



CHALLENGING HEIGHTS
**Child Marriage in
Ghana's Fishing
Industry**

ANALYSING THE
EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN
WHO HAVE WITNESSED OR
UNDERGONE CHILD
MARRIAGE



**Analysing the Experiences of Children who are
thought to have witnessed or Undergone Child Forced
Early Marriage in the Volta Lake Communities of
Ghana**

Report

For



Challenging Heights

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Analysing the Experiences of Children who are thought to have
witnessed or Undergone Child Forced Early Marriage in the Volta
Lake Communities of Ghana

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1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY¹

Children who are trafficked to work in communities along the Lake Volta (especially around Yeji in the Pru district) are more likely to commence sexual activities that often lead to various forms of marital arrangements (Challenging Heights, 2016). Some of these children end up being married off at very early ages (Mwakideu, 2016; Alvarez and Alessi 2012; Challenging Heights, 2016). Child forced early marriage (CFEM) is among the marital arrangements that is often contracted for trafficked children (Mwakideu, 2016; Challenging Heights, 2016). The exact extent of the problem of CFEM is unknown in Ghana due to the lack of in-depth research on the phenomenon. This study is expected to shed some light on the extent of the phenomenon in communities along the Volta Lake in the South Eastern part of Ghana. It will also contribute to the debate in existing literature that touch on the relationship between child trafficking, which is prevalent in Ghanaian fishing communities, sexual exploitation and child marriage (Alvarez and Alessi 2012; Outshoorn, 2005; Kempadoo, 2016).

A number of organisations in Ghana rescue trafficked children, and Challenging Heights is among the most prominent. Children who are rescued from the Volta Lake communities by Challenging Heights have lots of experiences to share on the prevalence and forms of CFEM and other forms of sexual unions.² This study has therefore been commissioned by Challenging Heights to harvest the experiences of some rescued children undergoing rehabilitation in a shelter in the Central Region of Ghana.

Challenging Heights, through its intervention programs, rescue and rehabilitate about 100 children annually from trafficking and dangerous labour in communities along the Volta Lake. It is estimated that about three quarters of them, both boys and girls, have either been promised to somebody as a husband or wife already; or have actually begun the process of being married (Challenging Heights, 2016). This will either be to another child slave, or to the slave master or to a member of the slave master's family. The aim of this practice is to set in motion, a dependence syndrome that ensures that these children continue to depend on and work for their slave masters when they become adults. This is an attack on the fundamental human rights of children.

As stated earlier, there is a lack of verifiable information – quantitative or qualitative – about the extent and nature of child marriage amongst trafficked children in communities along the

¹ This section is based on the Terms of Reference from Challenging Heights.

² The Volta Lake communities span across Northern, Brong Ahafo, Volta and Central regions of Ghana.

Lake Volta (destination communities) and in the fishing communities in Central Region of Ghana (source communities). This study hopes to harvest the experiences of rescued children from communities along the Volta Lake, who have returned to the Central Region. This approach has some weaknesses, which mainly border on the unreliability of the recollection of events of these rescued children. However, its strength lies in the fact that it is cost-effective, and has the potency to unravel attitudes and practices in the fishing communities that may otherwise not be revealed by adults in those communities.

2. INTRODUCTION

Although there is scant literature or any form of empirical data to suggest that the phenomenon of Child Forced Early Marriage (CFEM) exist among trafficked children in fishing communities in Ghana; the nature of forced child labour of trafficked children and the general ecological conditions around fishing communities lend some credence to its existence (See Alvarez and Alessi 2012; Outshoorn, 2005; Kempadoo, 2016). The primary aim of this research is to increase knowledge and understanding of the extent and nature of the incidence of CFEM. To do this, we harvested the memories and experiences of children who have been rescued from slavery in fishing communities along the Volta Lake. The study proceeds on the premise that CFEM leads to teenage pregnancy which does not only affects the development of the Children, but also limits their potentials for the future.

It is estimated that in developing countries, one in every three girls is married before reaching age 18 (UNFPA, 2016); one in nine is married under age 15 (ICRW, 2013). The UNFPA (2016: para 6) estimates that 47,700 girls under 18 years “are married or are at risk of being married” every day. With current trends, 150 million girls under 18 years will be married in the next decade (ICRW, 2013). Child marriage is a delimiting factor against promoting girl child education in the global south generally and sub-Saharan Africa specifically; where there are yawning gaps in literacy rates between male and female; and where the inequality gap is disproportionately against females (ibid; Nguyen and Wodon, 2014). Child marriage also affects boys (Mwakideu, 2016); however, it affects girls in far greater numbers than boys (UNICEF, 2014). Young girls forced into early child marriage often become pregnant while still adolescents, increasing the risk of complications in pregnancy and/or childbirth (ICRW, 2013). These complications are a leading cause of maternal mortality among adolescents in the global South (ibid). The need to understand and curb the occurrence of child marriage, especially CFEM is urgent; and this study hopes to shed some light on it.

The overarching objective of this study is to understand the extent and nature of CFEM in the fishing communities through the harvesting of the knowledge and experiences of children who have just returned from the fishing communities. This will help Challenging Heights to develop advocacy and communication tools for sensitization in both the source and destination communities for child trafficking.

The next section of this report provides the methodology and conceptual framework used for the study; followed by reviews of related literature on CFEM with a focus on the developing

world and Ghana. Subsequent sections analyze field data gathered from the study communities. This is followed by concluding remarks and recommendations for advocacy geared towards wider community members and policy makers.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Design and Data Collection

The data for this study was gathered from a sample of 23 respondents in Winneba, who have had a sojourn in some of the communities along the Volta Lake. Fifteen (15) of these were children who have been rescued from fishing communities by Challenging Heights. Data was collected mainly through in-depth interviews (IDIs) with these fifteen children. Respondents were selected based on their experience as victims of child trafficking and child labour in an environment that exposed them to CFEM. Each respondent was more than ten years of age. The purpose of the IDI was to harvest the experiences of rescued children through recollection and narration. Additionally, 12 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with the Deputy District Director of the Department of Social Development, the desk officer for the district girl education unit, 3 staffs of Challenging Heights and 2 social workers at the Challenging Heights rehabilitation centre. Two fishermen and a traditional leader in Yeji were also interviewed as key informants in order to understand the socio-cultural contexts in which these children lived prior to their rescue. Respondents’ demographic details are summarised in table 1 below;

Table 1: Demographic details of respondents

Number of children interviewed	Age and sex of child respondents			
	10-14 years		15-18 years	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
15	5	5	3	2
Key informants interviews (KII)				
Number of KIIs interviewed	Sex of key informant respondents			
	Male		Female	
12	8		4	

The survey instrument was largely open-ended. Data were collected on participants' social and demographic characteristics, reproductive knowledge and history, and discussions on marriage and reproductive health issues. Questionnaire also included questions on prevalence on CFEM, causative factors among others. Interview questions for children were translated into the Twi language during the interview process to allow the children to easily understand the questions. In a few instances, interviewers had to translate the questions into other local languages such as Dangbe which was better understood by the respondent. Completed questionnaires were

checked by head of the research team for completeness. The average time for each interview was 45 minutes.

