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Parents' reflections on child trafficking mitigation mechanisms in trafficking hotspot communities

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ABSTRACT

Evidence shows that the majority of the world's trafficking in persons for sexual and labour purposes occurs over short distances. In Ghana, children are largely trafficked from rural communities into resource-prone areas to engage in intensive labour activities. This study explores the views of parents in communities where children are largely trafficked, on the best ways to intervene in child trafficking cases. In-depth interviews were conducted with 21 adults (who are parents) from communities in Ghana. Data were managed with HyperRESEARCH software and analysed thematically. Findings reveal that providing vocational and technical training to improve means of livelihood, promoting knowledge on trafficking, and strictly enforcing laws will contribute to combating child trafficking in Ghana. The study recommends the need for inter-organisational collaboration and calls for the government to create rural opportunities for financially struggling families to prevent them from falling prey to traffickers due to their hardships.

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Introduction

'... intra-regional and domestic trafficking are the major forms of trafficking in persons' worldwide (UNODC, 2014). Like the case of several countries, in Ghana, perpetrators of child trafficking have adopted varied approaches to traffic children outside the public radar, including resorting to online platforms (Demetis & Kietzmann, 2021; Gottfried et al., 2020; Hernandez et al., 2018; Rafferty, 2021), and working directly with legal caregivers of children (Yadoglah, 2018). This study engages adults (who are parents) in Ghanaian communities where many children are trafficked on intervention mechanisms to mitigate child trafficking from the family perspective. This objective was born out of one of the researcher's (CRM) observations while conducting another study in communities with high trafficking cases. The interest to conduct this study was further deepened when on 10 January 2022, a multimedia group in Ghana released an exposé that underscored the plight of children

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forced into labour and the different tactics used by traffickers to sign up children to work on cocoa farms (Joy News, (2020)). In this documentary, parents were identified as major players in child trafficking activities, negotiating with middlemen to process fixed-term payments based on the ages of the children (Nartey, 2022). Prices for children sold into trafficking were lower than 1600 cedis (\$ 200 at the time of this study) for the oldest child (Nartey, 2022).

Victims who end up in the hands of traffickers endure extreme hours of drudgery, as well as increased exposure to physical and mental health complications due to severe forms of maltreatment such as sexual abuse, prostitution, and food starvation (Balfour et al., 2022; Miller, 2019). Balfour et al. (2022) and Mbamba et al. (2022) enumerated that governments and organisations involved in child trafficking interventions must put measures in place to curb this rather excruciating menace. The recurrence of trafficking children for forced labour is due to the demand for cheap labour in the agricultural, fishing and mining sectors in Ghana (International Justice Mission, 2021). Cocoa, for instance, remains one of Ghana's biggest exporting commodities contributing more than 12% to the agricultural sector (Vigneri & Kolavalli, 2018). According to Olden (2021), parents and caregivers get involved in the trafficking of their children due to extreme poverty. This economic hardship experienced by families is as fundamental as the lack of access to life's basic needs like food and clean water, good shelter, and quality education for children. A lack of these necessities often puts families in at-risk positions which makes them targets. Several traffickers prey on the vulnerability of the economic hardships faced by families to gain access to the children by offering family members regular or yearly monetary compensation (Olden, 2021). This is the first study in Ghana to explore parents' opinions on what they, as caregivers, and living in trafficking-sensitive communities see as the best ways to intervene in child trafficking in Ghana. The adults (who are parents) that are involved in this study have self-identified as people who have not trafficked children themselves but have lived, seen, and interacted with others engaged in such acts. However, their views on mitigation mechanisms are relevant because, first, they live in a community popularly noted as a trafficking-prone area in the country which gives them a strong understanding on the dynamics of the issue in their communities. Also, all the parents that were involved in the study are members of 'parents for anti-child trafficking' local groups where they meet periodically to discuss child trafficking issues among themselves. Many of these local groups were started by NGOs that worked or are working with these communities against child trafficking. Anecdotal information shows that the local groups are primarily into discussing trafficking issues and how best they can attract support from NGOs who are the major players in combating trafficking in Ghana. The authority of the groups is recognised within the local government of the districts and leaders of the groups are often invited during child protection stakeholder engagements

The study is guided by the following questions.

