2a) of the national constitution. As such foster care is being promoted in Zimbabwe as a tool to achieve the goal of having all children growing in family environment.

Beyond encapsulating the issue of children growing up in a family environment in the national constitution, Zimbabwe has established a child protection architecture which includes foster care. The National Orphan Care Policy (1999) recognises the family, extended family and community as the ideal place for a child to develop. The National Orphan Care Policy identifies a six tier system for child protection starting at family level as the first safety net.⁴ The next best placement for the child where the family, extended family and the community have failed is within the foster care system. In a foster care setting, it is expected that children are protected and have access to all the rights such as the right to be loved and cared for, the right to shelter, food, medical care, identity and education. On the hierarchy of the child care systems in the country, foster care is considered as the fourth tier of protection. Scholars such as Grant and Yeatman (2012); Sherr et al. (2017) posit that foster care, if efficiently administered, can be the next level of care should the family fail to provide for the children. The legislative framework on child protection in the country is capped by a wholesale Children's Act Chapter 5:06. The Act provides specific definitions and processes which gives the magistrates courts the power to place children under foster care through issuance of a court order that is renewed after every 3 years.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study employed the emic approach which allowed for views of a person who is familiar with a system or culture under study, and who has the know-how of functioning within it to speak to their reality (Berry, 1989). The approach emphasizes on self-determination and self-reflection (Ibid). Consequently, the study placed premium on the voices of the children in foster care, foster parents and probation officers. Data collection was done in twenty one districts of the country. In each of the ten provinces of the country, two districts were purposively sampled to ensure that both urban and rural districts are covered. The thinking was to have a basis for comparison on rural to urban nuances around foster care. In the twenty one districts that were selected, five primary stakeholders are targeted to foster care. The first target group was the children in foster care. The study initially targeted to have 100 children in ten focus group discussions. This meant that there would have been one FGD per province. The 9-14 and 15-18 years of age categories were the target for the focus groups.

The research was not able to conduct group discussion in Matebeleland North. The reason why there was no focus group discussion in Matebeleland North is that there were no children who were above the age of nine, which the research had set as the minimum threshold. It is worth noting that most foster parents in the research preferred children below the age of three years. In line with research ethics of not exposing the participants to any physical, social, emotional and spiritual harm or potential harm of any nature, the study ensured that none of the respondents were exposed to any harm by not asking private and sensitive questions. During FGDs with children, the research exercised caution in asking questions since some of the children did not know that they were under foster care. Further, FGD times were set in cognisance of the school times of the children so that they would not miss school. It was only in one district that the FGD happened mid-morning with some children missing school around that time. The practice was corrected with the respective probation officer for future programs. Consent was sought from the children's guardians. Forty in-depth interviews were also conducted with foster parents from the ten provinces of the country, meaning that four foster parents were reached in each of the ten provinces. Prior to interviewing any of the respondents, the research team was oriented to seek informed consent. The respondents were presented with the option to choose whether they wanted to participate or not at any point in the study. In each of the districts visited, key informant interviews were conducted with the probation officers. The reason for targeting probation officers was that they oversee the process of placing children in foster care as well as carrying out regular supervision to households where children are in foster care.

The context of foster care in Zimbabwe

The research discovered that there limited uptake of foster care in the country. As at December 2018, there were 4306 children spread across ninety six residential care institutions (Department of Social Welfare, 2018).⁵ Meanwhile, as at 2018, there were 532 children under foster care. This means that there are some 3774 children who can potentially be in foster care but are not absorbed into families because there are simply no families who have undergone the screening process to absorb these children. The research therefore sought to explore the reasons why foster care uptake was low *viz* a *viz* the need.

Table 1. Distribution of foster children by province.

Province	Number of children in foster care
Harare	220
Masvingo	41
Midlands	22
Mashonaland West	44
Mashonaland East	14
Mashonaland Central	46
Bulawayo	40
Manicaland	37
Matebeleland North	9
Matebeleland South	21

Source: Department of Social Welfare (2018).

Statutory process of registering foster parents

According to the Children's Act, foster care has been defined as situations where children are placed by a competent authority, through a court order, for the purpose of alternative care with registered foster family other than the children's own family that has been selected, qualified, approved and supervised for providing such care.⁶ For one to be considered to be a foster parent, the individual or potential family has to go through screening by the Department of Social Welfare. The rigorous screening process for one to be considered a foster parent has been given as reason for low numbers of foster parents. One foster parent noted that:

...the process to be considered a foster parent was hectic. I had to make several trips to the Department of Social Welfare several times. I had to use my resources to get a police report and medical report, the things which the Department needs to register me as a foster parent [In-depth Interview, 18/01/2018, Female, Foster Parent, Harare District]

To corroborate the foregoing, one probation officer noted that he had several potential foster parents who had not seen through the screening process. He was however quick to note that the rigorous screening process was necessary since the family, when approved as foster parents, would be a strategic resource to the Department of Social Welfare. This is because approved families become also places of safety where the DSW can place children in dire need.

