

BALLARD BRIEF

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Child Abuse in Residential Homes in Ghana

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Summary

Children placed in residential homes in Ghana suffer from physical violence and physical neglect more often than children in family-based homes. In overcrowded residential homes, many basic needs are often not being met, and the use of physical violence is common due to inadequate funding, lack of training, lack of clear policies, and years of normalizing violent disciplinary actions. This problem of child abuse within residential homes of Ghana creates financial burdens on the country and negative psychosocial effects for children suffering from neglect or physical violence, hindering their ability to reach their full earnings potential. Very few interventions have been tested for long enough to show reliable results to help eradicate child abuse in Ghana, but some practices have followed promising principles addressing the contributing factors of this issue, with the potential to result in improvement of its negative consequences if tracked over time.

Key Terms

Child Abuse—Risk or serious harm placed upon a person younger than 18 (who is not an emancipated minor) as a result of action or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker.¹

Child Maintenance—When children are physically removed from the parents accused of neglect (including children placed in residential homes), but these parents are still responsible financially for the children.

Child Maltreatment—This term includes all types of child abuse (physical, mental, sexual, and emotional) as well as child neglect by any parent or caregiver.

Corporal Punishment—Using physical force to discipline or punish a child with the intent to cause even slight discomfort or pain.²

Court Order—When a court order is issued, the parental rights of a child are shifted to the Department of Social Welfare in order to remove the child from a harmful situation.³

Cycle of Abuse—The concept that child abuse has a tendency to repeat itself from one generation to another.⁴

Orphan—For the purposes of this paper, an orphan will be referred to as a child (a person younger than 18 who is not an emancipated minor) who has been removed from the care of his or her parents, whether as a result of death or the parents' inability to provide sufficient needs.

Physical Neglect—A situation in which a caretaker fails to provide basic necessities for a child. Basic necessities include but are not limited to food, clothing, shelter, and educational needs.⁵ Physical neglect can also be referred to as basic needs neglect.

Residential Home—A care center where social-work supervision is provided for those with needs that go beyond housing accommodations. These homes can include elderly people, children in care, or adults with learning difficulties.⁶ In this paper, the term “residential home” specifically refers to an institution for children who have been removed from their original

homes and families. It is used interchangeably with the term “orphanage.”

UNICEF—United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund. An organization that works globally to implement child protection policies and services.⁷

Context

Q: What is child abuse?

A: Although abuse can take many forms, for the purposes of this paper, child abuse covers two main categories: physical violence and physical neglect toward a minor (under the age of 18). Child neglect has been considered a distinct type of maltreatment since the early 1950s and is now the most commonly reported type of child maltreatment.⁸ Child abuse is defined as any action towards a child resulting in serious physical or emotional harm or an imminent risk of serious physical or emotional harm.⁹ While physical abuse is nonaccidental by definition, neglect is the failure of a parent or other person

with responsibility for the child to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision to the degree that the child's health, safety, and well-being are threatened.¹⁰

Q: What are residential homes, and what do residential homes look like in Ghana specifically?

A: A residential home is a care center where social-work supervision is provided for those with needs that go beyond housing accommodations.¹¹ In this paper, the term “residential home” specifically refers to an institution for children who have been removed from their original homes and families, whether by a court order, a child welfare worker, or a family member. However, approximately one-third of children lack a legally-mandated court order for their placement in a residential home.¹² This fact means that these children have been placed in residential homes without the required legal oversight to ensure that they have the proper support system in place

when they get there. Eighty percent of children living in Ghanaian residential homes have at least one parent who is alive.¹³ Ninety-seven percent of residential homes are privately run, with the remaining homes operated by the government.¹⁴ Half of the residential homes are religiously affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁵ This brief will use the term “residential home” interchangeably with the term “orphanage.”

