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Child fostering and education in Ghana

Samuel K. M. Agblorti¹ and Augustine Tanle²

¹ Department of Population & Health University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana

Email: miledzi@yahoo.com ² Department of Population & Health University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana Email: augtanle@yahoo.com

Abstract

Introduction The literature on fostering of children and their welfare, especially on education, presents ambivalent outcomes. While some children in foster care may have access to better education than what would have been possible in their biological residences, others are prevented from attending school regularly or do not attend school at all due to labour demands in their foster households.

Drawing on data collected by researchers as part of a larger study of child mobility in Ghana, Malawi and South Africa, we explore the extent of child fostering in two agro-ecological zones in Ghana and how it relates to education.

Methods Data in the child mobility study were collected in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, followed by a questionnaire survey. This generated data for children (between 8 and 18) – both in-school and out-of-school.

Findings Our findings lean heavily towards the school of thought that maintains that child fostering is detrimental to the educational outcomes of fostered children. Even where children were fostered by relatives, the negative impact on education was evident. Fostered children were less likely to be enrolled in school, less likely to be attending regularly, and more likely to be ‘behind’ in their schooling, than those living with their biological parents. Serial fostering of children emerged as another dimension of fostering that needs further investigation in terms of its impacts on schooling.

Conclusion We conclude that fostering impacts negatively on foster children’s educational experiences and outcomes.

Keywords: Child fostering, educational outcomes, Ghana, serial fostering, current grade, current age

Introduction

There is a growing literature on the phenomenon of child fostering in general and, in particular, its impacts on the welfare of children. However, empirical reports on the effects of fostering on child welfare present mixed outcomes dependent on the social context of fostering, the motives for fostering, the existence of living mothers or fathers and the relationships between biological and foster parents (Serra, 2009: 158). Serra (2009) argues, based on earlier works by Akresh (2004) and Bennell (2005), that where fostering is sought by both sending and receiving households within acceptable cultural contexts, foster children do not appear to be disadvantaged with regard to schooling and therefore cautions against outright condemnation of non-parent residence as detrimental to children's welfare. This argument supports an earlier assertion by Goody (1982) that the purpose of pursuing fostering was to provide opportunities for the fostered child in terms of widened knowledge, experience and training.

In spite of the foregoing arguments, household labour deficits have been identified as a major force behind the decision by a household to accept foster children in West Africa. Ainsworth (1996) noted in Côte d'Ivoire that the motivating factor for fostering-in children aged 7-14 was solely driven by the need for children's labour services. This underpins Akresh's (2009) argument that parents reap the benefits of fostering whilst the fostered children often shoulder the costs. The sending parents benefit not only by receiving material payments; but they also save income that would have been used for the upkeep of the fostered child. Similarly, receiving parents benefit through the services provided by the fostered children, usually at a lower cost than alternatives.

The possible negative impacts of fostering on the welfare of children notwithstanding, Serra (2009: 166), when rationalising the pervasiveness of fostering in Africa, argues that the phenomenon "is an efficient way of raising and training children and preparing them for adult life under very specific conditions typical of African societies". Bledsoe (1990) made a similar observation within the Mende ethnic group of Sierra Leone: children can develop best by leaving the comfortable yet confining home in which they were born and striking out into the wider world. Kuyini et al. (2009: 440) put it more forcefully, asserting that the principal aim of fostering is to "provide the best and/or appropriate alternative care for children whose biological parents, for some reason, are unable to undertake the caring role". As Madhavan (2001) argues, kinship, family and networks need to be examined in order to understand the effects of fostering on children.