To demonstrate the greater need for foster care, in all instances where there were registered foster parents, there were no instances of registered foster parents who did not have children. This means that the country has more children in need of such care but are not receiving it. This unavailability of potential foster parents makes the children stuck either in places of safety, residential child

care facilities or various contexts of vulnerabilities. The research observed that the majority of the foster parents who have children are people who just walked into the DSW wanting to foster children. As has been noted earlier, these numbers of foster parents are disproportionate to the demand for foster care (Riley, 2012; Cantwell et al., 2012; Cooper, 2012).⁷

The concept of *mutorwa*

Ciganda et al. (2010) argue that Zimbabwe has many families that have absorptive capacity of taking care of vulnerable children. The research observed that there is a disproportionate distribution of foster parents between the urban and the rural. The general trend which can be observed from Table 1 is that predominantly rural provinces have less numbers of children under foster care compared to the urban provinces. The table also shows a conspicuously huge number of fostered children in Harare province.

Part of the explanation why Harare has more children in foster care is that most of the urbanites who foster children are not bound by the traditional beliefs which are inhibitive to the concept of foster care. Also in rural areas, kinship care is the main mechanism of taking care of the vulnerable members of society. Kinship care is embedded in the anthropocentric concept of Ubuntu. As Mbiti (1969) noted, the concept is premised on the belief that "I am because we are". As such, the communities get knit together and come up with mechanisms to take care of each other. The spirit of communitarianism can be considered to be strong in rural settings. In its idealistic sense, it ensures that all the vulnerable members of a society are taken care of and any nakedness is covered by the community.

Whilst the concept of communitarianism brings with it such cohesion and solidarity amongst the people living in the rural areas, it brings with it as well some exclusionary

tendencies. Due to the clear relationships that get established within communities on the basis of inter marriages and totems for example, when a stranger comes into the same community, they become conspicuous. In the Shona culture, there is a concept of *mutorwa*. A *mutorwa* is someone who is not related to you in any way be it through marriage or through totems. Whilst in the romanticisation of the Shona culture, it is easily argued that strangers are welcome. There are parameters within which one can interface with a *mutorwa*. One probation officer confirmed the existence of this phenomenon by noting that in the Shona culture, there is a proverb *chawawana idya nehama, mutorwa ane hanganwa* [when you find food, eat with your relatives, strangers are forgetful]. The meaning of this proverb in essence is that one has to take care of their own.

In the context of foster care therefore, families that are strongly embedded in their cultures and traditions find it difficult to take a *mutorwa* child into their homes as long as there are cousins and nephews still needing to be taken care of. It would be an issue of disapprobation for a family to take in a *mutorwa* child whilst there are relatives in need of care. This explains why in the rural settings, there is predominantly kinship care. It is only when families move to towns or to areas where they are not strongly linked with their clans that they can consider foster care and adoption. And when they do it, the research observed that it is kept as a sacred secret for life. The foregoing explains why it is easy for white foster parents to get a black child but there has not been an incident of black foster parents who either requested or fostered a white child. One probation officer observed that:

In my many years of working in the area of foster care, I have not found black foster parents wanting a white child for fostering. It is however acceptable for white foster parents to want black children. For black foster parents, the idea is to conceal the issue because if the relatives get to know that you went to foster a child of another race, clan or ethnic background, it may not be taken well. The relatives will ask whether you have finished taking care of the available relatives to go for a mutorwa... [Key Informant Interview, 22/01/18, Probation Officer]

Totemism

A totem is an animal, plant, or natural object (or representation of an object) that serves as the emblem of a clan or family among a tribal or traditional people. A totem represents a mystical or ritual bond of unity within the group. Totems are key symbols of religion and social cohesion; they are also important tools for cultural and educational transmission. Totems were often the basis for laws and regulations (Grundy, 1999).⁸ There are

connections of totems mainly through marriage. In the context of foster care, families who believe in this aspect find it difficult to foster or adopt a child who would have been abandoned with their totem not known. The challenge with this dynamic is that should the fostered child be involved in bad behaviour, it can be attributed to the ancestors of the clan where the child comes from which may be calling him or her to come back home, hence the bad behaviour. In such instances, for foster parents who believe in the doctrine of ancestors, they would feel that they do not have authority to discipline the child. One foster parent confirmed this assertion by noting that:

When a child you are keeping starts behaving badly, refusing to be sent, being lazy and being stubborn, it may be difficult to correct this child's behaving because maybe the ancestors of the child could be forcing him to behave like that so that he can go back to his roots. As someone I am not related to in any way, I may need to seriously think how to deal with it before the child does a lot of damage to drive the point home... [In-depth Interview, 25/02/2018, Female, Foster Parent, Gutu District]

Avenging spirits/Ngozi

There has been a plethora of literature that has been produced by several scholars on the traditional belief systems of the people of Zimbabwe (Taringa, 2006; Mawere, 2010; Perera, 2001; Mawere and Kadenge, 2010; Mutekwa, 2010; Maxwell, 1998; Maxwell, 1995; Bucher, 1980; Engelke, 2004).⁹ One fundamental aspect of the Zimbabwe traditional religion generally is this obstinate belief in the symbiotic connection between the dead and the living, the natural world and the invisible.

The research observed that linked to the concept of *mutorwa* is the aspect of *ngozi*. *Ngozi* is when a *mutorwa* dies under the custody of a particular family. The spirit of that individual will come to wreak havoc in the lives of the decedents of the person who would have caused the death of this *mutorwa* person. The spirit of the deceased can cause misfortunes of all kinds in the family including bareness, death and all sorts of calamities. One probation officer confirmed the foregoing when he noted that:

One of the reasons why people do not want to foster children is this belief in ngozi. There is a fear that if by any chance this child dies in my hands or a mistake happens causing this child to die, it will haunt my clan terribly. There are stories where the spirit of the deceased comes back to demand recourse. This belief is upheld by those who are still rooted in their traditional culture... [Key Informant Interview, 22/01/18, Probation Officer].