The majority of residential homes are located in the Ashanti, Eastern, and Greater Accra regions.¹⁶ Most residential homes have been open for 11–20 years.¹⁷ Residential homes typically hold 100–120 children, and a total of 3,530 children across Ghana currently live in residential homes.¹⁸ ¹⁹ In terms of demographics within residential homes, there is similar gender representation since 55% of children in residential homes are boys, and 45% are girls.²⁰ The average age of children in residential homes is 10.7 years old, and in 2018, 37% of children admitted were between 0–3 years old, indicating that children are more likely

to be placed in homes during critical development periods.^{21, 22, 23} Although placing a child in a Ghanaian residential home is listed as a temporary solution for a child suffering from abuse from their caregiver,²⁴ the average stay of a child in a residential home is 10 years.²⁵

Q: Why are children placed in residential homes?

A: Studies have shown that it is parents in poverty, not the loss of parents, that most frequently land children in residential homes in Ghana.²⁶ In fact, it was found that as many as two-thirds of children in Ghanaian orphanages still have one or more parents alive.²⁷ The most common response to physical neglect cases in Ghana is to arrange for child maintenance, where parents send their children to residential homes but remain financially responsible for them.²⁸ Since research has found poverty to be the most common reason children in Ghana require out-of-home care,²⁹ these parents are often unable to pay the

necessary bills to support these children.

Some reports have found so-called “orphanage recruiters” to convince parents to give up children to these residential homes with promises of brighter futures for their children. Some reports even claimed that parents were offered cash in return for placing their children in the home in order to increase the overall number of children in the homes to receive more money from international donors.^{30, 31}

Other factors resulting in children being placed in residential homes include child abandonment cases, disownment by parents for serious physical deformities, and increasing HIV rates increasing the number of parent deaths for children. In the first 3 months of 2014, the Department of Social Welfare in Accra, Ghana, found 77 children abandoned in marketplaces and truck stations. Most were disabled and from rural areas.³² A 2022 study found over 61,000 homeless children in the Greater Accra region in Ghana alone.³³ Additionally, over 1.1 million of

the 13.7 million children in Ghana have lost at least one of their parents, a number on the rise with the increased AIDS problem in Africa.³⁴

Q: Who is at risk of abuse in Ghana's residential homes?

A: In a 2011 study, 90% of children in Ghana were reported to have experienced some form of physical violence.³⁵ This is significantly greater than the 60% of children who have experienced physical violence in Nigeria, a similar African country.³⁶ It is also greater than the world average, which indicates that approximately 25% of children worldwide experienced some type of maltreatment, including physical abuse or neglect.³⁷ Ninety percent of children in Ghana aged 2–14 years reported being beaten when young, 88.7% experienced psychological aggression, and 93.6% experienced violent discipline.³⁸

The likelihood of experiencing physical abuse and neglect increases when a child is living in institutional care (such as a residential home) as opposed to

children who live in a family-based household.³⁹ While there generally is limited data for abuse in institutional care homes, research has found that children in group care arrangements, like residential homes, are 3.5 times more vulnerable to sexual abuse compared to their peers in foster or family-based care.⁴⁰ Over 50% of these children in residential homes reported exposure to violent discipline, and approximately 25% of them reported not receiving any responsive care.⁴¹ There are over 1 million orphans in Ghana (4.7% of the total population and 10.4% of the children and adolescent population),⁴² with approximately 3,500 of those orphans living in residential homes.⁴³ Orphans report higher psychological distress and discrimination.⁴⁴ Risk factors for physical abuse of children include poverty, having a non-biological caregiver, facing negative stigma, and alcohol abuse by caregivers.⁴⁵ Most cases of exposure to violent discipline in residential homes occur for children from ages 5–9 years old.⁴⁶

Q: Who is most likely to perpetrate abuse?