3.2 Data Analysis Approach

Data was analysed exclusively using qualitative approaches of description, interpretation and inferences. Information collected from all respondents were collated to identify running themes to form the basis of our interpretations and conclusions. Inferences were drawn from the children's stories by comparing and contrasting with reviewed literature, as well as information gathered from officials of a local NGO (Challenging Heights) with vast experience working with vulnerable children in fishing communities on the Volta Lake. The ecological model for understanding violence was used as basis for analysing the data collected.

3.3 Limitation of the Study

The study relied on the memories of children who were rescued from child trafficking and hazardous labour and who are now residing or undergoing rehabilitation in Winneba; some of whom were not victims of CFEM, but were eyewitnesses to the experiences of their colleague either in Winneba or in communities along the Volta Lake. Since some of these respondents have been psychologically traumatized and emotionally unstable due to the harsh experiences they had been through, strenuous ethical review processes were followed in order to ensure that these children are not further destabilised psychologically. Admittedly, the conditions of these children are likely to affect the quality of data elicited from them, by way of them either overstating or understating their experiences.

3.4 Measures to Address the Limitations

To ensure that the data collected was accurate, some measures were put in place. These measures were adopted to ensure that the data collected was devoid of probable prejudices that the rescued child-respondents might be harbouring due to traumatic experiences they might have suffered as child labourers under harsh conditions. The first of such strategies was that the interviews were conducted under friendly ambiance to relax the minds and nerves of the children before and after the interview. Ice-breakers were also used to make the children open up to the interviewer in their responses and to boost recollection of events. Researchers were careful not to create a dependence syndrome in the process of creating a friendly environment.

Because of the sensitive nature of the survey topics, the respondents were interviewed by interviewers of the same gender. The interviews generally took place in secured rooms in the rehabilitation centre to ensure that the privacy of children who took part in the study were felt protected.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The ecological model adapted for the study looks at the relations between issues that affect a single entity at different levels. This model acknowledges that no single factor can explain why people exhibit violence against another person(s). The framework categorises the determinants of Child Forced Early Marriages at four levels namely: individual, interpersonal, community and societal levels (Dahlberg and Krug, 2002). The phenomenon of CFEM is propagated by drivers at all the four levels separately and collectively.

The individual drivers refer to thoughts and feelings of an individual towards child marriages, which are born out of the person's history, socioeconomic characteristics, experience and exposure which predisposes the person to child marriages.

The interpersonal drivers are relationships that increase the risk of an individual becoming a victim of child marriage. It includes happenings in the individual's social networks, beliefs and practices, environmental interactions and associations with peers who are either married or not. The Stockholm Syndrome is one phenomenon that can affect this level. The Stockholm Syndrome is a situation where victims of an ordeal have compassion towards their captors, and even perceive them as protectors against law enforcement agents (Fuselier, 1999). This phenomenon is applicable here, especially where sexual and filial relationships are developed between the victims of trafficking on the one hand and the hosts or other members of the household on the other hand.

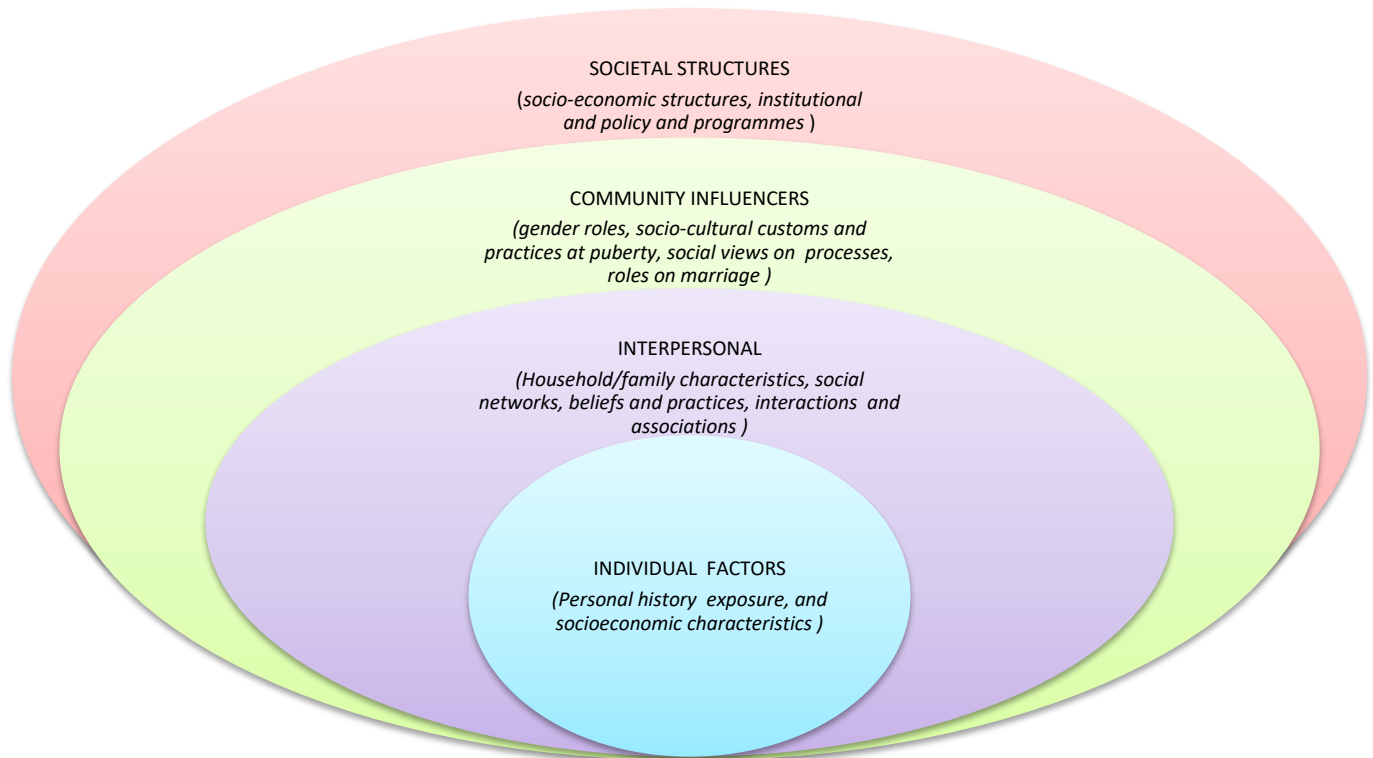
The community level explores community settings and environment that support or hinder child forced early marriages. These factors may be rooted in the community and society's views on marriage, its role and structure and the responsibilities. It may include the society's socio-cultural customs and practices at menarche, norms on the desirable age to marry, choice of spouse and processes for contracting marriage amongst others.