In view of the foregoing, the research observed that would-be foster parents would rather not have a *mutorwa* child amongst them since something may happen which may cause the death of the fostered child. Usually appeasing a *ngozi* requires another human being as well and substantial fortune such as cattle to be given to the family of the deceased. Families that are grounded in their cultural beliefs therefore do not want to take chances hence they will not foster or adopt children in need of care.

Syncretism

One of the reasons which the research noted as a discouraging factor to consideration of foster by would-be foster parents is heavily linked to the belief of *ngozi*. The traditional beliefs are heavily embedded into the value systems of the people to the extent that for those who then choose to become Christian or follow another religion, they take their beliefs with them. In a way, they 'indigenise' Christianity for it to incorporate their traditional beliefs and way of life (Grundy, 1999).¹⁰ This is called syncretism. One scholar aptly put it by saying:

There is increasing evidence that, even among African Christians of long standing, there continues to be a lively awareness of the presence and power of the ancestors, (even if the specific rituals are no longer performed in their entirety, that much illness and misfortune is still explained in terms of witch beliefs and that in certain communities the last hundred years has seen the increasing spread of new cults centring on possession by alien spirits (Pauw, 1963).¹¹

Manona (1981: 36) agrees with the foregoing assertion when he makes a general observation that Africans have never actually disassociated themselves from their ancestors. One reason for this conflation of beliefs has been that Christianity has had much to say about the individual, and about society at large, but little specific teaching about one's duty towards one's wider kin, a lacuna filled by continuing ancestor beliefs (Hammond-Tooke, 1986).¹² It therefore means that even for the families that are in religions such as Christianity still believe in such things as *ngozi* and totems. Such beliefs deter families to consider fostering children and adopting.

QUALITY OF LIFE FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

The above section discussed some of the deterring reasons for limited uptake of foster care in Zimbabwe. In spite of all the reasons given above, there are still some families which decide to foster children. This section details debunks the notion which many researches on foster care have implicitly noted, that foster care is the

destination for child protection. The section enunciates some realities within foster homes. The research used the quality of life conceptual framework to explore the kind of life which the children live under foster care. The World Health Organisation defines quality of life as:

...an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. It is a broad ranging concept affected in a complex way by the person's physical health, psychological state, personal beliefs, social relationships and their relationship to salient features of their environment.¹³

As can be deciphered from the definition, quality of life is a subjective interpretation of an individual hence the research placed premium on the views of the children and foster parents which were collected through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews respectively. Subjective interpretation of quality of life corroborates Campbell (1972) assertion that quality of life must be in the eye of the beholder. Milbrath (1978) also concurred with this notion by positing that '... I have come to the conclusion that the only defensible definition of quality of life is a general feeling of happiness', which is subjective to the person.

The research observed that the quality of life which fostered children experience in a home is a function of the kind of foster parents. These foster parents are not a monolithic group. The ACRWC appreciated this fact when it noted that:

'parents or other persons responsible for the child shall have the primary responsibility of the upbringing and development of the child and shall have the duty... to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities, conditions of living necessary to the child's development...' African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999).¹⁴

The ACRWC seemed to appreciate that 'abilities and financial capacities' of parents and other responsible persons would not be the same. The bottom line however is that child development has to be guaranteed. In consonance to the ACRWC, the research observed that broadly, there are three 'abilities and financial capacities' typologies of foster parents in the country namely chronic poor foster parents, transient poor foster parents and well off foster parents.

Foster parents' typology 1: Chronic poor

The concept of chronic poor foster parents is derived from the general definition of chronic poverty as has been posited by several scholars.¹⁵ The definition of chronic poverty used by this research was given by Hulme and

Table 2. Foster parent case study.

An elderly lady decided to foster a boy in the spirit of taking care of children. She offered to take care of the boy despite her poor background. Her rationale was that she had weaned off her own children and needed someone to stay with whom she would provide for since her children were working in other cities and towns.

For sustenance, the lady relies on farming proceeds and remittances from her children to take care of the basic needs for the fostered child. For school fees, she depends on support from the DSW, though the support does not cover all the essentials for school. She uses the child to seek for assistance from neighbours.

The fostered child together with two other grand children spend a lot of time after school on the farm. This affected the fostered child's education such that he did not pass his O' Level exams in 2017. This has affected the boy and his relations with the foster parent are strained. The boy wants to rewrite his O levels but does not have finances to do that so he is stuck at this home, doing farming a lot more since he has more time on his hands.

Shepherd (2003) who noted that chronic poverty is an experience of deprivation that lasts for a long period of time.¹⁶ Borrowing from Barrientos et al. (2005), the other dimension of this type of poverty is that households in this bracket have per capita income or consumption levels that are persistently below the poverty line during a long period of time.¹⁷ The research showed that there were foster parents who generally fitted the aforementioned definitions. The foster parents in this category resembled a speculative characteristic in that some of the reasons for choosing to foster children were a perceived opportunity to benefit from government support that comes with fostering. This observation came mainly from probation officers who had made this deduction on the basis of their interaction with the foster parents. The research had an opportunity to interview some of the foster parents that are in this category.