A: An important element of abuse is that it is the fault of someone with responsibility for the child. For children living in residential homes, this means that the people in positions to potentially abuse the children are the caregivers in the home, whether they are paid staff or volunteers. The risk of abuse increases when caregivers are not properly trained, which means that this risk increases when volunteers act as caregivers.⁴⁷ A common issue in Sub-Saharan Africa especially is the popularity of foreign volunteers without proper training to come and serve in residential homes (also known as voluntourists), with 45% of residential homes in Ghana using foreign volunteers in caregiver positions.⁴⁸ Research has shown that opening up to foreign volunteers creates a high risk for abuse, specifically sexual abuse, of children within residential homes.⁴⁹

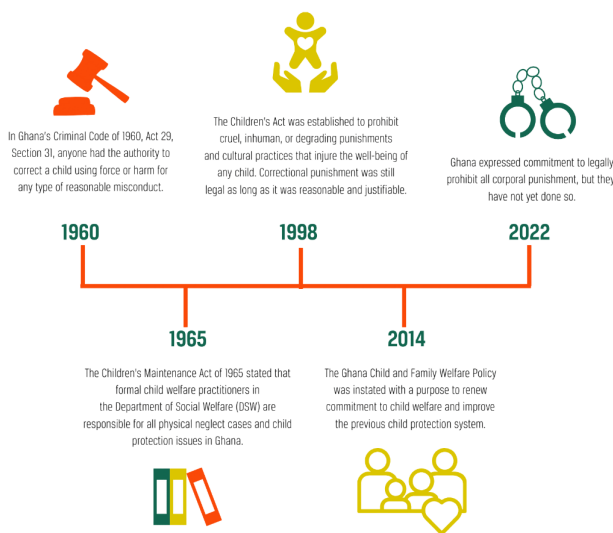
Q: What is the history of residential homes in Ghana?

A: Prior to colonization, Ghana had designated caregivers put in place within their own community who were responsible for caring for children in need, meaning that children who could have been sent to an orphanage would be taken care of by the community itself. This practice persisted until residential homes were introduced to Ghana in the early 1900s by European missionaries.^{50, 51} The first children's home in Ghana specifically for orphans and abandoned children was the Child Care Society, established in 1949.⁵²

The number of these residential homes grew rapidly at the beginning of the 21st century, going from 10 in 1998 to 148 in 2008,⁵³ partly due to the increase of orphans as a result of the AIDS crisis.⁵⁴ In response to the rapid increase of residential homes, UNICEF initiated a care reform in 2006.⁵⁵ One of the aims of this reform was to place children in these residential homes less and in family or community-based care

more. The number of homes decreased by 34 in 2014 to a total of 114, but as of 2021, the number increased by 25 to a total of 139 residential homes.⁵⁶

Q. What is the history of child welfare legislation in Ghana?



policies and funding, put residential home children at risk of neglect and abuse because there are fewer safeguards to hold care workers accountable. Residential homes themselves lack proper safeguards to prevent abuse of children within the homes. A census revealed that 38% of Ghanaian residential homes do not have a written child safeguarding or child protectionism policy.⁵⁷ This is also a direct violation of the national standards established by the Republic of Ghana in 2018, which was created to ensure that children's needs were being met and no harm was being done to the children within the homes.⁵⁸ Only half of the children in residential care have an assigned caseworker from the Department of Social Welfare, and approximately one-third are without an individual care plan.⁵⁹ An individual care plan ensures that a child has the plan to transition into a good environment when they leave the residential homes and that they are given a suitable environment while in the home. Without these, the formalized support system for

Contributing Factors

Inadequate Safeguards for Children

Inadequate safeguards for children, including a lack of child protection

caregivers to identify and prevent abuse is insufficient, and children's needs may be overlooked, leading to a greater prevalence of neglect.

Lack of Funding

Without funding, residential homes are at increased risk of not meeting their children's needs. Funding is an essential piece to providing these basic needs of children within residential homes, especially since 97% of homes are privately owned without receiving governmental support.⁶⁰ In 2018, social workers in several districts reported receiving no funding for monitoring residential homes and the children in their care, despite preparing budgets for government approval.⁶¹ In a 2021 study done among 3 selected child welfare agencies in the Ashanti region of Ghana, 11 out of 13 child welfare workers agreed that because of the limited formal support systems available, most parents and children did not receive concrete support or intervention plans from the Department of Social Welfare.⁶² This department can act as an important

resource for funds for these residential homes, and when that support is taken away, residential homes are left with a lesser ability to meet the basic needs of the children they care for.