Child fostering in Sub-Saharan Africa has been attributed to a number of reasons. In Ghana, Kuyini et al. (2009) reported that strengthening and maintaining family ties were the key reasons for fostering children but were quick to point out the intimidation and physical and emotional abuse that characterised the phenomenon. Vandermeersch (2002) and Serra (2009) considered fostering as a demographic regulator of family size. Bledsoe's (1990) report from Sierra Leone regarded fostering as central to child-rearing and socialising of children. In Burkina Faso, Akresh (2009) and Hampshire (2006) observed the role of fostering in regulating household size as a temporary coping strategy against external shocks while Ansell and Van Blerk (2004) noted in Malawi that fostering could help meet household labour deficits. These reasons reinforce the argument by Serra (2009) above that where there is an agreement between out-fostering and in-fostering households within acceptable cultural contexts, the impacts of fostering could be minimal.

The effects of fostering on children's educational outcomes present similarly ambivalent reports (Pilon, 2003). On the one hand, children may have access to education as a result of being fostered whereas on the other hand, household demands sometimes prevent children in foster households from enrolling in school. However, foster children's schooling, according to Charmes (1993) is often more vulnerable and unpredictable than that of non-fostered children (Cited in Pilon, 2003). Charmes notes that foster children, especially girls, were more vulnerable to disenrolment from school than non-foster children. Similarly, Kuyini et al. (2009) found in Ghana that a quarter of the fostered children they interviewed indicated that they did not think that they were given the same treatment as non-fostered children. But Zimmerman (2003) noted in South Africa that fostered children were just as likely to attend school as non-fostered children, because of purposive fostering of children to households that were better able to enrol them in school. Fostering could therefore affect children's welfare in general and their education in particular either way – positively or negatively. With parental background being a key determinant of children's educational outcomes (Smyth et al., 2009; Nonoyama-Tarumi, 2008), this paper contributes to the debate by exploring the relationship between child fostering and education in Ghana using data from two agro-ecological zones – coastal and forest.

Child fostering defined

Child fostering, a pervasive phenomenon in Sub-Saharan Africa (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1984; Akresh, 2005), has been variously defined by different authors. The phenomenon, which is widespread in Ghana, is generally considered as the relegation of parental responsibilities to non-biological carers (Vandermeersch,

2002). Isiugo-Abanihe (1983) defines child fostering similarly as sending children out to be raised by non-biological parents. Pilon (2003), while admitting the two definitions above, goes further to give a precise age range – from birth to nineteen. However, there are situations where fostered children are orphans and therefore the issue of relegating one's parental responsibility does not pertain. Drawing on these definitions, we define a foster child as one who is not above 19 years and not staying with his/her biological parents whether such parents are alive or dead.

Two categories of fostering have been identified in the literature – kinship and non-kinship (Kuyini et al., 2009). According to Scannapieco, Hegar, and McAlpine (1997) kinship foster care involves sending children to blood relations to be catered for, while the foster parents in non-kinship foster care are not blood relations. In the case of Ghana in particular, kinship foster care might not necessarily be regarded as the relegation of parental responsibilities as noted by Vandermeersch (2002) because kinship foster care is culturally accepted within the extended family system. However, we are quick to note that fostering (whether to kinship foster household or non-kinship foster household as noted by Kuyini et al. (2009)) could mean relegating parental responsibilities. Often, arguments which tend to defend fostering as a way of securing better future opportunities for foster children contend that the in-foster households are usually better in terms of their potential to provide better future opportunities for foster children than the out-fostering households (see Serra, 2009; Pilon, 2003; Bledsoe, 1990). Thus, the better opportunities in the in-fostering household serve as a motivating factor. Although not a major focus for this paper, it is important to note that a particular fostering arrangement – whether kinship or non-kinship – could have different outcomes on the welfare of fostered children based on Kuyini's et al. (2009) argument that fostering, especially kinship fostering, is intended to keep family ties alive.

Data and methods

This paper draws on data collected in Ghana as part of a large multi-country research project: *Children, Transport and Mobility in Sub-Saharan Africa* (www.dur.ac.uk/child.mobility), designed and led by Durham University (UK), in collaboration with the University of Cape Coast (Ghana), the University of Malawi and CSIR (South Africa). Details of the project study design, methodology and analysis (where this relates to Ghana) can be found in Porter et al. (this volume); see also Porter et al. (2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d, 2011a in press); Robson et al. (2009). Briefly, the Child Mobility project was conducted in 24 field-sites across three countries: Ghana, Malawi and South Africa. In each field-site, qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to gather data

on children's mobility in relation to education, health, livelihoods, transport and migration. In this paper, we draw on the material on mobility and education collected in the Ghana field-sites.