- (1) Why do you think parents are engaged in the trafficking of their children?
- (2) How can the trafficking of children be mitigated?

Child trafficking mitigation mechanisms

In 2000, the United Nation's Palermo Protocol stressed on four interlocking concepts for a holistic fight against human trafficking: protection, prevention, partnership, and prosecution (United Nations General Assembly, 2000). Since the passing of this legislation, efforts from countries and the international space have focused on these four dimensions. In a South African study on human trafficking and the effectiveness of initiatives, Bello and Olutola (2016) highlighted that community policing tactics have been adopted to deal with the plethora of human trafficking cases, especially among children. Bello and Olutola (2016) proved that since trafficking cases are more likely to rise in the absence of social control, policing is an important alternative approach. Another study in the Netherlands augments the relevance of virtual policing and tightening anti-cyber-bullying initiatives by stating that, now, many child trafficking cases start and take place over the internet in several forms, including child pornography. Therefore, there is a need to build the capacity of law enforcement professionals, particularly the police in cyber policing, to match emerging child trafficking avenues (Winterdyk, 2018).

Martinho et al. (2021) also spotlighted the role of knowledge about trafficking and awareness creation in communities, projecting the significant role of a collective community approach to combating child trafficking. They succinctly stated that '... an empowered community can actively contribute to the prevention, signalling, and (re) integration of victims of child trafficking' (Martinho et al., 2021, 1028). A study consolidating evidence in Europe suggested inter-organisational collaboration between the private sector, civil society, and government organisations as a binding technique to pull resources together and eclectically tackle all aspects of the canker of child trafficking (Reichel, 2011). In line with collaboration, some studies in Ghana posit that an effective way to do this is to encourage the formation of national coalitions and inter-sectoral collaboration to consolidate the vested interests of various groups contributing to combating child trafficking (Baku, 2019; Danvers, 2022; Loh, 2018). Erikson and Larsson (2020) shared a similar recommendation on the need for sectoral collaboration for more robust intervention measures against trafficking. This includes partnerships between the health, human and social services sectors as well as the education sector. Again, in Ghana, a Child Protection Compact signed between the United States and the Government of Ghana in 2015 has placed enormous emphasis on child trafficking intervention through bottom-up, collaborative approaches (US Department of State, 2020). Amidst this plethora of evidence, the trafficking of children is still rampant in Ghana. Therefore, the gap we attempt to fill is to offer a nuanced perspective, by exploring parents' opinions on what they, as caregivers, interacting with others who have trafficked their children and living in trafficking-sensitive communities see as the best ways to intervene in child trafficking.

Methods

Study design

The study used a qualitative approach to explore the in-depth narrative of community members in a source community where child trafficking is prevalent. The source community was identified after researchers engaged the leadership of International Needs

Ghana, an NGO working on anti-child trafficking issues in Ghana. Suggestions were made by the organisation on communities that have recorded the greatest number of children being trafficked in the last two years. We ranked the list and selected the included community. Silverman and Marvasti (2008) spotlighted the usefulness of qualitative studies in understanding the subjective views of individuals about a phenomenon. The study employed a phenomenological approach, The phenomenological approach allowed researchers to explore insights into participants' narratives, allowing us to make sense of their experiences (Padgett, 2016).

Participants and procedure

Researchers used purposive sampling to recruit participants for the study. Two research assistants and one of the study authors (DA) engaged relevant stakeholders and opinion leaders in the community including church leaders, heads of organised community groups such as the women's group, non-governmental organisations, the chief, and assemblyman informing them about the study. Researchers explained the aims of the research and shared flyers of the study with these individuals to leverage their influence in reaching targeted participants. Researchers employed this strategy by encouraging these influential individuals to share details of the study with their friends and other members of the community. Researchers added their contacts to the flyer to allow interested participants to contact them directly and arrange for their availability for a screening process before the interview.