Inadequate Inspections

Inspections, assessments, and licenses are important measures for preventing child abuse because they can hold workers of residential homes accountable for adequate care. The legal requirements of the application process involve inspection of the premises and local social welfare officers' assessment.⁶³ The Children's Act (Sec. 114) makes it an offense to operate a residential home without a license or to prevent any Departmental official from conducting an inspection on the home. Yet as of 2021, only about one-third of residential homes in Ghana were found to have a valid license.⁶⁴ Another census showed that 26% of residential homes had expired licenses, 19% had falsely reported having valid licenses, 18% were not licensed, and 6% were missing data about their licensing.⁶⁵ The Department of Social

Welfare is legally mandated to close unlicensed homes or homes that are not meeting standards of care.⁶⁶ Nearly 25% of residential homes are not registered with the Department of Social Welfare at all or do not comply with registration requirements.⁶⁷ Licensing is an important abuse-preventing action because it requires inspection of the homes and regular assessment of workers. Without this accountability, potential abusers do not face strong deterrence to keep from abusive behavior. Though the Department of Social Welfare is legally obligated to monitor residential homes periodically, only 45% have documented the process, making it impossible to know how much monitoring is actually taking place.⁶⁸ Additionally, monitors do not always have the opportunity to interact with children in the homes they visit, only having time to check that the registers and files of children are accurate.⁶⁹ Isolation is a key aspect of abuse. When homes are not monitored properly, child abuse is more likely to occur because research has found that

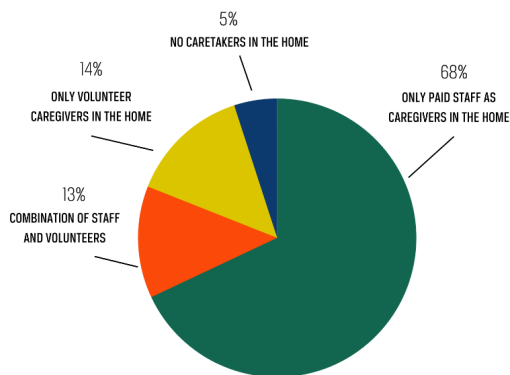
social isolation is significantly associated with sexual abuse for children under 12 years old.⁷⁰

Improper Caregivers

The National Standards on Residential Homes for Children explicitly states that volunteers should not take care of children in residential homes in order to provide the high-quality care children need.⁷¹ When children do not receive the level of care they need, they experience neglect, which is a form of abuse. Despite this requirement, 1 in 7 residential homes exclusively has volunteer caregivers.⁷² Sixty-eight percent of homes have only paid staff as caregivers, 13% of homes have a combination of staff and volunteers, 14% use only volunteer caregivers, and 5% have no caregivers in the home.⁷³ In one study, half of the selected residential facilities (12 out of 24) used international volunteers as caregivers in their operations. Only 5 of these had professional qualifications. The others used temporary volunteers between 18–20 years old. None of these volunteers were screened, and all of

them were used to compensate for a low number of paid workers.⁷⁴

Inadequate Safeguards for Children



Because volunteer workers often do not require police clearance reports and background checks, studies have shown that having volunteer workers increases the risk of abuse for children because it removes barriers that would prevent previous and potential offenders from having unfettered access to children in the homes.

Volunteer supervision is another preventive measure that is often not taken in Ghanaian residential homes.⁷⁵

But even when residential homes include paid staff, if they do not have proper training or are not thoroughly

vetted, children are still at risk of abuse. In a 2012 qualitative study, caregivers in the Ashanti Region of Ghana expressed concern for themselves about the sustainability of the residential homes, specifically identifying a concern of insufficient training and supervision.⁷⁶ Only half of Ghanaian residential homes require background checks on all personnel within the homes, including the paid workers.⁷⁷ About half (54%) of homes reported having completed police or background checks on staff, and 46% said this was done for volunteers. Background checks are an important safeguard for preventing child abuse in residential homes because they can ensure that workers do not have a history of perpetrating abuse.