There were eight field-sites in Ghana: four sites (one urban, one peri-urban, one rural with basic services and one remote rural, classifications based on those of the Ghana Statistical Service, 2000) in each of two agro-ecological zones: coastal savannah (Central Region, around Cape Coast) and forest (Brong Ahafo Region, around Sunyani). A variety of methods were used to solicit data from the respondents by two categories of field assistants – adult researchers and child researchers (Porter et al, 2010a, c; Robson et al, 2009; Hampshire et al, forthcoming 2012). This paper draws on the data collected by adult researchers. Quantitative data involved a survey of 1005 child respondents aged between 8-18 (around 125 children per settlement). This number included both in-school and out-of-school children living with either foster parents or biological parents. Households were sampled randomly along transects in each study settlement; one child per household was then selected for interview at random by drawing lots.

Qualitative data collection involved focus groups and in-depth individual interviews with both in-school and out-of-school children (fostered and biological children), as well as with parents, teachers and community leaders. Both foster parents and non-foster parents were interviewed. Participants of the focus groups were selected with the help of the Assemblyman/woman¹ for each study site. In selecting respondents for the in-depth interviews, spatial distribution of the respondents was taken into consideration. The fieldwork started in January, 2007. This was preceded by a pilot study from the 10th -19th January, 2007. The pilot study was conducted in communities with similar social characteristics to the selected study centres. The fieldwork lasted till October, 2008.

School enrolment and parenting background of child respondents

School enrolment, especially at the primary level, has been phenomenally high in Ghana, reaching a gross ratio² of 98% for males and 97% for females. (UNICEF, 2007). A more refined measure, the net ratio³, puts this at 75% for both males and females. The substantial differences between the gross and net

¹ An Assemblyman/woman is an elected member to the District Assembly, the lowest political administration structure in Ghana.

² Enrolment ratio regardless of age and grade

³ Enrolment ratio of children in grades which their ages qualified them to be.

measures (23% for males and 22% females) in Ghana by 2007 show clearly that many children are lagging behind the appropriate class for their age group. In Ghana, the recent increase in school enrolment has been attributed to the pro-poor policies introduced within the last decade, especially the Capitation Grant⁴ and School Feeding Programme⁵. A teacher from coastal Ghana summarised the reason for high enrolment rate as follows:

Because the capitation grant caters for school fees, about 90% of children tend to come to school regularly. Apart from the capitation grant, there is also the realisation by majority of parents/guardians that sending their children/wards to school can be rewarding in the future. Some also send their children to school to avoid public ridicule.

[A basic school teacher, Female, Coastal Ghana]

However, one should not lose sight of the fact that pro-poor policies alone are not enough to enrol and maintain all children in school. For example, viewed within the earlier context provided by Ainsworth (1996) that household labour deficits were responsible for fostering; pro-poor policies would not make any substantial impact on the educational outcomes of fostered children if household duties were given priority (Esia-Donkoh and Mariwah, this volume).

Table 1: Living arrangements of children interviewed (Children aged 8-18y)

Response	Frequency	%
Staying with no one	3	0.3
With both biological parents	542	53.9
With biological mother only	201	20.0
With biological father only	55	5.5
Fostered (with neither biological parent)	200	19.9
Missing	4	0.4
N	1005	100.0

Our quantitative data show that about a fifth of children surveyed were fostered (i.e. living with neither biological parent, according to our definition above): Table 1. A quarter were staying with one biological parent and only just over half were living with both biological parents. This relatively high proportion of children living without their biological parents reflects the wide cultural

⁴ This grant covers school fees at the basic level of education in Ghana, although parents still incur other expenses in sending their children to school.