Foster parents in this category took the opportunity to complain about how they are not receiving any support to take care of the children. They underscored the need for the foster fees to be disbursed, even though they also were quick to say that the foster fees were insufficient to cover the basic needs of the households. One foster parent noted:

...When government gives us children, they need to be a responsible father to these children. I have not been receiving foster fees since 2013. How does the government think that I will take care of the children? I don't have a job and am old now. We used to come here at the Department of Social Welfare and would be given blankets, food for the children, clothes and seed for farming. Now, there is no support we get except for the 50 kg maize under drought relief... [In-depth Interview, 18/01/2018, Female, Foster Parent, Masvingo District].

In view of the foregoing citation, fostered children living in such a household would be deprived of basics since the foster parent will not be able to provide. The sentiments of the foster parent also exhibit a lot of reliance on the government with a seeming sense of entitlement premised on the fact that the foster parent is housing a 'government child'. One would wonder why the foster

parent chose to be one at their own volition if it is such a burden. It would appear that the foster parent did not count the cost of fostering, hence the assertion that such a foster parent was speculative in making the decision to be a foster parent. One officer pointed out that at least 60% of prospective foster parents that she had trained were anticipating getting direct material benefits through fostering a child.

The research observed that all foster parents in this category are all not formally employed. They either are vendors or undertake menial jobs for livelihood. Some of the foster parents in this classification once requested letters from the probation officers to use on begging for assistance from well-wishers. This request was turned down for ethical reasons. The average age of these foster parents is 55 years. Some of these foster parents having been taking children from the Department of Social Welfare since the 80s when the government used to have means of taking care of children in foster care (Table 2). During a focus group discussion, one child under this typology of foster care retorted:

Life is hard. I wish the government would support us with food, stationery at school. Sometimes I go to school hungry and without a complete school uniform. After school I would have to go and sell vegetables so that we can at least find some money... [Focus Group Discussion, 18/01/18, Child Respondent, Masvingo District]

Foster parents' typology 2: Transient poor

Transient poverty is associated with a fluctuation of income around the poverty line.¹⁸ Foster parents in this classification can be defined as precarious non poor. It means that they are able to meet their basic needs as long as the exogenous factors are amicable. They are easily affected by any changes in variables such as inflation rates, macroeconomic policies as well as natural happenings like *inter alia* droughts and flooding. Such families live in a precarious state. All the foster parents in this category had either formal employment or running

Table 3. Well off foster parent case study.

This couple decided to foster two children, a boy and a girl, in the spirit of providing someone with a chance after being abandoned. The couple already has four biological children. The husband has a Phd in electrical engineering working in a power utility company. Being a senior executive in the company, the husband has a facility at work that takes care of the school fees needs of his biological children. The fostered two children are not on this program because of different surnames. The couple decided however to take care of the educational needs of these two children. They go to a private school in their town together with the other children in this family. For health, the family is on company medical aid and have a family doctor.

The family resides on a 10 hectare plot where they built a house which allows each child to have their own room. The house has wifi therefore there is continuous presence of internet connectivity. The household also has a full bouquet digital satellite television.

The family encountered a challenge the previous holiday season. As part of the foster father's work benefits, he can take his family outside the country for holiday. The family could not go since the fostered children did not have passports. The children currently use the short birth certificates which make it difficult when travelling abroad.

their own small enterprise. The research observed that children fostered by households in this category had what they needed when the small businesses were doing well. In times when the macro economic conditions were not favourable, the family would take a direct hit. Children under this typology of foster parents go to school with the rest but may not have all the supplies that they need. There is a lot of improvising to make ends meet. The research observed that this group of foster parents do not necessarily begrudge the government when the foster fees are not paid. They also do not have an ardent pursuit of the government officials to ask for any form of assistance to take care of the children. They certainly will not ask a letter from the probation officer to beg for assistance. One child living in this kind of family noted that:

I honestly do not have anything to complain about. I see that my parents are really trying to provide for us. Sometimes we get what we ask for but sometimes we do not. Like everyone else at school, we sometimes get sent home for not paying school fees. The teachers understand our kind of life... [Focus Group Discussion, 25/02/18, Child Respondent, Kadoma District]

Foster parents' typology 3: Well off

The second category is one where the foster parents are well off and have means to take care of the fostered child. These more often are well educated usually with formal or predictable income from business or acquired skills. This category of foster parents would not want any support from the government in taking care of the fostered children. The major support they need from the government is facilitation with getting birth certificates as well as expediting adoption papers. In Hwange and Bulawayo, the foster parents wrote letters to the DSW indicating that they did not need any foster fees or even school fees support.

The children in this kind of family are provided with the general basics that they need to realise their full potential.

Since foster parents in this category are well off, they naturally assume an elevated role in contexts such as churches, schools and so forth. That profile also benefits the fostered child as they ride on the identity of the foster parents. This observation is in consonance with assertion by Bhatta et al. (2006) who argued that an individual's level of human capital itself is influenced by their family's income and assets. As such, household wealth is a potential determinant of human capital at the individual level.¹⁹ Human capital is an important ingredient for the success of any person. Children in well off families have a lot of it through their parents. On the contrary, poor households have a significant negative impact on an individual's ability to accumulate human capital. It means that in those households, children will not have a lot of networks necessary for their development (Table 3).