Following this strategy, researchers received messages from 40 participants who were willing to participate in the study. Participants who volunteered to partake in the study were screened with the inclusion criteria: 1) stayed in the community for more than 24 months, 2) was more than 18 years old and 3) had knowledge of the incidence of child trafficking in the community. Researchers, with a short questionnaire, tested the third criterion to examine the knowledge of potential participants about child trafficking before interviews. 17 participants who did not pass one of the stated criteria were excluded from the study. Two other participants had to drop out of the study due to work-related duties which sent them out of town and personal reasons. For the eligibility criterion on being in the community for at least 24 months, researchers anticipated that participants would have had considerable engagement on child trafficking issues within the community. A summary of the participants is found in [Table 1](#) below.

Ethical consideration

Researchers obtained ethical clearance from the Institutional Review Board of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. Informed consent letters were also given to all participants before the interviews. Participants consented to these letters by signing to communicate their willingness to partake in the study. In instances where participants could not read and sign, details of the informed consent form were read to each participant and approved by thumbprinting the form.

Table 1. Participant demography.

Participants	Sex	Age	Occupation
Adult 1	Female	41	Baker
Adult 2	Female	46	Petty Trader
Adult 3	Female	39	Street Vendor
Adult 4	Female	38	Waste Picker
Adult 5	Male	42	Cocoa Farmer
Adult 6	Male	51	Electrician
Adult 7	Female	44	Garment Worker
Adult 8	Male	34	Labourer
Adult 9	Male	37	Unemployed
Adult 10	Male	55	Waste Picker
Adult 11	Male	46	Unemployed
Adult 12	Female	42	Garment Worker
Adult 13	Female	38	Baker
Adult 14	Male	41	Unemployed
Adult 15	Male	47	Waste Picker
Adult 16	Male	31	Waste Picker
Adult 17	Female	33	Street Vendor
Adult 18	Female	35	Unemployed
Adult 19	Male	37	Cocoa Farmer
Adult 20	Female	32	Garment Worker
Adult 21	Male	33	Labourer

Data collection and measures

Interviews were conducted in participants' homes and private settings recommended by the participants. Participants insisted on being interviewed in a setting of their choice to reduce any interruption to the interview process and to increase participants' freedom to express themselves without fear of being blacklisted in the community. Interviews started in late November and ended in mid-February, with each session spanning 65 minutes. Interviews were conducted face-to-face using a semi-structured interview guide. The semi-structured interview guide allowed researchers to ask follow-up questions to have a better understanding of participants' narratives.

Interviews were conducted in Twi (a dominant indigenous language in Ghana) and English. Participants chose the language for communication during interview sessions to enhance their comfort in clearly communicating their understanding of the issue. The fluency of the researchers collecting the data made it easier for them to develop a good rapport with participants, which enhanced their responsiveness during the interview. With the authorisation of participants, researchers audio-recorded interviews to prevent narratives from being lost.

Analytic procedure

Data analysis commenced after researchers had transcribed all interviews ad verbatim in Microsoft Word. All interviews conducted in Twi were translated to English and then transcribed in Word. Researchers followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase data analysis procedure. First, each researcher casually read transcripts to develop their understanding of the study and participants' narratives. This was followed by line-by-line coding of participants' narratives which is the second stage. In the third stage, all the researchers independently came up with codes from their understanding of the transcript to generate themes. At the fourth stage, researchers came together to review named themes.

Disagreements of codes by researchers were solved by consensus. Some of the codes researchers developed included 'skill training' and 'knowledge'. Similar codes were then arranged and merged into themes. The fifth and sixth stages involved refining themes with names to capture participants' responses and presented them as findings for the study respectively. Researchers used NVivo 12 as the main assistant for importing and organising codes.