Lack of Resources in Residential Homes

A lack of adequate resources, including food, water, hygiene items, and caregivers in residential homes, leaves the basic needs of children in Ghanaian residential homes unmet, resulting in abuse in the form of basic needs

neglect. In 2018, the Republic of Ghana listed national standards for their residential homes.⁷⁸ These national standards outlined the resources children need in order to be given proper care, including access to health supplies and food items. The standards define that every residential home must have an easily accessible first aid box, but a 2021 study found that 13% of residential homes did not have any first aid kit on the premises.⁷⁹ Some residential homes (29%) are also lacking other important health supplies like mosquito nets, an important protective method against malaria, and handwashing facilities (nearly 1 in 7).⁸⁰



Photo by [The African Union Mission in Somalia \(Source\)](#)

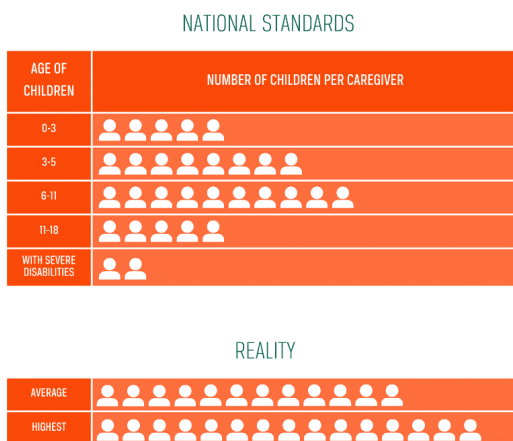
A lack of access to important health resources leads to abuse because children's medical needs are not met, resulting in neglect. As far as food, a qualitative study of residential homes in the northern region of Ghana found that 68% of children in residential homes felt that they could not have the foods that they preferred because of the large number of children in the homes. They also mentioned inadequate food supply overall and a common issue of older children not eating in some cases in order to leave food for the younger children.⁸¹ This results in basic needs neglect because an inadequate food supply can leave children malnourished. Other standards require that children receive education about personal hygiene, health, substance abuse, and reproductive health, but no data could be found for the implementation of these practices.⁸² This lack of documentation means that there is no way to ensure that these needs are being met.

Abuse can also occur as a result of a lack of staffing altogether because there are not enough caregivers to meet the needs of the large number of children residing in these homes. According to national standards, the number of children cared for in a residential home should not exceed 30, yet studies found that only 8 out of 98 residential homes in Ghana met these criteria. Five of the homes studied accommodated between 100–200 children.⁸³ The standards also included specific ratios of caregiver to children that were necessary in order for a child to receive the proper care they needed. The standards stated that there should be no less than one caregiver for every 5 children under the age of 3; one caregiver for every 8 children over the age of 3; one caregiver for every 10 children between the ages of 6 and 11; one caregiver for every 5 children between the ages of 11 and 18; and one caregiver for no more than 2 children who have extreme disabilities.⁸⁴

Children with intellectual disabilities, in particular, suffer in overcrowded

residential homes because they need greater attention in order to develop properly and will suffer more from attention deficits than children without disabilities.⁸⁵ In reality, residential facilities had an average caregiver-to-child ratio of 1 to 12. The highest ratio was 1 to 15.⁸⁶ Therefore the insufficient quantity of staff altogether can lead to children in these homes being neglected. For example, approximately 25% of children ages 2-4 were found with no stimulation or responsive care (no staff or volunteers had engaged with them in any activities over the past 3 days).⁸⁷ This lack of responsive care is abuse when the needs of the child go unmet or are neglected. The caregiver stress resulting from the high child-to-caregiver ratio may also be the reason many children mentioned experiencing corporal punishment and maltreatment.⁸⁸