The last level – societal structures – is the overall societal influencers of child Forced Early marriages, which include the broad socio economic conditions, institutions, policy and programmes that foster or impede child forced early marriages.

The drivers of Child Forced Early Marriages vary depending on the social, economic, political and cultural setting. Though the specific drivers are categorised under four levels, they are connected and reinforce each other to influence CFEM as indicated by the overlapping ovals in Figure 1. Aside using the model to explain the factors determining child forced early

marriages, it also informs the levels at which to tackle emerging or existing issues of CFEM. The conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The Ecological Model for determining Causes of Child Forced Early Marriages



Source: Dahlberg and Krug (2002: 12)

5. FORMS OF MARRIAGES IN GHANA

Marriage is a cross-cultural institution that enjoins two people together in sexual union, taking into account the socio-cultural beliefs, norms and practices, as well as meeting the legal requirements of the society in which the marriage is being conducted. Marriage has a strong cultural entreaty, and that normally distinguishes marriages from one society to another. The types of marriage differ for different societies, with culture and religion acting as the primary drivers of what is acceptable as marriage in most countries. In general, marriage comes in many forms, including monogamy, polygamy, polygyny, polyandry, cohabitation, child marriage and same sex marriages. Child marriage and same sex marriages are illegal in many countries. In the case of Ghana, the Criminal Code (Act 29), 1960 as amended frowns on Child marriage and same sex unions.

Customary marriage is the most common form of marriage practiced in Ghana, and is contracted through acceptance and simple rituals between family members of the prospective couple. Customary marriages are registered under the Customary Marriage and Divorce Registration Law, 1985 (PNDCL 112). The process that are followed and the specific practices involved with customary marriage in Ghana vary from groups to groups depending on the culture, beliefs and practices of the local area and the particular ethnic group(s) found there. Among the Akans, customary practice requires the man to present some predetermined list of items, including physical money, to the woman's family on the day of marriage (Owurasah, 2015). As a sign of affirming mutual agreement between the man and the woman, the woman's family representative openly asks the woman thrice as to whether the items should be accepted for the marriage to proceed, and the woman would have to respond in the affirmative, testifying that the marriage is not being forced on her.

This affirms the fact that customary practices in Ghana generally do not encourage forced marriages. Marriage in Ghana also has a strong unifying tool not only between the man and the woman involved, but also between their families (Agyekum, 2012); implying that at all times, families strive to have mutual consent for marriage to occur.

Such strong family role in marriage has the tendency to overshadow the preferences of the prospective spouses. Bethrodal marriages, for instance, have historically been initiated by family members of prospective spouses whilst the latter were still young, below the ages of consent. Although such bethrodal marriages are consummated only at adulthood, there is subtle coercion that compels the bethroded to accept the terms of the marriage agreement and to

consummate the marriage. The next section touches on specific dimensions of child marriage in Ghana.

5.1 Early Marriages in Ghana and beyond West Africa

Early marriages still remain one of the cankers of developing countries, especially those in Asia, Latin America and Africa (USAID, 2015; Nguyen and Wodon, 2014). Child marriage occurs when girls or boys, but mostly girls, marry before the legally approved age of marriage. It is common to find child, early and forced marriage used interchangeably; this is because implicit in child marriage is the element of force and the fact that the said marriage occurs earlier than it should.

The developing world has the highest rate of child marriages with 20-50 percent of women getting married before age 18 (USAID, 2015; ICRW, 2013; Girls Not Brides, 2013). About 40 percent of 20-24 year olds who get married under 18 live in sub-Saharan Africa, making the sub-region second only to South East Asia in absolute numbers of under 18 year olds who get married or enter into unions (ibid). Within sub-Saharan Africa, West Africa has the highest incidence of early marriages (Walker, 2012). It is also noteworthy that CFEM is consistently high in countries with high incidence of income poverty and fertility rates. Thus, poverty and CFEM are positively correlated, and together this twin problem reinforces vicious cycles of deprivation and gender inequality.

CFEM can be explained from historical, religious, cultural, economic and sociological perspectives (Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi, 2003). Culturally, some societies perceive their female daughters to be burdens, who if not married off early, could get pregnant and shame the family (Jensen and Thornton, 2003). The reverse is also true where young girls are seen as the road to family's economic liberation, thereby marrying them off early to rich men who can afford to take care of both the girl and her family. In extremely poor countries such as Niger and Mali, early marriage becomes a means to economic relieve (ibid). Where there is also the religious believe that females are created for the sole purpose of serving men, early or forced marriage is encouraged (WiLDAF, 2014). There is clearly no one factor that can be the ultimate reason for a forced or early marriage to occur; for, research indicates that countries with high index of child marriage are economically poor, fundamental in their religious belief and obstinate in upholding their culture (Walker, 2012). Walker puts it thus "... male-dominated power structure conflates religious injunctions with customary practices to justify marrying off girls before puberty" (Walker, 2012:233).

Thornton and Jensen's (2003) article delves into some of the effects of child or forced marriage. They derived a correlation between child marriage and lower education in women. Child marriage has consequences like higher incidence of illiteracy, physio-psychological effects, health implications and poverty (Chaaban and Cunningham, 2011; Otoo-Oyorley and Pobi, 2003). Nguyen and Wodon (2012) also found some association between child marriage on one hand, and maternal mortality, morbidity and HIV/AIDS on the other hand.

Ghana has been noted to be among countries with the highest child marriage prevalence rates in the world, showing that on average, one out of four girls will be married before their 18th birthday" (UNFPA, 2012). According to a WiLDAF study, while there has been some decrease in the incidence of child marriage between 2003 (28% of women aged 20-24 were married or were in union before age 18) and 2008 (25% of women aged 20-24 were married or in union before age 18), the regional breakdown is still alarming (See WiLDAF, 2014). The current statistics indicate the breakdown as follows: Upper East (39.2%), Western Region (36.7%), Upper West (36.3%), Central (31.2%), Ashanti (30.5%), Volta (29.3%), Brong Ahafo (29.1%), Northern (27.4%), Eastern (27.2%) and Greater Accra (12.2%) (ibid).