Trustworthiness

Researchers ensured the trustworthiness and credibility of findings through member checking. This approach involves the validation of transcripts by participants (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Since most interviews were translated from Twi to English, several quotes from participants were out of context. To enhance the credibility of participants' narratives, transcripts were sent to participants for corroboration and feedback. Researchers took the time to read transcripts to participants to ensure that they understood the process and give clarity to their narratives. Additionally, none of the researchers were affiliated with the community, which minimised their bias in presenting findings.

Findings

Vocational and technical training

Study participants asserted that poverty was an underlying cause of parents' involvement in trafficking. They highlighted that many of the communities where children are trafficked from in Ghana have large family sizes. This, together with the poverty they are already experiencing, pushes legal guardians to give children out to fishermen, cocoa farmers, and mining lords for them to utilise the little resources available to them to fend for the remaindered of the family. To limit parents' involvement in child trafficking, participants suggested providing practical skills training to help them do something beneficial rather than sell their children for money.

The problem we have in this country is that we do not have enough opportunities to help struggling parents and other individuals. It is as if, if you are not fortunate enough to go to school to land a white colour job, you are useless and there is not much that you can do, which is sad. I think for me, one of the key things to end such an absurd thing is to create opportunities for parents to learn a skill. With that, they will not see their children as a commodity or a way out of poverty. *(Adult 12, 42 years).*

On economic opportunities, participants mentioned that there used to be a lot of support from community-based organisations, helping struggling families with start-ups, but now, there is limited support. A participant took time to explain why providing parents with economic opportunities is a good to reduce the rates of child trafficking

I think if some of these parents had something better to do or lean on, they wouldn't even think about selling their very own children to someone to work . . . In the past, there were a good number of organisations supporting us, but now, there are none and getting money to start buying things or paying for training is difficult . . . Let me tell you, when a certain organisation came into this community to train us in soap making, more than half of the community members registered but there was space for only 20 people. I mean, almost all the

men are farmers, and the women are housewives, what do you expect? In as much as it sounds ridiculous, what will they do if they don't have any hope or anything to survive on? Absolutely nothing. Our country has become very difficult with less opportunities for people to stay. If they knew how to sew a dress or even plait hair for other people at least, they would get some money and I feel that is what the government and some of the community leaders need to focus on – not just coming out with measures. We want to learn oo, but we need money to start up.

(Adult 4, 38 years).

Although participants acknowledged the difficult situation in which the country is in now, a considerable number of them asserted that it takes more than the government to protect children and put some mechanisms in place to help parents. According to the participants, everyone has their part to play.

We all know that things have become tough in the last two years due to the pandemic and we can even see that the current government is even struggling with some policies and programs but for me, we cannot always rely on the government. What about all the businessmen in certain communities? What about the NGOs too that are working in these communities especially here in Northern Ghana? They also have a role to play. Even you and I, if we all decide to employ parents and individuals with families and give them on-the-job training, I do not think we will have this situation frankly. We need to come together and look out for each other that is how we grow and prevent some of these crimes and social issues

(Adult 21, 33 years).

I know a lot of Ghanaians and organisations like the blame game, but for me, we have to put ourselves in the shoes of these parents. You are married, and even in some cases, you are a lone parent of eight, nine, or ten children without a job; how do you want such a person to survive? No job, no skill, no opportunity, nothing at all. How can they survive, my sister? Those situations make parents desperate, so even if you tell them, you will give them 5 cedis a day to give their child to you to work, they will. We need to train and give them the skill to flee from such a thought

(Adult 7, 44 years).

In addition to creating opportunities for parents through skill and vocational training, participants emphasised the need for stakeholders to not focus on training only mothers and women but include men too because they face similar challenges with their children. One participant put it this way:

I think in the society that we live in; we think of parenting as only the responsibility of the woman and not the man and sometimes when we want to solve sensitive issues as this we tend to focus more on women and ignore men because they can survive without such opportunities which I think is very wrong. Men are heads of their families according to our Ghanaian culture and in some situations, they have children they are fostering or taking care of so if they don't seem to find any purpose or anything to do, they will tend to focus on dubious means to get money of which this can be a part of. As we champion creating opportunities for parents, it should be equal opportunities not opportunities for mothers only

(Adult 18, 35 years).