Lack of Staffing in Residential Homes



Social Norms for Behavior Management

Children in Ghanaian residential homes suffer from social norms promoting physical violence as a form of behavior management, which can lead to abuse.⁸⁹ Corporal punishment is when a child is disciplined using physical force; physical abuse occurs when a child is disciplined in a way that causes physical harm. While corporal punishment is a common form of discipline in Africa—with more than 70% of children ages 2–14 experiencing corporal punishment in 2010—it is particularly common in Ghana. Over 93% of children in Ghana

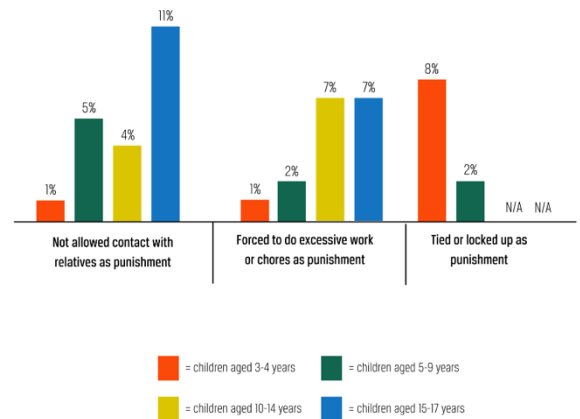
are disciplined with corporal punishment, making Ghana rank second in the world, behind Yemen, for the prevalence of corporal punishment.⁹⁰ Most children experience corporal punishment between ages 5 and 9; boys and girls experience equal levels of corporal punishment.⁹¹ In 2011, 14% of children experienced corporal punishment classified as “excruciating.”⁹² Caregivers who do not use corporal punishment are often perceived as being “too soft,” indicating societal pressures within residential homes to include violent physical punishment in behavioral management.⁹³ Half of the respondents in a 2011 study stated their belief that corporal punishment is necessary to discipline children adequately.⁹⁴ Given the fact that corporal punishment frequently goes underreported, the actual current prevalence is likely significantly higher.⁹⁵ The statistics of 34 of 37 studies performed across Ghana and similarly developed countries indicate that corporal punishment is sustained by beliefs that it is typical and

appropriate to use.⁹⁶ Ultimately, the normalization of violent disciplinary actions contributes to the amount of abuse towards orphaned children. Despite legislative efforts to eliminate abusive forms of discipline, social norms and the law still enable corporal punishment, which can be taken to the point that it leaves lasting physical harm to children in the residential homes of Ghana.

The majority of children in residential homes also reported exposure to these violent forms of discipline.⁹⁷ Fifty-six percent of children in licensed residential homes reported experiencing or witnessing violent discipline, while 61% of children living in unlicensed homes reported the same. Fifty-seven percent of children in residential homes with over 30 children and 56% of children in residential homes with less than 30 children were found to be exposed to forms of violent discipline.⁹⁸ Other types of discipline experienced by children ages 3–17 in residential homes in Ghana include not being allowed to contact relatives or peers,

being forced to do excessive work or chores, and being tied or locked up.⁹⁹

Social Norms for Behavior Management



Consequences

Physical and Mental Effects

Child abuse in residential homes negatively impacts the physical and mental health of abused children because they do not receive the care they need to develop properly, including adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, security and safety, and opportunities for early learning.¹⁰⁰

Physical Effects

A 2021 study found that 20% of children aged 15–17 were involved in a physical fight inside a residential home at least once in the past 12 months, and 1 in 7 children had been seriously injured in the past 30 days alone.¹⁰¹

One in 5 of the residential adolescents reported being involved in a physical fight within the home in 2021.¹⁰²

Due to inadequate nutrition, children living in residential homes may also experience stunting and weight issues.¹⁰³ Forty percent of children under age 5 who live in residential homes are moderately or severely stunted, meaning that they fall below 2 standard deviations of the World Health Organization’s median height-for-age standard.¹⁰⁴ Twenty-two percent of these children are underweight, a sign of malnourishment resulting from neglect.¹⁰⁵

Malnourishment can cause both growth retardation and a child being underweight. Malnutrition is also the leading cause of child mortality in