Cultural practices remain a fundamental determinant of child marriages in Ghana. The question that needs to be answered is; *in what ways do culture provide leeway for manipulation?* Marriage in Ghanaian societies, as is elsewhere in Africa, is perceived as an institution of honour (Nukunya, 1992; Evans-Pritchard, 1951). As such, young women especially are overtly and actively encouraged to aspire for it. Thus, it can be said that such practices sometimes lead victims to see themselves as having been honoured to be chosen. Indeed, in some instances, girls and their families might become objects of envy for being selected by especially rich men as a wife.

There is also interplay between culture and religion (Steegstra, 2005). In most Ghanaian cultures, the appearance of a girl's menstruation is a signal of her maturity and hence readiness for marriage (ibid). Indeed, nubility rites such as *Dipo* and *Bragoro* are means of advertising to the entire community that a girl is matured enough for marriage (Kearin, 2013; Steegstra, 2005; Evans-Pritchard, 1951). While it is scientifically proven that girls have their menses at different stages, the cultures do not take this into recognisance, and operate on the assumption that once a girl has her menses then she is ready for marriage. What this implies is that girls as young as thirteen or even lower could be married based on the appearance of their menarche. Moreover, the lack of comprehensive records on births in Ghana makes it difficult to accurately

place the age of girls. In such circumstance, parents or relatives who force a child into marriage can easily lie their way out of punishment by overstating the age of the girl.

A key issue that needs attention especially in the Volta region is the adherence to the practice known as *Trokosi*. This is a practice where young girls are given off as slaves to serve at a shrine to atone for a crime by a family member (Bilyeu, 1999). These girls become sexual objects to the whims and caprices of the priests and eventually end up becoming their wives. The implication of this practice is that it perpetuates child or forced marriage covertly; and while the state agencies enforce the laws against child or forced marriage, practices like *Trokosi* will continue to serve as a breeding ground for its perpetuation.

6. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

6.0 Introduction

As elaborately articulated throughout the previous sections, Ghana has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world. On average, every one in four girls marries or enters into sexual relationship before 18 years (UNICEF, 2015; MICS, 2011). Again, the incidence of child marriage in Ghana shows greater regional variations, in which regions surrounding the Volta Lake are among the places experiencing the highest occurrence of child marriages. This section provides a synthesis of the findings from the interaction with some rescued children in Winneba, a few social workers in Winneba, and opinion leaders in Yeji. The emerging themes have been discussed based on all respondents' experience or understanding of CFEM in the fishing communities along the Volta Lake. These include the shape, form and causes of CFEM.

6.1 Incidence and nature of child forced early marriage

The responses indicate that child marriage is prevalent in the study communities. When asked to use the 10-stone method to estimate the proportion of girls married in the host communities,³ the children estimated that about 4 out of 10 girls between the ages of 11 and 16 were engaged in various forms of sexual unions; although no explicit evidence of CFEM was gleaned from their responses and gestures. They have heard about the existence of the practice through public media such as radio, television, public announcements and demonstrations. Respondents also know of teenage girls who have been lured into sexual unions in their communities, but stopped short of referring to these as CFEM. One girl explained it as follows, after selecting four stones to represent the proportion of girls in the host community that are in sexual unions:

When they are going to marry, people accompany them and they exchange drinks and they share drinks. I even attended one. I even got proposals at one of such ceremonies from one man and when I refused they sacked me from the place. The son of the man I went to live with, Akwetey, who was ten years old even told me to marry one of the men. The man who wanted to marry me was about twenty year old or more, he was very big [Interview with 14 year old girl at Winneba on October 14 2016].

³ Host communities will be used subsequently to refer to the communities along the Volta Lake that hosted the children whilst they were working as trafficked children.

The respondents gave no clue that suggests that cultural practices in the host communities explicitly fuel the incidence of CFEM; although there is often the carrot-and-stick push, as recounted by this girl:

Akwetey maame convinced me to marry the man because he said if I married him he will provide all I needed and even provide for my parents but I refused. So Akoto's mother went ahead and took the money from the man. I run away from the house till he left the house. Akwetey maame threatened me and said I should follow the man or I shouldn't return to the house. She eventually sacked me from her house and threw my things out so I went and stayed with a woman called Maame until I was rescued. I spent one Christmas in Maame's house [Interview with 12 year old girl at Winneba on October 14 2016]

There are inherent social and economic norms and practices that generally push girls to engage in early unprotected sexual relationships that lead to teenage pregnancy that has higher chance of tying the teenage mothers to the fathers of their children.

This is consistent with accounts given by a community chief and two members of the fishing community in Yeji, in which they disputed any claims of CFEM. In other words, what appears to be evident from their account is the prevalence of sexual promiscuity and predatory sex, which normally leads to teenage pregnancy. Once the girls get pregnant, they are more likely to marry the men who got them pregnant, in order that the burden of responsibility will not lie with the girls' families who mostly are already cash strapped.

Sexual promiscuity, has strong links with most of the factors (poverty, parental irresponsibility, child labour) identified in the next section as causes of CFEM. The key perpetrators are the slave masters or fishermen under whose care the children reside. They either lure the girls into sexual relationships or pledge them into marriage with boys who are also mostly working for them as labourers. Respondents in Yeji were of the opinion that it is taboo for fishermen to rape female members of the community, since that act can bring bad luck and poor catch. They agreed, though, that male members of the community can adopt various strategies to get girls and women to have sexual relationships with them.

But some children gave testimonies of personal experience of rape, which presupposes that there are occasions of rape in the communities: and which conflicts with the accounts given by the opinion leaders interviewed at Yeji.

The daughter of the sister of the woman I was staying with took me to a man and he slept with me. I was forced. When we went to the room, the lady I went with left and the man asked me to sleep with him but I said I was young, yet he forced and slept with me. He slept on top of me on the bed and told me not to shout. I kept telling him he will hurt me but he refused to listen.....

[Interview with 16 year old girl at Winneba, October 14 2016]

This disparity between accounts of victims and opinion leaders justifies the methodology used for this study. Harvesting experiences of persons who have lived the realities of life in the fishing communities can be very enriching, although there is the possibility of exaggerating or simplifying the accounts.