Increasing knowledge on trafficking

All the participants stressed the lack of knowledge about what trafficking is as a problem. Knowledge is important for reducing risk factors. Interestingly, participants reveal that most parents see an opportunity in giving their children out to family, friends or extended family relatives in the cities because it will position their children in the right

environment to make money and manage their affairs in later years. This makes it important to intensify education on child trafficking to make parents well-informed about the consequences of their actions. This ambivalence on the part of parents leads to trafficking because they are sometimes not aware that their own extended family members are middlemen or traffickers themselves.

The sad thing is that most of these parents don't know what they are doing and the harm they are causing to their children. In their quest to position their children in the right place according to their terms and give them the needed work experience, they expose them to the worse form of abuse and violence. And you know, these traffickers are smart so they will deceive you and make you think that they are going to give your child the best experience they could ever have but they go and do something else. I think it is about time we do something about this and kind of immerse parents with information on some of these cruel acts
(Adult 1, 41 years).

Speaking on how the media could be used as an essential instrument to contribute to anti-trafficking mandates in Ghana, a 47-year-old participant questioned the role of the media and how when properly utilised, could be beneficial.

How many television or radio programs talk about how harmful and destructive child trafficking is? I do not know of any, if we cannot come down to ring these sounds in the ears of perpetrators, how will they know that it is wrong? It is about time we take education seriously in this country. If you can't do it, give it to the media to do it *(Adult 15, 47 years).*

Participants further suggested ways to strengthen the education of individuals in communities where these acts are rampant. One participant said it this way.

You see how when we were at the peak of COVID-19, our President had sessions to talk and address the doubts we all had about the virus? That is the same approach we need to adopt in this case. Because it is a serious issue that affects children's mental and physical health, we need to go the extra mile to save them. At least when the President and other influential people speak about it, people will realise how intense the situation is and they might have a change of mind. We cannot just do anything just like that because we think it cannot happen to us or it is not an epidemic.
(Adult 11, 46 years)

Strict enforcement of the law

Participants asserted that the law is taken for granted in communities where trafficking occurs. Perpetrators often do not adhere to laws because negative repercussions for their actions are neglected. Participants engaged in this study narrated instances where people walked freely for a crime they committed. Hence, deterrence of parents involved in trafficking their children is possible when law enforcement bodies like the police uptick their activities in hotspot communities where children are sent from.

Living here for more than five years, I have realised and understood a lot of things. It is as if the law doesn't work here; it is crazy and scary at the same time. The only way these things can happen here and in other communities apart from the fact that there might be limited opportunities is that the society has created some perception that by all means possible you need to survive, and they don't even care when they are hurting someone because, at the end of the day, the police will do nothing about it. So, I think the law enforcement agents need to step up
(Adult 3, 39 years).

Some communities can be toxic and facilitate crime and violence, so the earlier you put stringent measures in place, the better for everybody. For instance, there was a time that I heard one guy beat his girlfriend mercilessly and was even choking her to death, but what happened after the girl was taken to the hospital? Nothing! I think the police have even forgotten about us, and I can say that for most communities, this is what happens, so there are different forms of violence. If the police were to imprison some parents involved in this act, I don't think some will even think of engaging in selling their children (*Adult 9, 37 years*).

Participants evidenced that the strict implementation and enforcement of the law in the communities will discourage other people from engaging in acts of trafficking, which infringes the rights of vulnerable children and women. This will make the community safe for individuals. One participant opined.

In a community where it is each one for himself and God for us all, the only way you can stop people from doing the worse things is to have a strict system where people are heavily punished for some of the crazy things they do else, they will always be motivated to do the wrong thing and when it happens that way it is the children and women who will suffer as in the case of what we are talking about. We cannot turn a blind eye to what is happening, and the police know that. Get those who are involved, punish them, and put them behind bars; that is the only we to go if you ask me (*Adult 2, 46 years*).