⁵ Under this programme, school children at the basic level are provided with one nutritious meal per day but the programme does not cover the entire country as at the time of this study.

acceptability of fostering as a child-rearing strategy in Ghana (see Kuyini et al, 2009).

Perceptions of formal education and school enrolment

In order to understand and appreciate why foster/biological parents would want to cater for the educational needs of the children under their care or not, it is important to put into perspective their own perceptions about formal education. If they perceive education as a necessary condition for successful outcomes in adulthood then denying foster children such opportunity may be regarded as tantamount to active discrimination. But if foster parents do not perceive education as a necessary tool for the fortunes of individuals during adulthood it would be difficult to attribute the disadvantaged position of foster children as a deliberate attempt by the foster parents not to cater for their educational needs.

The qualitative data show that formal education is widely perceived as the gateway to future success in Ghana (Porter et al. 2011 in press). Respondents indicate that going to school serves as a means to acquiring the necessary ingredients for a successful adulthood. Indeed, this was reported by both foster and biological parents as one of the reasons for the high enrolment rate these days. The following views are illustrative of the majority of interviewees' perspectives:

These days, it is important to send children to school. The world has changed. Because I never went to school, I am unable to get any well-paid job to do. I don't want my children to face the same problem in the future. My children must go to school in order to brighten their future chances of getting good job.
[Biological Parent, Female, Rural, Coastal zone]

Now, you cannot do without education. Even if you want to sell in the market you need a certain level of education. For example, now they expect that you have at least Junior Secondary School certificate before you are given driving licence so you can't do away with education. Also, education brightens your chances in the future.

[Foster parent, Male, Rural, Coastal zone]

The above statements from both a foster and a biological parent indicate that formal education is seen as being indispensable nowadays. Even parents who had no formal education themselves saw the need to educate their children as demonstrated in the first statement. These two

statements, therefore, set the context within which foster children's access to education was analysed.

Most children also reported the importance of formal education:

We need to attend school to ensure a brighter future for ourselves. You can get a better job and be able to cater for your parents. I like to walk the long distance to come to school everyday because I will not like to be in the house and go to the farm. I like learning in school.

Male, 14, In-school, Remote rural, Coastal zone]

However, there were a few exceptions. A few children interviewed said that they did not value school-based education. Such children would often drop out of school, regardless of their parents' or guardians' wishes. This 18-year-old young woman, for example, stopped schooling despite her parents' apparent support for her education:

I used to attend school. I completed P5 and was about to go to P6 when I stopped. I just decided to stop schooling without any reason. My parents were taking care of me but I just decided to stop. I have no regret for not attending school because I made up my mind that even if I finished school, I would learn sewing and I am now learning it so I don't have any regret. Distance to school those days was not a problem. The school is within five minutes walk from my house. So, nothing was responsible for me not attending school. Even during those days I was above average in terms of performance in school.

[Female, 15, Apprentice, Urban, Forest zone]

Children's own desire to attend school is thus a crucial factor influencing schooling outcomes. The above quote indicated that the fostering status would not make any significant impact on the child's education. In other cases, it may be parental pressure that precipitates a child dropping out of school early, or even failing to enrol in the first place, as this young man describes how he fought against being prevented from enrolling in school:

It was because of my father; he did not want me to go to school, he wanted me to be at home but I wanted to go to school so whenever he came home from work I was always bothering him and crying that I wanted to go to school but he was still adamant. I persisted and it came to a time that my mother also intervened;

he still did not want to send me to school. It took more persuasion from my mother and me before he finally gave in and sent me to school. He claimed that we were not serious children and he did not believe that we would achieve anything in the future because my elder brothers went to private primary and junior secondary school and then to senior secondary school but they did not pass their exams.

[Male, 15, Completed JHS, Rural, Coastal zone]

In summary, schooling is affected by the attitudes of both the children themselves and of their parents or carers. Children's desire to go to school may be a necessary condition for school enrolment and regular attendance, but it is not a sufficient condition. The attitudes and actions of parents can be key, as we elaborate below.