ADMINISTRATION OF DISCIPLINE IN FOSTER HOMES

The concept of *in loco parentis* means "in place of a parent" (Harrison, 1996).²⁰ Foster parents therefore get children in respect for this principle. They however expressed concerns with the parameters of the application of the principle of *in loco parentis* as it relates disciplinary authority. Foster parents expressed disdain on the fact that the Department of Social Welfare would give them children with strict instructions that the children should not have corporal punishment administered on them (Table 4). The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child provides that:

*Parents or other persons responsible for the child shall have the primary responsibility of the upbringing and development of the child and shall have the duty...to ensure that domestic discipline is administered with humanity and in a manner consistent with the inherent dignity of the child.*²¹

This provision seems to imply that foster parents have a key role to play in administering 'domestic discipline'.

Table 4. Consolidation of foster parents’ typologies.

Foster parents typologies	Reason for foster care	Support needed from the government	Educational levels	Employment status	Generalised Quality of life for the Children
Chronic poor and speculative foster parents	<p>-possible benefits that can be obtained from the government and well wishers</p> <p>-purported love for children</p>	<p>-foster fees</p> <p>-scholastic needs such as stationery, uniforms, payment of fees,</p> <p>-food</p> <p>-assistance with utility bills</p>	<p>-more often without any tertiary qualification</p>	<p>-formally unemployed</p> <p>-conducting activities such as vending, cross border trading</p>	<p>Health- When the children get sick, they are taken to public hospitals with an Assisted Medical Treatment Order (AMTO). There were however complaints that the AMTO does not cover for medicines that may be needed by the children</p> <p>Education- the children go to public schools and they rely on either Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) or school fees payment by the government. There were complaints that the support provided is not holistic to include such items as stationery and other needs that the children may have. For school uniforms, the Department provides through Enbee.</p> <p>Environmental- children raised concerns that they would appreciate support from the government for bills payment because most households in this category struggled with paying utility bills especially electricity. The children also suggested buying of beds and food supplies. The basic living standards for children in this category are deplorable in the category</p> <p>Emotional- Most of the children knew that they were in foster care. This was primarily because the foster parent uses them to mobilise resources from the community around them.</p> <p>Social- the children did not exhibit a lot of confidence though some of them were articulate in outlining the issues they needed fixed.</p> <p>Spiritual- all the parents indicated that they go with the children to the church chosen by the foster parent.</p>
Transient poor but foster parents	<p>-love for children</p>	<p>-foster fees</p> <p>-scholastic needs such as stationery, uniforms, payment of fees,</p> <p>-food</p> <p>-assistance with utility bills</p>	<p>-tertiary qualifications</p>	<p>- these are sometimes employed in public service or elsewhere but at the lower echelons hence making little money to be able to take care of the needs of the fostered children.</p>	<p>-Overall, the foster parents in this category endeavour to provide for the children using all the means that they have. In some instances they fail to meet all the needs of the child. Such households are in transient poverty therefore the state of affairs in the household vacillates depending on agricultural productivity of that year, or good economic policy and so forth. The quality of life for children in this category is not the same but ranges on the border line between having what is necessary to have quality of life and in some instances not having at all.</p> <p>Health- the households relies on the government to provide access to quality health care for the fostered child. This household therefore needs AMTOs when a child gets sick hence issues around the lack of comprehensive cover of AMTO in taking care of the health needs of the child is something that foster parents in this category raised.</p> <p>Education- the children’s tuition fees are paid by the government. The foster parents however are able to provide the other scholastic needs of children such as stationery and civic day payments.</p> <p>Environmental- the environment for households in this category presents challenges for the child to flourish. In the era of privatised public goods like electricity and water, the foster parents sometimes do not have money to pay utility bills and to have running water.</p> <p>Emotional- though the household may not be able to meet all the needs of the fostered child, the latter however grows in a loving family that can help the child to reach their full potential in spite of the antagonistic circumstances. Children in such homes are able to have solidarity with their parents and lower their expectations on what they can get from the foster parents.</p> <p>Social-the child in this category are able to integrate into the society as they face similar challenges that the other households around them face. Usually foster parents in this category stay in high density areas if it is an urban setting.</p> <p>Spiritual- just like any other category of this typology, there seem to have been a unanimity that foster parents provide guidance to the fostered children on religious matters. This is primarily because of the age of the fostered children which is averagely 3 years.</p>

Table 4. Contd.

Well off foster parents	-the desire to give other children a chance in life -barrenness	-assistance with getting long birth certificates and passports for the children -expediting the process of adoption	-mostly tertiary qualifications, including PhDs	- mostly formally employed -in a rural setting, well-resourced with land, cattle and necessary equipment for successful agriculture	<p>Children fostered in such families are given remarkable opportunities to flourish and realise their full potential without many impediments. Children in this kind of family, foster parents do not generally have closer monitoring by the parents since the parents will be preoccupied with their business or career endeavours. This arrangement leaves the children without parental supervision for the greater part.</p> <p>Health- such families procure private medical facilities therefore they would not need the AMTOs. It is well within their means to take care of the health needs of the fostered child.</p> <p>Education- the families do not need support from the government through BEAM or other facilities. They are able to take the fostered child to well resourced schools, including private schools in some instances. The family is also able to provide most scholastic needs of the child.</p> <p>Environmental- the child is given an environment which has most requisites for a healthy childhood.</p> <p>Emotional- There is a dynamic of irregular and inconsistent availability of the foster parents to provide parental and emotional care to the child. This is because such households are characterised by several career and societal obligations which make them not be available all the time.</p> <p>Social- A foster child coming from such a family does not struggle to integrate into the society as they ride on their parents’ social capital.</p> <p>Spiritual-All households interviewed go to a Christian church despite the plethora of variations. The choice of the church is done by the foster parents in the spirit of family and doctrinal cohesion.</p>
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Some of the foster parents felt that the DSW disenfranchised them by not allowing them to beat the children whom they were fostering. One parent noted that:

The Department gives us these children and tells us that under no circumstances should we beat them. If we do not beat them, they will become unbridled. They need to be shown the way. Even the training we were given by Child Protection Society, they said that we cannot beat the children. Exactly how do I become the parent if I cannot beat the child when they do something wrong for the umpteenth time without listening to verbal rebuke? [In depth Interview, 8/01/18, Female Foster Parent, Harare District].