Ghana, attributing to approximately 54% of deaths beyond early infancy.¹⁰⁶

Mental Effects

Because of basic needs neglect in residential homes, children may experience detrimental effects on their cognitive development. If children do not receive encouragement and development opportunities from their caregivers, they are likely to be delayed in their developmental milestones due to weakened neuronal pathways.¹⁰⁷ For example, infants need to hear sounds repeated several times and receive verbal responses to their babbling in order for language to develop properly.¹⁰⁸ While there is no data showing whether or not children in these homes are receiving this specific kind of stimulation, a deficit in children ages 2–4 in residential homes can be inferred since 25% of these children were found with no stimulation or responsive care for 3 consecutive days.¹⁰⁹ Less than 50% of young children in Ghanaian residential homes are developmentally on track in terms of social-emotional development.¹¹⁰

Decreased Academic Performance

Child abuse in residential homes leads to decreased academic performance due to the extreme impacts of abuse on developing brains. Child maltreatment is linked with diminished working memory and mental flexibility, which allows a child to adjust to different mental demands and perspectives. A deficit in these skills can make children less likely to achieve success academically and in a future career.¹¹¹ One publication gave the overall “low standards of education” in Ghana, measured by performance on a Basic Education Certificate Examination, to the “high incidence of irresponsible parenting in the country.”¹¹²

Overall, studies have shown that a child is 3 times more likely to have academic problems when they have experienced any level of maltreatment in the first 5 years of life.¹¹³ This also decreases the likelihood that a child will finish school altogether.¹¹⁴ To illustrate this, a study done in the Ashanti Region found this pattern among the majority of students

enrolled in schools in Kumasi. The qualitative study’s results showed that the majority of respondents who had previously experienced neglect displayed higher rates of absenteeism and lack of concentration in their academia.¹¹⁵

Decreased Academic Performance



Only one-third of children in residential homes have foundational reading skills (being able to name at least 10 letters of the alphabet and read at least four simple words).



More than half of children aged 3-4 are behind their peers in terms of social-emotional development: not distracted easily, getting along well, and not kicking, biting, or hitting other children.



Only 13% of children have foundational numeracy skills (being able to recognize and name numbers 1-10).



Photo by [Frontierofficial](#) on [Flickr](#)

Financial Burden

Child abuse in residential homes causes a financial burden on both individuals in Ghana, because of improper development caused by abuse, as well as Ghana as a whole, because of the financial costs of providing treatment to victims.

It is estimated that child abuse costs the Ghanaian economy more than \$200 million per year or 1% of Ghana's Gross Domestic Product.¹¹⁶ Additionally, each survivor of abuse costs the country an average of \$64.29.¹¹⁷ Costs of abuse for Ghana as a whole include costs to treat,

monitor, and prevent psychological and behavioral problems that come as a result of experiencing traumatic violence in childhood, as well as the cost of healthcare systems to treat the short and long-term physical impact of injuries. For example, survivors of abuse are legally entitled to free care in Ghanaian hospitals, although these acts are currently not implemented due to a lack of funds.¹¹⁸ While this has proven beneficial for abuse survivors, this is a cost that could have been avoided if the abuse had never occurred in the first place. The earlier abuse starts in a person's life span, the greater likelihood that the treatment needed will last longer and therefore cause a significant economic impact.

Child abuse also causes a financial burden to individuals in Ghana because improper child development can result in productivity loss and a failure to reach full earnings potential. This often comes because a child suffering from physical abuse is hindered in their ability to perform well in school both socially and academically.¹¹⁹ Evidence from other countries estimates that

survivors of child abuse will earn approximately 5% less than other children over a lifetime.¹²⁰

Practices

Creating Advocates

One of the reasons child abuse has remained an issue in Ghana for so long is that it has been considered socially acceptable.¹²¹ In an effort to change these traditions, one practice to fight against these dangerous social norms is to increase education and raise awareness among the Ghanaian population. The overall goal of this approach is to rally the people of Ghana together through a crowdsourcing model and invite them to consider ways in which they can personally strengthen the child protective system.