The phenomenon of child early marriage, with subtle element of force that lures children into sexual unions, also involves boys. Boys are lured or threatened to engage in sexual activities with girls; which is used to blackmail them to stay longer with their masters. This is particularly so when the girls get pregnant for the boys. Since the boys will not be able to cater for the girls and their babies, they are compelled to stay longer with the master through the phenomenon that has become known as the Stockholm syndrome. The victim of child early marriage sees their master as protectors of their interests, as they provide their sexual, economic, social and psychological needs, no matter how meagre this may be. Under the circumstances under which they live, their best bet is to stay with the master, especially since they do not often have the advantage of comparing their situation with other children of their age.

6.2 Causes of Forced Child Marriage in the Fishing Communities

1. Broken homes, parental neglect and irresponsibility

The family is the primary unit of socialisation for every Child. Families play the fundamental and critical role of raising a child to the standard acceptable in society. More specifically, the family consisting of both the father and mother is fundamental to raising responsible children. Households managed by a single parent is likely to default on most of its responsibilities to children and in the process, the children lose their family protection, drop out of school, become

displaced or forced into child labour to find a living for themselves. For girls, such a situation makes them vulnerable to conditions such as teenage pregnancy and/ or early marriage with the potential of truncating their social development and economic empowerment. This limits or erodes their chances of enhancing their capabilities for a productive future. The rate of vulnerability is even higher especially in families where both parents have separated and have forfeited their responsibilities, either in part or in whole. The situation worsens when the family is poor.

It was found from interactions with respondents that the rescued children, especially those forced into child early marriages, mostly have family history of single motherhood (where father did not accept responsibility for pregnancy or is not available to support), or broken homes, and so have ever lived with a single parent or other extended family members for most part of their formative years. Some of the respondents (especially girls) who were rescued narrated their ordeals of how they ended up in the hands of their slave masters or mistresses and eventually got trapped in sexual relationships at tender ages. One such respondent responded to the question of how she ended up in the Volta Lake community as follows:

I went to Makango as a little girl. My mother and father at the time were not together and my mother was not the one taking care of us. At that time my mother's sister was living in Makango and had no daughter so fostered me and took me there and brought me up like her own daughter. [Interview with 21 year old girl at Winneba, October 13 2016]

Another girl recounted:

I was born in Yeji and brought up there. My father did not take care of my mother when she got pregnant. When I was a bit older I asked my grandmother to take me to our hometown because I wanted to see my father. My grandmother took me to my mother who then took me to my father. My father enrolled me in school but my father beat me one day and I even have the marks to show. They used to accuse me of every theft in the house so I decided to go back to my grandmother so one day I just took off and went to my grandmother at Yeji. [Interview with 14 year old girl at Winneba, October 13 2016]

The relationship between parental neglect/broken home and CFEM is not a straightforward one. Parental neglect has interwoven links with other factors such as child poverty, child slavery, sexual promiscuity and teenage pregnancy all of which contribute to the endemic nature of CFEM in fishing communities and along the Volta Lake.

2. Poverty and Limited Economic Opportunities in both Source and Destination Communities

Poverty is another major cause of CFEM. Globally, there is near universal consensus that child marriage is more pronounced in regions and countries where poverty is noticeably high, and where many families lack access to sustainable source of income or livelihood (Jensen and Thornton, 2003; International Centre for Research on Women, 2010). Poor families/parents regard the girl child as maturing investment in the form of pending bride price to support the rest of the family. People either give their children into marriage or give them out to work as child laborers in order to make money for survival and to cater for the rest of the family. Giving young girls out for marriage, on one hand, is a way to cut the number of dependents in the household to be fed and clothed. Respondents reported that it is a common practice in the host and source communities to find young girls staying with adult men as concubines or spouses while attending school or learning a trade. According a key informant interviewed

Some parents/people even push their children to go and do it [have sexual relationships]. Even in my community at the beach, they don't see anything wrong with it. They think that if the man has money and can take care of that child, what is the problem? They say that they don't have money to take care of their own children, so if they find someone who can, they don't mind at all. Even in the town, there are children who are going to school but are staying with men, teachers, masons, taxi drivers. And the parents approve of it. The same thing happens in those communities. [Interview with Municipal Girls Education Officer at Winneba, October 14 2016]

This practice puts children in vulnerable situations. Children by their very nature are vulnerable, and thus need welfare support and protection from adults. However, when these vulnerable children are made to go and fend for themselves, their situation is exacerbated. Alluding to the practice of parents forcing their children to sleep with or marry older men so

that their needs will be taken care of, including that of their parents in some instances, a respondent asserted:

My mother sent us to our father because she said she didn't have money. When my mother sent us to Yeji, my father also refused to take care of us because he said he had no money. He therefore asked me to work with a man so I can get money and then continue schooling. [Interview with 16 year old girl at Winneba, October 13 2016]

Such children are often left at the mercy of their masters; making them vulnerable. The nature of vulnerability associated with household poverty on children is quite similar to the earlier discussion on broken home and parental irresponsibility. However, poverty has a broader effect on people's ability to make rational decisions for themselves and the future of their families including their children (especially girls), due to limited choices. The attendant effect of poverty makes some parent take uncritical decisions as means to cope with the existing hardship and deprivation. Poverty and lack of means to economic opportunities restrict access to basic and other essential services, including education, basic healthcare and social justice.

The nagging question is, can parents be made to take responsibility for the decisions they take when pushed by extreme poverty? There is no straightforward answer to this. Poverty and limited economic choices lie endogenous to, and fundamentally inseparable from, the plight of these young girls and their families. Thus, it is not enough to conclude that parents deliberately shed their responsibilities by denying their children the right to education. It also does not tell the full story to say that, such parents lack knowledge of the benefits of educating their girl child. Rather, most of these uncritical decisions may have been taken for lack of alternatives and social safety nets.

The narrative of a 12 year old respondent (girl) describes the prevalence of CFEM as a result of general poverty conditions leading to a depressed ability of parents to take decisions in the best interest of their children. She said:

During Christmas, we went to last market at Yeji and I even saw my father there. A man came and bought me one beautiful dress and wanted me to marry me. I refused and he followed me to the house. Akoto maame convinced me to marry the man because he said if I married him he will provide all I needed and even provide for my

parents but I refused. [Interview with 12 year Old girl at Winneba,
October 13 2016]

3. Child Labour/Slavery

Child marriage in the study communities is predominantly an aftermath effect of child labour which is also a consequence of poverty and deprivation. This twin problem conspires to make child marriage an endemic problem in the communities along the Volta Lake and other fishing communities in Ghana. To adequately curb the problem of child marriage, we need to first deal ruthlessly with child labour or slavery, and also empower residents in these areas to have access to decent and reliable source of livelihood in source and destination communities.