Another participant added

If you want to stop these crimes, make the system work. That is the only way. If the system is not working and the police are not doing their job, I am very sorry my sister, but we will go on and on and on. It is about the police showing no mercy to perpetrators, making them know that what they are involved in is bad. Punish them and they will not do that again (*Adult 20, 32 years*).

When asked whether they feel that punishing parents and imprisoning them is the best way to go since children might end up growing up without their primary caregiver, participants suggested that alternative care homes remain the best option since it is not a good idea to leave children in the hands of those who pose threats to their lives.

... see, we cannot continue to think that way. If the parent had something better to offer the child, they wouldn't have sold the child. Do not temper justice with mercy. It is not as if they would have cared for the child anyway. Fine them, jail them and take the child to a children's home; that is it and nothing else (*Adult 5, 42 years*).

Discussion and implications

Like the case of studies in several regions especially in Asia and other parts of Africa postulating that a major cause of the persistence of child trafficking is poverty (Balfour et al., 2022; Olden, 2021), the current study corroborates this, indicating that poverty creates the condition for children's exposure to trafficking, and as a mitigation mechanism, suggests the provision of, availability and accessibility to technical and vocational training opportunities in communities plagued the hardest with child trafficking in Ghana. One reason necessitating the need for vocational and training opportunities is that the availability and access to schools to acquire formal education in rural areas in the country is one of the major ways of enlightening individuals about the destructive nature of child trafficking to keep them on guard against perpetrators. Unfortunately, in rural areas,

accessibility to schools is almost non-existent (Anlimachie & Avoada, 2020). Thus, setting up centres that train both the young and old in rural communities to make money to fend for their families has the potential of reducing parents' considerations to give their children out to either strangers or close relatives. For example, the findings of Si et al. (2020) and Wu and Si's (2018) studies on rural communities revealed that creating entrepreneurial opportunities for rural folks helps in economic independence and a reduction in criminal activities caused by poverty. Some vocational and technical skills training that could help with financial liberation in rural communities are carpentering, soap making, local drink ('sobolo') making, 'gari' making, shea butter making, hairdressing, barbering, and organic farming training. Monson (2019) stated that these are areas in Ghana that when ventured into, can yield good financial results because of increased demand for such products. The findings reveal that while many parents are ready to enter such ventures, they are challenged with the funds to start. To them, this was not a problem in the past when there were several organisations helping, but now, there is no support.

The findings also reveal that, in the past, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have been instrumental in bringing some developmental projects to their communities. Now, the rural development mandate has been left in the hands of the Government of Ghana, which is facing excruciating economic hardships especially as it strives to recover from COVID-19 losses. Therefore, the findings call for an active involvement of non-profit organisations to help provide employment opportunities through funding skills training. This is consistent with the call for inter-organisational collaboration (Erikson & Larsson, 2020; Reichel, 2011), and an acknowledgement that the role of NGOs in community development is an important part of nation-building and development. Thus, taking some lessons, strong partnerships involving community-based organisations, local leaders, and community youth groups to adopt community-emanated solutions can go a long way to limit parents' involvement in the trafficking of their children due to financial hardships. Significantly, the findings reveal that key persons in the communities, especially well-known businessmen, can contribute by supporting community training programs to give back to their communities. It is important to stress the findings' revelation that some training programs are gender biased and must be checked to include men and women. The patriarchal ascription of certain skills being reserved for certain identified gender groups should be eschewed. From the findings, it appears community members are willing to engage in productive ventures, however, the financial capacity to start up hinders them.