School enrolment, attendance and fostering

Our quantitative data confirm the high enrolment figures reported for Ghana, with 87% of the 8-18-year-olds surveyed currently enrolled in school (Table 2). A similar proportion reported that they were attending school (either regularly or not), while 13% had either dropped out of school or had never attended.

Table 2: School enrolment and attendance (Children aged 8-18y)

Enrolment status	Frequency	%
Enrolled	875	87.2
Not enrolled	129	12.8
N	1004	100.0
Attendance		
Attending school everyday	780	78.4
Attending school some days	86	8.6
Not currently attending school but has attended before	99	9.9
Has never attended school before	31	3.1
N	996	100.0

Both the qualitative and the quantitative data reveal that fostering affects children's schooling status. The survey data show a strong relationship between parenting status and schooling status (Table 3). As anticipated, children staying with both biological parents were more likely to attend school every day (82.7%) than those children staying with one biological parent (74.4% for mother only and 81.5% for father only) and those living with neither biological parent (69.3%) [$p(\chi^2) = 38.579$; $p < 0.000$].

By contrast, fostered children were significantly more likely never to have been to school, or to have dropped out of school, than those living with at least one biological parent.

Table 3: School attendance by parenting status (N=996 children aged 8-18y)

Parenting status Staying with:	Attendance (%)				Total
	Attending everyday	Attending some days	Not currently attending, but has attended before	Has never attended before	
Both biological parents	82.7	7.5	7.3	2.5	100.0
Biological mother only	74.4	13.6	11.0	1.0	100.0
Biological father only	81.5	7.4	11.1	0.0	100.0
Fostered	69.3	7.6	16.1	7.0	100.0

Chi² = 38.579; p < 0.000

A similar trend was found between fostering and school enrolment. But here the difference was more pronounced. Nearly a quarter of children living with foster parents were not enrolled in school, compared with around 10% of those living with biological parents [$p(\chi^2) = 24.293$; p < 0.000]. (Table 4). These highly significant relationships between fostering on one hand and school enrolment and attendance on the other reveals how strongly fostering impacts on both schooling processes.

Table 4: School enrolment by parenting status (N=1004 children aged 8-18y)

Parenting status Staying with:	Enrolment (%)		
	Enrolled	Not enrolled	Total
Both biological parents	90.6	9.4	100.0
Biological mother only	87.6	12.4	100.0
Biological father only	89.1	10.9	100.0
Fostered	77.0	23.0	100.0

Chi² = 24.293; p < 0.000

The qualitative data give further insights into how fostering can affect children's schooling. Fostering was frequently mentioned as a reason for not enrolling in school or dropping out of school. The following interview extract exemplifies this situation.

...Just after the kindergarten, I moved to start the P1 at [A] in the Upper East Region. I could not remember that journey. Initially it was just a visit to see my grandparents. Anytime I wanted to return to [B] where my father lived, my grandmother kept procrastinating it. Any time she left for market she asked me to take care of the millet. At a time, I realised that she would not allow me to come to my parents so I started P1 at [A]⁶. But I realised she was not interested in my schooling because she kept on preventing me from going to school. At a certain time I realised that my grandmother was not going to allow me to attend school so I sent a message to my parents at [B] about the problem I was facing. When my parents received the message, they sent me some money to come down to [B]. One day I left [A] (about 700 km from [B]) without informing my grandmother. I only informed her after I reached my parents. She was annoyed but since my parents were aware she had nothing to say. When I returned to [B] my parents hired a room for me and my siblings for us to attend school at [C], (about 20 kilometres from [B]) the nearby big town to [B] where I started from P4.