In building up this argument on some foster parents’ disapproval of the government directive for not beating children, another foster parent noted that:

When a child continues to do bad behaviour, we have been told that we should bring him/her to the probation officer. What does that say about me as a parent? The child won’t respect me knowing that I will not punish them...? [In depth Interview, 22/01/18, Female Foster Parent, Masvingo District].

As can be deciphered from the citations above, the foster parents seem to be in disapprobation with the policy that the government came up with for not disciplining by beating any fostered child. There were sentiments that the policy was derived from westerns ideologies. One parent lamented that:

How come we just took the policies that came from overseas to make them our own? Why did we not see how the issue of banning the beating of children can be replaced before we talked about abolishing it? Who also did they consult? If

you say we should not beat the children, then give us the options that are viable so that we will not be stranded...? [In depth Interview, 15/01/18, Female Foster Parent, Makonde District].

The above quotation of a foster parent challenges the policy of prohibition of corporal punishment as a policy that was not done with wider consultations. The research observed that the main tool for disciplining children which some of the foster parents knew was beating. Removing beating from the equation therefore made the parents not to have options. It must be noted however that in the traditional cultures of Zimbabwe, beating of children was not the first option available to the parents. During an in-depth interview with a foster parent from Gutu District, the latter gave the research team a catalogue of Shona proverbs which indicated that beating was not the only avenue for disciplining children. Table 5 is an outline of some of the

Table 5. Shona proverbs on disciplining of children.

Shona Proverb	Translation	Interpretation
Potsi haarwirwi	The first time is not worth fighting over	Beating someone for first offence or bad behaviour is not right. Action would need to be taken if there is repetition.
Yafamba kamwe hayiteyirwi musungo	You will not put a snare for an animal that would have tracked once on an area.	A single transgression should not be taken seriously.
Mhembwe rudzi inozvara mwana ane ruzhumwi	A duiker is one of a species, if it bears a child, he will have a tuft on his head.	The behaviour of children reflects the parents. This means instead of disciplining the child, the parents need to introspect if they are setting the right examples.
Mwana asingachemi anofira mumbereko	A child who does not cry dies in the cradle	A child should voice out his or her complaints and concerns
Chirere mangwana chigozokurerawo	Care for it and it will care for you tomorrow.	The motivation of nurturing of adults to children is to have responsible children who will take care of their communities and elders.
Kurayira kunoda pwere. Mukuru ndimambo	Discipline requires a child. An adult is a chief.	Give advice to children so that they grow up knowing the right way. When one is an adult, it will be too late as they may not heed the advice.
Kuziva mbuya huudzwa	To know one's grandmother means being told who they are.	Children should be taught even the seemingly obvious things. How can they know unless they are told?
Chenga ose manhanga hapana risina mhodzi.	Take care of all pumpkins since there is none without seeds	Take care and nurture both boys and girls, they all have something to offer.
Rambakuudzwa akazoonekwa nembonje pahuma	Headstrong was found with a head wound.	The one who refused to be advised will get permanent scars which could have been avoided.
Regai dzive shiri, mazai haana muto.	Let them be birds, eggs do not have soup	Let the children grow and realise their full potential. Child marriage does not produce fruit.
Kuudza mwana hupedzisira.	When you tell a child, do it like it's the last time	Take time to explain instructions to children as there may not be another opportunity to do so
Gudo guru peta muswe kuti vaduku vakutye	A big baboon should fold its tail for the small ones to fear it	The adults need to lead by example if they are to get respect from the young people around them

Source: Compiled by the author from in depth interviews with foster parents (2018).

Shona²² proverbs that guided how the parents dealt with their children in issues of discipline.

Proverbs embody a people's culture, values and worldviews. The aforementioned proverbs of the Shona people demonstrate that premium was put on telling or advising the children, not necessarily administration of corporal punishment. Administration of corporal punishment was not the first option available to parents as can be envisaged from the proverbs above. As such, when foster parents feel disenfranchised to administer discipline on the children they are fostering, it is partly a lack of understanding of the requisite ethos that were used historically in raising children. The lack of this indigenous knowledge system in some foster parents on raising of children was laid bare by some of the responses of the children during the focus group discussions. The children noted that whilst the government had made beating of the children unacceptable, the foster parents then resorted to other

means which equally violated the right of the fostered children. In a focus group discussion in Kadoma, one child's narration epitomised the general sentiment of the children by saying:

I would rather be beaten, then you know that the matter is resolved. If you refuse to be beaten, the foster parent will threaten to take you back to the Department. I don't want to go back where I came from. I would rather they beat me and I know that I have somewhere to stay. What's the point of refusing to be beaten then you are homeless again...? [Focus Group Discussion, 11/01/18, Child Respondent, Kadoma District]

This sentiment was expressed a lot by the children. They had a concern that they felt like they were treated differently since they could not be beaten. Such treatment made them to feel as though they did not belong. The children did not want to be treated in any special way

Table 6. Children's perspectives to physical punishment.