This practice is currently being done through a social drive campaign known as Ghanaians Against Child Abuse (GACA).¹²² With this campaign, Ghanaian supporters are encouraged to become advocates when they offer an online pledge to the movement. Anyone can sign this pledge, but Ghanaians especially are encouraged to do so.¹²³ This suggests that the responsibility lies on the people of Ghana, collectively and individually, to change the old ways of the country. Awareness is also spread through online-accessible, age-appropriate comic books for children to educate them about ways to protect themselves against child abuse. Specific goals this campaign is aspiring for right now include making positive changes visible to the public, increasing partnership opportunities with other organizations, and helping the entire country view protecting children from violence as essential to community development. When the campaign was first launched in 2017, it was anticipated that it would change the narrative of Ghanaians

when talking about protecting children from abusive behavior.¹²⁴

So far, only outputs have been measured for this practice, and no randomized controlled trials have been conducted to measure the impact on the number of abuse cases in Ghana. Recent research done to show the overall cases of abuse in Ghana within the last 5 years since the campaign's launch is also scarce. However, with the goal of spreading awareness and engaging the public, this campaign is showing signs of success through its output measurements. Two years after its launch, it was found that 5 million people had been engaged in the issue;¹²⁵ 2 million through digital platforms and over 3 million through offline messages, including mobile community theaters and dialogues.¹²⁶ In addition, over 10,600 people have pledged to the movement.¹²⁷ With child abuse having been such a prominent and normalized issue in the country for so many years, spreading awareness can lay an important foundation to prepare the country for eradicating the problem, as has been seen in other

countries. Another promising sign of sustainability comes from this advocacy program's partnership with the government of Ghana, as this campaign was launched intentionally at a time when it could run to help support and provide momentum for recent policies written by the government's Child and Family Welfare and Justice for Children that are helping to strengthen the child protection system in Ghana.¹²⁸

Without impact measurements, the full validity of this campaign in helping to eradicate child abuse norms in Ghana cannot be determined. One potential gap in the practice is found in one of its greatest strengths as well: that is, the success of this movement depends on the responsibility of the entire community. In studies conducted on similar practices, others have critiqued campaigns promoting awareness, finding that they have the potential to lead to a lack of action and backlash, and create harm, especially when reaching the wrong audience.¹²⁹

Reintegration into Family

Sources agree that no matter how much the residential homes of Ghana or any other country improve, they cannot adequately replace the proper care that a child will receive in a healthy family unit.¹³⁰ Therefore, one of the most effective solutions is to remove children from residential homes altogether and into a better environment. Ghana Make a Difference, a nonprofit organization started in 2012, is an example of an organization that prioritizes the reintegration of children into a family system. They focus on children who would otherwise be placed into residential homes (specifically children with special needs, children living on the streets, or children who have been trafficked into forced labor) and provide a temporary space for them while actively working on getting them into a better family situation. This temporary space includes an Academy of Learning, a customized learning curriculum for each child to address the problem of lack of academic achievement in

children, specialized, trained staff, and shorter stay of children in order to prevent overcrowding and get children into a family system as soon as possible. If integration into a family is not possible, the alternative solutions are vocation (allowing the children to shadow someone to learn a trade) and supporting the child through school. Both of these options are efforts to provide the child with the tools they need to be self-sufficient so that they can one day leave home and be prepared to provide for themselves. This organization emphasizes the preparatory training and follow-up support of these children to ensure their success.¹³¹ Although this organization's mission meets the criteria that research suggests would improve these children's lives, there have been little to no outcomes measured, and impact has not been measured at all. In the last 10 years, 249 children have been rescued from abusive situations, but whether or not these children were being abused in residential homes and whether or not these children's lives have been

improved as a result of their rescuing
has not been determined.¹³²

Endnotes

1. “The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA),” Child Welfare Information Gateway, Children’s Bureau, accessed February 6, 2022, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/can/defining/>.
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