[Male, 15, In-school, Rural, Forest zone]

Fostering, age of children and current grade

In Sub-Saharan Africa, one major issue that is hidden behind the high gross enrolment ratios that have been witnessed in recent years is the mismatch between age and current grade at school. Whereas school enrolment of children and/or adults with ages above the expected age for a particular grade should not necessarily be considered as a problem in itself, it comes with developmental challenges especially where this segment of the schooling population is substantially large. 'Over-age' school-goers may contribute to the pressure on the educational infrastructure of such countries; they also impact on the age dependency ratio where people who should be in the productive sector are still in school. Being 'behind' in school can also have serious impacts on pupils' motivation, and can itself precipitate drop-out. Our qualitative data reveal that this is an issue worth looking at in Ghana in the following quote:

... I started my education in one of the villages near Bogoso at the age of eleven. Due to my age they sent me straight to class one (1), they did not let me go to the kindergarten though the school that I was enrolled in had one.

[Fostered, Male, 16, Rural, In-school, Coastal zone]

⁶ Place names are not disclosed to protect interviewees' identities.

Table 5: Fostering, current age and current grade (N=974 children aged 8-18y)

Level	Parenting status Staying with:	Current age			Total (%)
		8-11 (%)	12-14 (%)	15-18 (%)	
Primary*					
	Both biological parents	43.2	46.7	10.1	100.0
	Biological mother only	33.1	50.0	16.9	100.0
	Biological father only	21.9	62.5	15.6	100.0
	Fostered	28.4	47.7	23.9	100.0
JHS					
	Both biological parents	4.8	42.3	52.9	100.0
	Biological mother only	5.1	38.5	56.4	100.0
	Biological father only	4.8	28.6	66.6	100.0
	Fostered	0.0	31.5	68.5	100.0
SHS					
	Both biological parents	-	-	100.0	100.0
	Biological mother only	-	-	100.0	100.0
	Biological father only	-	-	100.0	100.0
	Fostered	-	-	100.0	100.0

*Chi² = 21.498; p < 0.001

In the following analysis of the relationships between fostering, age and school grade, we grouped child respondents into three age categories, corresponding to the ideal educational level of that age group. Thus, 8-11 corresponds to primary school; 12-14 corresponds to junior high school (JHS) and finally 15-18 to senior high school (SHS) (Table 5).

Fostering status appears to be a significant predictor of being 'behind' at school, for those attending primary school at least. Among fostered children who were attending primary school, only just over a quarter (28.4%) were officially of primary-school age (the others were old enough to be either at JHS or even SHS); this compares with over two-fifths of primary school pupils who were living with both their biological parents: Table 5 [$p(\chi^2)=21.498$; $p < 0.001$]. A similar direction of effect was apparent for JHS pupils (Table 5), although this was not statistically significant at the 5% level.

Quality of schooling

Another key issue relates to the *quality* of schooling. It is generally believed in Ghana that private schools offer better quality education than public (state-run)

schools, reflected in better outcomes for pupils. We hypothesised that parents would be more willing to pay the extra costs of private education for their biological children than for fostered children, and that this would be reflected in the proportions of fostered and non-fostered children attending different school types. However, this was not borne out by the survey data (Table 6). From the qualitative data, it appears that proximity is the over-riding factor influencing choice of school, and the vast majority of children attend the nearest (usually state-run) school.

Table 6: Type of school attended by parenting status (children aged 8-18y)

Parenting status Staying with:	Type of school (%)		
	State basic school	Private basic school	Total
Both biological parents	93.6	6.4	100.0
One biological parent	91.7	8.3	100.0
Fostered	92.2	7.8	100.0

Chi² test: no significant differences.

Serial fostering: A demotivation for school enrolment?

Although the literature is replete with issues on the impacts of fostering on education, repeated fostering and its impact on education is rarely discussed. Repeated fostering occurs when a child is fostered from one household to another serially. A child who is fostered and re-fostered may lack the consistency needed for academic progression which could subsequently affect the child’s motivation for school attendance. This report from the qualitative data is illustrative of the problem:

I was born at [A] near [B]. I stayed in this village till my parents moved to [C]. At [C] I started school at [D] Primary when I was 6 years old. I was the sixth born of eight children. I was then coming to school at [D] in the company of my older siblings. I continued schooling at [D] till Primary 3 when I left to stay with my senior sister at [E]. I combined schooling with farming at my sister’s place till I reached Primary 5 when I was sent to another extended family member at [F] to continue my education. Less than a year my father requested that I should come back to continue my schooling at [D] where I started. When I returned to my father I lost interest in schooling due to how I was being tossed here and there. I subsequently stopped schooling at P5.