From the background of rescued children who were interviewed, it was clear that almost all the children trapped in child marriage or forced unions were first given out to work as labourers for people either on the lake, or at the banks preparing the daily fish catches. Therefore, intervention programs seeking to end child forced marriages must first tackle the root cause of child slavery in the identified communities. While child slavery is not the only cause of CFEM, it contributes strongly to it. Thus, dealing with it adequately is a significant stepping stone to the goal of eradicating this dehumanizing practice

4. High Illiteracy Rate

Level of education correlates strongly with the possibility of early marriage; the lower the level of education, the higher the chance of being married early. Low or no formal education increases the risk of girls being given out in marriage. Parents who are educated are more likely to give adequate protection to their girl child from marriage and sexual abuse, send them to school, make them economically independent and therefore extend the age of marriage of the girls. Studies have shown (Jensen and Thornton, 2003) that child marriage and other associated forms of child abuse are more rampant in countries and within countries where literacy levels are significantly low. Unfortunately, in most countries, the patriarchal nature of existing norms and practices creates inherent biases against women, and makes the education of girls less of a priority to most parents and families in such communities.

Access to education was a problem for all respondents, and their parents or guardians were mostly illiterates with no education at all. Interactions with officials of Challenging Heights revealed that, all the children rescued so far either have no formal education or did not school

beyond lower primary level. Children in these communities largely support their parents in their daily farming or fishing activities.

5. Social Norms, Societal Beliefs and Practices

The socialisation process in many African societies have inbuilt biases and stereotyping against young girls and females in general. This span from cultural, ethnic and gender based norms and practices that exhibit inherent male supremacy over females (Huang, 2014). Again, the social environment in which child upbringing takes place is patriarchal in outlook, and undermines girls' ability to recognise themselves beyond raising a family for another man. Females are often portrayed as the weak version of males, and often have to be submissive and need the support of males in order to achieve their life goals. This inadvertently echoes in the minds of the girl child to limit their dreams to finding a man to marry once they reach their puberty. Traditionally, it is also interesting to note that in most Ghanaian societies, being matured to marry is not determined by age. Rather, it is determined by a girl reaching her puberty, that is when she starts menstruation and this is normally experienced at ages far below 18 years which is internationally recognized minimum age qualification for marriage. A key informant summed it up as follows:

The general perception is that women belong to the kitchen, so some of the parents believe that even if she goes to school, she will still go to the kitchen. They think that if someone has even come to marry her early, she is even lucky that we have gotten a husband for our daughter, and she won't get impregnated outside marriage. Someone even told me that Virgin Mary married and gave birth when she was a teenager. That was a woman we were trying to convince that her daughter is intelligent so she should let her go to school and not get married as a child. So the perception is very bad. They feel that if the girl gets her menses, she is grown, so sometimes, they reduce how much they take care of the child: they make her buy stuff like pad for herself; they don't give her meat in the food. In some communities, if you're fifteen and have not given birth, they will say you are a 'saadwe' (meaning you are barren), and they tease you. That is the norm. They perceive that if you

get to twenty or twenty-five, and you haven't given birth, your birth canal will close, so you have to get at least one child early. That is why they don't see anything wrong with marrying early and giving birth early [Interview with Municipal Girls Education Officer at Winneba, October 14 2016].

In effect, the social environment of most societies teaches females to be dependent on males for success, to be less ambitious in life and to act on the margins of life as auxiliary actors for male counterparts. This original and gender-based biases against females feed into the mind-set of girls in their early development stage. They are thus obsessed with mediocrity and lack of self-belief, low self-esteem and low self-confidence to pursue higher ambitions in life.

7. Effects of CFEM on Children in the Study Communities

Ending child marriage will help break the intergenerational cycle of poverty by allowing girls and women to participate more fully in society. Empowered and educated girls are better able to nourish and care for their children, leading to healthier, smaller families. When girls are allowed to be girls, everybody wins (UNICEF, 2014).

Child marriage is associated with a number of dehumanizing factors which children in general, and girls in particular face in developing countries. The list of such dehumanizing effects of CFEM on children cannot be exhaustive, and the dynamic interplay within and between these factors can hardly be overstated. Our interaction with rescued children and social welfare workers in the study communities (Winneba, Senya, Yeji and surrounding communities), as well as review of related literature and policy reports, point to some common themes under which all other effects of CFEM can be summarized and discussed. Some of these are discussed below:

First, children, who become victims of child marriage, are exposed to sexual abuse or violence from mostly their older sex partners. This could be their slave masters, fishermen, or even boys under 18 who also work as child slaves in the communities along the Volta Lake. Most of these girls are initially lured into sexual unions, and then subsequently abused and neglected. Violence within sexual unions is more common than occasions of rape that precede sexual relationships. Some of these sexual unions are arranged by the slave masters or other adults in the communities.

Second, such cases of maltreatment, including rape within sexual unions and outside of sexual unions, are hardly reported for redress and sanctions of the perpetrators. This is largely due to lack of access to the law enforcement agencies, like DOVVSU of the Ghana Police Service, in the communities along the lake. Often times, the slave masters and other household members who receive such reports from the victims are themselves accomplices or perpetrators, too. Hence those cases die out naturally and the young girls are made to suffer and live with the

consequences for the rest of their lives. At the shelter, one girl narrated her ordeals after a case of sexual abuse in the Volta Lake community as follows:

Afterwards I told the lady [the daughter of the woman I was staying with] that the man had hurt me but she said he hadn't done anything, so I should keep quiet and come home with her. When we got home, I told my madam about it and they asked the lady. Later when they went to the man's house he tried lying because the lady who took me was trying to connive with him to hide the truth [Interview with 16 year old girl at Winneba, October 13 2016].

Third, family members are unable to take up the matter to seek justice for the victims of sexual abuse due to logistical constraints. Alternative dispute mechanisms within communities are often preferred; which often end up in negotiated settlement or disbanded entirely after prolonged negotiations:

My uncle decided to take up the matter and ask him to pay some compensation. The case was still on going when I was rescued here so I have no idea how far it has gone [ibid].

Fourth, and related to the risk of sexual violence, is the inordinate exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and other health problems. Treatment of some of the sexual and reproductive health problems can be crude:

It was a very painful experience [the rape] because I had lower abdominal pain and they put ginger drops in my vagina so I could heal. [Interview with 16 years old at Winneba, October 13 2016]

While specific data about the prevalence of STIs among young girls and boys who engage in early sex in the study communities is not readily available for comparison and emphasis, these children victims are exposed to the danger of contracting STIs through unprotected sex people who mostly have multiple sex partners. Therefore, these children are more susceptible to getting infected with diseases such as HIV/AIDS, gonorrhoea, syphilis etc. than their counterparts who are less exposed to sexual abuse. The mode of treatment of some of these infections leads to further complications.