The findings emphasise the role of ignorance about trafficking, and how it affects parents' ability to engage in child trafficking criminal activities. Corroborating this, the study of Martinho et al. (2021) demonstrated that knowledge plays a significant role in fighting trafficking globally. In a report by the Polaris Project on trafficking risk factors and perpetration in the United States of America, legal guardians and family members were ranked among the key players (Polaris Project, 2020). While the dynamics may be different in Ghana, this revelation gives credence to the results of the current study, presenting the perspective that parents may not always be trafficking their children because they are poor, but for other factors like being ignorant about the crime of trafficking. The findings also paint the image of parents trying to give their children the best of life, which results in them giving their children out to strangers who promise wealth and care for their children

elsewhere. This includes guardians and caregivers thinking that their children are being mentored in 'deep fishing' and 'mining' skills for a better future without knowing the harm being caused and the legal ramifications. Therefore, to bridge this knowledge gap, the findings reveal that local media's active involvement, including radio, television, and print, in awareness creation will be instrumental. This suggestion of active media involvement is consistent with the arguments of Hill (2016) that the media is a powerful tool against trafficking. For example, in the State of New York, legislators are pushing for the passing of a bill on training employees of lodging facilities to easily identify traffickers and victims of trafficking (The New York State Senate, n.d).

This study, therefore, recommends that such awareness training programs can be implemented throughout the country, especially the hotspot areas around the Volta River, mining, and quarrying sites. Stakeholders relevant to this cause include the National Commission of Civic Education (NCCE), and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection. International Needs Ghana, and International Justice Missions-Ghana are two non-profit organisations that are at the forefront of anti-human trafficking activities in Ghana. Therefore, up ticking their knowledge-impacting activities will contribute to the anti-trafficking mandate.

Congruent with previous studies that implementation flaws in child protection laws in Ghana are a key driver of child trafficking cases (Okyere, 2017), the findings of this study reveal a similar trend and highlight the strict implementation of existing laws as an intervention mechanism. The findings show that failure on the part of law enforcement to bring perpetrators of trafficking crimes to justice, including parents themselves, hinders the fight against trafficking. Therefore, the findings highlight the importance of the strict implementation of laws, which includes enforcing all the punitive measures against perpetrators whether they are the child's legal guardians. While some studies in Indonesia (Pasaribu, 2020) and North Korea (Yoon, 2019) have suggested a more restorative justice approach in cases where parents and legal guardians are involved in child trafficking, the current study deviates from this, suggesting that individuals who commit child trafficking crimes should be punished. This could be attributed to the compounded nature of child trafficking cases over the years in Ghana with little curtailing progress. The study recommends the need for human rights advocacy groups like the Ghana Coalition for the Rights of the Child and the Department of Children to advocate and echo the lacuna within the law enforcement system to bring attention and consequently, action.

Conclusion

The trafficking of children in Ghana has evolved to the point where parents and legal caregivers themselves are involved in the trafficking of their children. This study engages parents in communities where many children are trafficked on intervention mechanisms to mitigate child trafficking from the family perspective. The study identified that because parents go through unbearable financial hardships with someresorting to the trafficking of their children. Creating technical and vocational training avenues for parents to gain economic independence and social functioning will contribute to mitigating child trafficking. Additionally, the study found out that the lack of awareness on what contributes to trafficking is a push factor for parents to give their children out to traffickers in the guise of kin or kith because child fostering is a predominant practice in Ghana (Abdullah et al.,

2020). More specifically, taking into consideration how polarised values of trust, respect for elders and kinship care are rooted in traditional communities (Nukunya, 2016), adopting culturally sensitive awareness creation approaches will amass the support of the communities at large towards building a communal body of knowledge.

Finally, the findings suggest strict enforcement and implementation of the law relating to perpetrators of trafficking. The findings show that this will serve as a deterrence to other traffickers.

Limitations

This study only involved parents from communities that are noted as 'hotspot' sending communities. It will be important for other studies to investigate communities that largely receive victims of trafficking to provide a comparative analysis of the dynamics in the two settings. This will contribute to deepening the results of the current findings. Various researchers and policymakers should be cautious in generalising findings from this study due to the non-random nature of recruiting participants and views representing the community. However, the current findings have enormous strength because it involved participants in trafficking-sensitive areas.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Data availability statement

The data that supports the findings of the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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