[A 19 year-old, male, school drop-out, Rural, Coastal zone]

This dimension of fostering has a strong potential for impacting negatively on education. As a child is fostered and re-fostered, the locational characteristics also change, creating adjustment problems each time the child is fostered, thus affecting the child's development as a whole and education in particular.

Summary and discussion

Fostering of children is relatively common in Ghana (Table 1). In summary, the study has revealed generally negative impacts of fostering on education. Specifically, the quantitative data reveal significant relationships between living arrangement of children on the one hand and their enrolment, schooling status and progress on the other. Children staying with both biological parents were more likely to attend school regularly (a prerequisite for successful schooling outcomes) than their counterparts staying with foster parents. Moreover, there seem to be a continuum with regard to living arrangement of children and schooling status, with children living with both biological parents attending school most regularly, to fostered children who are least likely to be enrolled in and attending school, with children living with one parent occupying an intermediate position. Fostered children significantly lagged behind their ideal grade at the primary school level.

The quantitative data did not support the earlier hypothesis that fostered children were more likely to be enrolled in state basic schools which are comparatively cheaper. But relatively few children surveyed attended private schools, probably because of the relatively poor socio-economic status of the study settlements and the dearth of private schools in many areas.

The in-depth interviews also reveal the perceived disadvantaged experience by fostered children with regard to education and further indicate the expressions of fostered children as a clear manifestation of their awareness of the situation. Emerging from the qualitative data is the role of serial fostering as a disincentive to school attendance. Fostered and re-fostered children have an additional burden of having to adjust to different and new socio-academic contexts which could slow or even stall progress in schooling (for a discussion of issues mediating between fostering and educational outcomes, see Hampshire et al. forthcoming).

The foregoing arguments lend clear support to the view that fostering is detrimental to at least some schooling outcomes (Kuyini et al., 2009; Akresh, 2009; Pilon, 2003; Ainsworth, 1996 & Charmes, 1993). Indeed, our findings from both the qualitative and quantitative data reveal a negative impact of fostering on fostered children's educational outcomes. Thus, our findings run

contrary to views that fostering creates better educational opportunities for those children who would not have had access to the quality of education provided under foster care (Serra, 2009; Akresh, 2004; Bennell, 2005; Goody, 1982 & Bledsoe, 1990).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that discussing impacts of fostering on education should be done with caution, especially when viewed against the background that strengthening and maintaining family ties (Kuyini et al., 2009) and opening opportunities in terms of widen knowledge, experience and training (Serra, 2009) are some of the reasons for fostering. An important limitation of this study is that the pre-fostering situation of fostered children was not known since the study was a cross-sectional one; therefore it was not possible to compare before and after situations of fostered children.

Conclusion

In all, our paper suggests that fostering impacts negatively on the educational outcomes of children in Ghana. Fostered children are less likely to be enrolled in school, and less likely to attend school regularly, than those living with both biological parents. They are also more likely to lag behind their ideal grade, especially at the primary school level, than their counterparts either living with both biological parents or either biological parent. However fostering status does not appear to affect the type of school a child attends (private or state-provided). Living with only one biological parent also impacts negatively on children's schooling. In addition, we suggest that serial fostering is an under-considered issue, which may dampen children's enthusiasm for schooling and may lead to early drop-out. The cross-sectional nature of our study meant that we were not able to understand fully the processes of change over time, as children are fostered and re-fostered, or fostered and return ultimately to their biological parents. Future research on this issue should take a longitudinal approach and to ascertain the schooling status of the children before fostering in order to address these issues.

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