Fifth, young girls trapped into early sexual unions suffer from high maternal and child mortalities, as well as other related pregnancy and childbirth complications due to lack of access to quality antenatal and postnatal treatments. Information elicited from respondents indicates that access to quality healthcare is predominantly lacking among those working on the Volta Lake and the nearby villages. Again, due to lack of financial resources, pregnant young girls mostly resort to self-medication, which sometimes has disastrous health implications, especially during the first trimester of gestation

Moreover, an early sexual union limits children's ability to reach their full potential in life. Respondents gave the demographic characteristics of children involved in early sexual unions in the host communities as girls aged 11-16 years. What this means is that these girls have been forced to give up any ambition of going to school or learning a trade or pursuing a specific career in future. With CFEM, children are limited to childbirth and performing household duties like sweeping, washing, cooking or fetching water. This also means that they continue to be financially dependent on their partners and lack reliable source of livelihood, which feeds on generational poverty cycle.

8. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Overall, the major finding in this study is the high incidences of sexual promiscuity. This was evident in the responses of respondents. They revealed that some sexual relationships were initiated by men who promised girls a better life from slavery. Seeking a way out, these young girls fall prey and are then married off to these men once they get pregnant. There were also situations narrated by respondents where the young girls and boys themselves were initiators of the sexual relations because of the monies they accrue from such a union or the acceptability they get from their friends. This is depicted in the narrative of a 13 year old girl:

Yes. There were a lot. The children initiate it. For instance there was this girl known as Belinda she always had money and called us uncouth and said if we wanted money like she had we should sleep with men. I used to get so upset anytime she said that. One day Belinda started vomiting and it was said Bro Emma had impregnated her so her father beat her and she confessed that they had sex in the bush. The girls normally slept with the older men [Interview with 13 year old girl at Winneba, October 13 2016].

The major findings of the study are conceptualized in the table below. This is summarized along the ecological framework adapted for the study, which categorizes CFEM at four different levels: Individual, interpersonal, community and societal levels.

Causes Of CFEM in the Study Communities	Category	Effects of CFEM in the Study Communities	Measures To Curb CFEM in the Study Communities
Broken home, parental neglect and irresponsibility	Individual, Interpersonal	Child labour/slavery, sexual promiscuity, teenage pregnancy, school dropouts	Support for single parents, build strong social welfare system, prosecute parents who fail to cater for their children
Poverty and Limited Economic Opportunities in both Source and Destination Communities	Societal structures, individual, community influence	School dropouts, child labour, sexual promiscuity, teenage pregnancy, exposure to STIs, maternal and child mortality	Build the capacities of people with entrepreneurial skills, support the agricultural sector to be more lucrative-access to credit, access to market, good producer prices,
Child Labour/Slavery	Societal structures, community influences, interpersonal networks	Sexual violence, exposure to STIs, teenage pregnancy, abuse of children's fundamental human rights	Law enforcement of child labour, prescribe tough punishment for perpetrators, advocacy campaigns
High Illiteracy Rate in the study communities	Individual, interpersonal networks, community influences, societal structures	Poverty, teenage pregnancy, exposure to STIs, maternal and child mortality, school drop out	Provide access to education- build schools closer to the villages and incentivize parents to retain their children in school
Social Norms, Societal Beliefs and Practices	Individual, interpersonal networks, community influences, societal structures	Exposure to domestic violence, maternal and child mortality, school drop out	Sensitization through media campaigns and Ghana Education Service

9. CONCLUSION

This study examined the incidence of CFEM along the Volta Lake (fishing communities) in Ghana by harvesting the memory of rescued child migrants from communities along the Volta Lake. The study proceeded on the assumption that CFEM leads to early or teenage pregnancy which seriously affects the health and psychosocial development. CFEM is a violation of the fundamental human rights of children 18 years and below. Despite this violation, and the existence of international conventions and national laws against it, the practice remains widespread especially in developing countries. In Ghana, poverty, traditions, sexual promiscuity and limited economic opportunities have been attributed to the prevalence of CFEM.

Currently in Ghana, there is little or no research – qualitatively or quantitatively – that provides insight into the menace of CFEM. Although there is rich literature on Child Labour and Trafficking along the Volta Lake, this is the first such attempt to document the extent to which CFEM is prevalent in Ghana, especially in fishing communities. The approach used for this study was memory harvesting of the experiences of rescued Children from communities along the Volta Lake. The study concludes that, while CFEM is prevalent in the communities along the Volta Lake and other fishing communities in Ghana, children are not always forced into the practice. Rather, early sexual escapades, lures for sex, and sexual promiscuity, arising from interplay of causative factors, including poverty, single parenting and parental neglect, make teenage pregnancy an endemic phenomenon in the communities, which ultimately compels girls into marriage or informal unions with the men who got them pregnant.

We however suggest that a more detailed and contextualised study should be conducted that purposively select victims of CFEM working as labourers in communities along the Volta Lake. This will help unravel more details about the very extent and nature of the prevalence of CFEM in Ghana.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

A more collaborative approach involving all stakeholders (individuals/families, communities and the state) who matter in the fight against child marriage is needed to effectively and sustainably deal with the menace in the host communities and Ghana in general. Specifically, the study recommends the following;

State/National Level

- There should be enforcement of specific provisions in the criminal code on unlawful marriage (including child marriage), by invoking the punitive measures to serve as deterrent to perpetrators and accomplices of child marriage. Part II, chapter 6 of Ghana's Criminal Code (Act 29, 1960) talks about voidable marriage which is supposed to protect all females from being married illegally. Strict enforcement of such laws could help in the fight against incidence of child marriages.
- Strong social welfare system to support affected girls. The Social Welfare Department must be well resourced logistically and in personnel to be able to deal adequately with cases of Child Marriage and to offer protection and support to affected children.
- There is the need for effective collaboration between the Social Welfare, Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service and the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) to ensure the existing legal and policy regimes are strictly enforced to ward of perpetrators of such crime.

Community Level support and sensitization

- Support for affected children – girls who get pregnant as a result of sexual ignorance – must have adequate support systems from community stakeholders (both state and non-state). This is the only way to encourage reporting of such matters to the appropriate bodies for redress. In the current circumstances, affected children and their families feel reluctant to report cases of abuse such as rape and defilement to the appropriate authorities for legal action, especially when the victim is already pregnant, for the fear that the victim (girl) will not get the needed resources to support herself during pregnancy and after delivery child.