Offences that qualified to be beaten for	Offences that do not warrant one to be beaten
When I stole all the relish of the family and ate by myself	When I break a glass or plate by mistake
When I forgot to feed the chickens after being reminded several times	When I did not do well at school
When I picked up a cigarette and smoked it	When the teacher beat me because my books were not covered and yet I did not have the money to buy book covers
When I pulled down the television and it smashed to the ground	When I overslept because I was tired
When I forgot to inform the parents that my school uniform needed to go for dry cleaning until the day before schools opened	When I lost money for bread after being sent to the shops
	When my books at school got stolen from my drawer

Source: Compiled by author from focus group discussions with children in foster care.

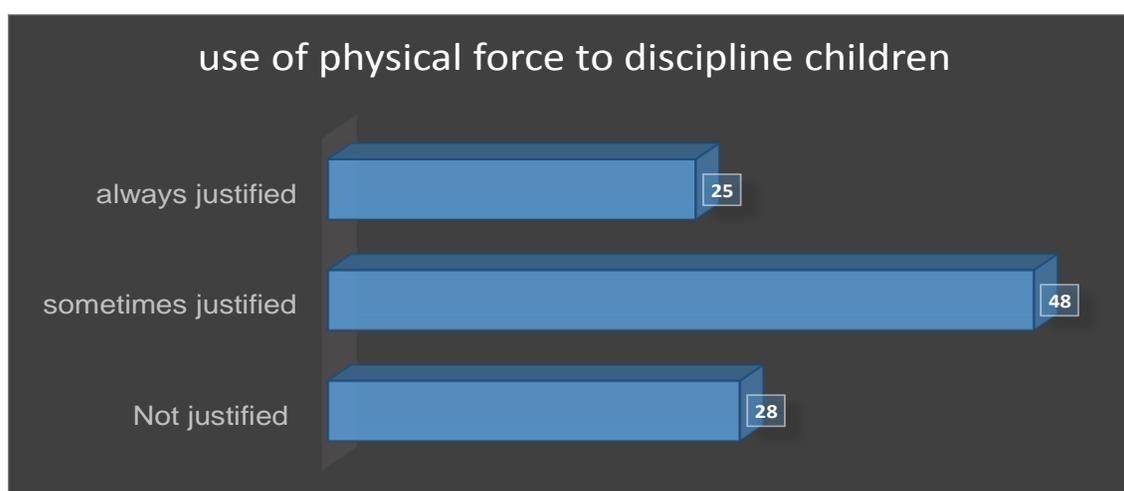


Figure 1. Public Sentiments in Zimbabwe on the use of physical force to discipline children.

Source: Adapted from the Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 156, 12 July 2017.

because they had been placed there by the government, they wanted to be treated like any child would be treated. This dynamic delicately poises the carefulness of the foster parents in that the fostered children had come through a court order and were subject to periodic supervision from a probation officer. Whilst the monitoring by the Department of Social Welfare can be said to be needful, it however made the foster children to be somewhat 'different' from the other children who may be in the household.

Physical abuse versus disciplining

In some of the focus group discussions, children distinguished between physical abuse and being disciplined. One child noted that:

When a parent takes shamhu²³ to beat you after you do something wrong, that is not abuse. When they take a cooking stick or another big instrument to beat you that is physical abuse [Focus Group Discussion, 18/01/18, Child Respondent, Masvingo District]

The sentiments of the child presuppose that there is administration of discipline which is understandable to the child depending on the crime committed. There is however some administration of discipline that becomes abuse. The research interrogated this aspect by asking the children to outline some of the crimes which they thought were justified to be beaten and those which did not justify. Table 6 outlines the children's responses.

Another aspect that the children raised on discipline was that if they were beaten after getting an explanation of why they were beaten and also given the opportunity to respond, they appreciated it rather than be beaten in the spasm of the parent's emotions. The views of the children as cited above corroborate what the 2017 Afrobarometer found out when they conducted a survey earlier in 2017. The survey found that 28% of Zimbabweans believe the use of physical force to discipline children is never justified; 48% believe it is sometimes justified, and 25% believe it is always justified as illustrated in Figure 1 (Ndoma, 2017).²⁴

The figure shows that the majority of the respondents

agreed with the sentiments of the children in focus group discussions conducted by this study in that physical force should not be used at all times. The foster parents who felt disenfranchised of the *in loco parentis* for not being allowed to beat the fostered children fell into the 'always justified' category of the cited research.

Conclusion

As momentum is growing in making foster care be a viable child protection tool in the country, there is need to interrogate some of the factors that are limiting its uptake. This paper has shown that there are several embedded cultural and traditional beliefs that would need to be confronted through foster care promotional initiatives.