- Logistical support should be made available for the identifiable state and non-state institutions to frequently sensitize communities on issues that give rise, and the dangers associated with Child trafficking and child marriage.
- The Community Child Protection Committee (CCPC) concept should be replicated in all fishing communities along the Volta Lake, and further strengthened in Winneba and its environs, in order to serve as the first point of call for victims of sexual abuse and domestic violence. Currently, the police-population ratio (PPR) is 1:784 people as of 2015. This figure falls short of the UN required PPR of 1:500. This shortage limits the visibility of Police personnel nationwide, thus making it difficult for special departments such as DOVVSU to effectively carry out their mandate. Therefore, CCPCs can become the local agents in the respective communities to provide access to security and justice for victims and their family.
- Interventions for girl child education should be introduced more in the source communities to encourage parents to send their children to school.

Community Empowerment and Livelihood Support for Identified Vulnerable Households

- Specific and targeted interventions focusing on empowering disadvantaged families and single parents economically in the study communities. This may include giving them entrepreneurial training in trades of their choice and empowering them to start a self-sustaining business.
- It would be useful to support poor households to keep their children in school to build their capacities to reach their full potentials.
- There is also the need for intensive counseling at household and community levels.

11. ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATION POWER POINTS

The main findings of the study suggest that child marriage prevail in the communities along the Volta Lake, however, the element of force is at best a subtle one. This means that there is the need to deal with child marriage in its entirety and not just forced child marriage. Based on the findings of the study, the following advocacy points are proposed to be carried out in the communities along the Volta Lake of Ghana.

- Community sensitization and education, targeting individual families/households, religious units (mosques, churches, self-help groups etc.) in the study communities through visitations by state and non-state agencies tasked with the mandate of ensuring healthy environment, and development of children must be improved and strengthened. These actors include but not limited to the District Assemblies, Ghana Education Service, Ghana Health Service, CHRAJ, Ghana Police Service (DOVVSU), Social Welfare Department, and Community-based Organizations.
- Mass media campaigns, using radio and information vans to mobilize the communities against child marriage. This campaign should devise messages that highlight the root causes of sexual promiscuity and child early marriage and its effect on the children and the community as a whole.
- Rallying support against child marriage through nonverbal means such as paintings, artistic impresses and public posters to create a sense of communal appreciation and ownership of the issues and the need to put a stop to it.
- Resorting to social and behavioural change communication (SBCC) tools to subconsciously appeal to, and change societal perceptions about children (especially girls) in the communities. SBCC is the use of communication to influence behaviours, including the adoption and use of services acceptable to the community, by positively influencing knowledge levels, attitudes and social norms and practices. SBCC focuses on the relevant changes that need to be made at the individual, inter-personal and community levels. This leads to changes in socio-cultural practices that are required to create conducive environment to meet the goals of an intervention.
- Organising awareness and capacity training for selected indigenes in the target communities to serve as change agents and to sustain the awareness campaign in the communities.

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APPENDIX 1: SOME INTERVIEW REFERENCES

- Interview with 21 year old girl at Winneba (October 13 2016). She had left the school and was apprenticed as a seamstress. She lived in Makango. She was profiled by CH as one of the girls who was co habiting with a man. This girl however denied that, although she indicated she had a boyfriend whom she had sex with once.
- Interview with 13 year old girl at Winneba (October 13 2016). This girl was in school while she was trafficked to Yeji to work along the Volta Lake helping to prepare the fishes. She stayed there for three years before Challenging Heights rescued her
- Interview with 12 year old girl at Winneba (October 14 2016). This girl was rescued from Demleku near the Volta Lake. She was a child slave and a school dropout. She was not married but her slave master tried to give her to a man in marriage. When she refused she was thrown out of the house and she went to live with another woman before Challenging Heights rescued her. She also gave accounts of young girls she knew who were given out in marriage at Demleku.
- Interview with 16 year old girl at Winneba (October 14 2016). She was born in Yeji and brought to Senya Bereku. The mother who is Fanti was married to an Ewe man and they lived in Yeji. Her parents divorced, and the mother took her and her little sister and relocated to Senya Bereku. After sometime, the mother sent her and sister to back the father in Yeji because she said she was no longer financially able to support the girls. The father also gave her out to a woman to work because he also said he didn't have money to take care of him. She worked for two years before Challenging Heights rescued her. She was also a victim of defilement even though the case was not pursued.
- Interview with 14 year old girl at Winneba (October 13 2016). This girl was a school dropout living with her mother at Yeji. Her parents had divorced and none of them was prepared to take good care of her. She was being abused in her father's home before she fled to live with her grandmother. She lived with her grandmother before Challenging Heights rescued her
- Interview with Municipal Girls Education Officer at Winneba (October 14 2016). She gave more insight into the problems of child slavery, child marriage and sexual promiscuity in the area. She attributed these problems to poverty, parental irresponsibility and societal perception.
- Interview with a staff of the Social Welfare and Community Development department in Winneba (October, 2016). He has served in the department for approximately 5 years. He has been involved in occasional activities/collaborations such as rescue and re-integration with Challenging Heights International, International Needs and other relative NGOs working on child trafficking in the area. He operates mainly in the Winneba area which is as a child trafficking source community.
- Interview with a staff of Challenging Heights (October, 2016). He has been involved in rescue and Community Engagements. He has a cumulative experience of about 7 years

working on various child trafficking interventions such as rescue, re-integration, rehabilitation and community agent/liaison person in both source and destination communities. He gave us insights into the nature of Child trafficking in both the sources and rescue communities.

- Interview with a staff of Challenging Heights (October, 2016). She works as house parent at the Challenging Height's shelter facility. She has worked in the facility for four years and performs all parental responsibilities at the shelter.
- Interview with Municipal Girls Education Officer/Girl Child Coordinator), Winneba (October, 2016). She is an educationist with over nine years of experience in promoting girl child education in Ghana. She leads efforts to advocate for girls education and helping in retaining girls in the classroom

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT WHILE THE OCCURRENCE OF CHILD MARRIAGE IS DECLINING, THE PROPORTION OF GIRLS WHO ARE MARRIED IS REMAINING STEADY. IN ORDER TO COMBAT THIS PRACTISE, CHALLENGING HEIGHTS COMMISSIONED THIS STUDY TO UNDERSTAND HOW CHILD TRAFFICKING AND CHILD MARRIAGE ARE RELATED.

"Some parents/people even push their children to go and do it [have sexual relationships]. They think that if the man has money and can take care of that child, what is the problem? They say that they don't have money to take care of their own children, so if they find someone who can, they don't mind at all. Even in the town, there are children who are going to school but are staying with men, teachers, masons, taxi drivers. And the parents approve of it. The same thing happens in those communities."

- Municipal Girls Education Officer, Winneba