The research also showed that foster care provides children with an opportunity to grow up in a normal family whose characteristics are heterogeneous hence needing to be differentiated. Overall, the quality of life for children in foster care is varied. Some of the children get into families that set them a platform to flourish whilst others get into families which themselves have limited opportunities. This is reality of human existence since all the families cannot have similar opportunities for their children. Again, the aspiration is for children to grow up in a family environment which fosters child development. The screening process in Zimbabwe does not favour only the rich. The research has shown that families that are poor have been given children to foster. There may be a risk of discriminating against poor families who may want to foster children. With higher demand and limited supply for foster care, when a family goes through the entire screening process, it is a huge opportunity for a child who may spend their entire childhood in a residential child care institution. If the process were to set high wealth threshold for approving the kind of families that can foster children, it would be flawed to assume that well to do families better protect children. The paper has shown that there are different child protection issues in all the three typologies of foster families. The paper has given caution that placing a child in foster care is by no means the end in itself as there are various vicissitudes and nuances within these families which need closer attention to ensure better quality of life for children.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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END NOTES

¹ African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), Preamble

² Zimbabwe Constitution, Section 81 (1)

³ Zimbabwe Constitution, Section 19 (2)

⁴ The six safety nets for child protection start with the nuclear family, followed by extended family, then community care, foster care, adoption and institutional care as the last resort.

⁵ Unpublished Department of Social Welfare 2018 Annual Report.

⁶ Children's Act, 5:06

⁷ A recent unpublished research titled 'National Foster Care Baseline Report' by the Department of Social Services showed that there are 532 children under foster care as at 2018 compared to a population of 13 million people as per the 2012 national census.

⁸ Grundy M (1999), Syncretic Religion in Zimbabwe: the Evidence of Sculpture, Brown University;

⁹ See Maxwell D (1995). Witches, prophets and avenging spirits: The second Christian movement in North-East Zimbabwe. *Journal of Religion in Africa/Religion en Afrique*, 25, 309., Bucher H (1980). *Spirits and power: an analysis of Shona cosmology*. Oxford University Press., Maxwell D (1998). 'Delivered from the spirit of poverty?': Pentecostalism, prosperity and modernity in Zimbabwe. *Journal of religion in Africa*, 28(Fasc. 3), 350-373., Perera S (2001). Spirit possessions and avenging ghosts. *Remaking a world: Violence, social suffering and recovery*, 157-200., Taringa N (2006). How environmental is African traditional religion? *Exchange*, 35(2), 191-214., Mawere M and Kadenge M (2010). Zvierwa as African IKS: epistemological and ethical implications of selected Shona taboos. *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 9(1):29-44., Mutekwa A (2010). The avenging spirit: Mapping an ambivalent spirituality in Zimbabwean literature in English. *African Studies*, 69(1), 161-176., Mawere M (2010). Indigenous Knowledge Systems' (IKSs) potential for establishing a moral, virtuous society: Lessons from selected IKSs in Zimbabwe and Mozambique. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 12(7), 209-221., Engelke M (2004). Discontinuity and the Discourse of Conversion. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 34(1), 82-109.

¹⁰ Grundy M (1999), Syncretic Religion in Zimbabwe: the Evidence of Sculpture, Brown University.

¹¹ Pauw BA (1963). African Christians and their Ancestors. *African Independent Church Movements*.

¹² Hammond-Tooke WD (1986). The aetiology of spirit in southern Africa. *African Studies*, 45(2), 157-170.

¹³ <http://www.who.int/healthinfo/survey/whoqol-qualityoflife/en/> (Accessed 29 January 2018)

¹⁴ African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Article 20 (b)

¹⁵ See Devereux S (2002). Can social safety nets reduce chronic poverty? *Development Policy Review*, 20(5), 657-675., Kothari U (2002). *Migration and chronic poverty* (Vol. 16). Manchester: Institute for Development Policy and Management: Chronic Poverty Research Centre., Aliber M (2003). Chronic poverty in South Africa: Incidence, causes and policies. *World development*, 31(3), 473-490., Hulme D and Shepherd A (2003). Conceptualizing chronic poverty. *World development*, 31(3):403-423., Bird K, Hulme D, Shepherd A, and Moore K (2002). Chronic poverty and remote rural areas. *Chronic Poverty Research Centre Working Paper*, (13).

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¹⁷ Barrientos A, Hulme D and Shepherd A (2005). Can Social Protection Tackle Chronic Poverty? *The European Journal of Development Research* 17 (1):8-23.

¹⁸ Gaiha R and Deolalikar AB (1993). Persistent, Expected and Innate Poverty: Estimates for Semi-Arid Rural South India. *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 17(4):409-421.

¹⁹ Dev Bhatta S and Sharma S (2006). The determinants and consequences of chronic and transient poverty in Nepal.

²⁰ Harrison R (1996). Student discipline by school principals and boards of trustees: Powers, procedures and remedies. In *School discipline and students' rights*. Papers presented at a seminar held by the Legal Research Foundation of the University of Auckland at the Auckland College of Education on 19 March 1996 (pp. 56-86). Auckland: The Foundation.

²¹ ACRWC, Article 20 (c)

²² According to the constitution of Zimbabwe, the country has the following officially recognized languages: Chewa, Chibarwe, English, Kalanga, Koisan, Nambya, Ndau, Ndebele, Shangani, Shona, sign language, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda and Xhosa. The research however identified only Shona proverbs. As such, this is one of the limitations of the study. By no means is Zimbabwe culturally and linguistically homogeneous to have Shona proverbs represent all. Suffice to note though that Shona is the widely spoken language in the country.

²³ *Shamhu* implies a small thin branch of a tree. It is usually used to swipe the legs without causing any injuries on the child. When the *shamhu* is thin, it causes a twinging pain that however does not damage the skin.

²⁴ Ndoma S (2017) Contrary to court ruling, Zimbabweans endorse parental right to physically discipline children: Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 156, 12 July 2017 accessed at <http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/assets/pdfs/states-reports/Zimbabwe.pdf> (Accessed, 7/02/18)