Cross-cultural and Interracial Fostering in South Africa: Challenges Faced By Non-relative Foster Parents.

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ABSTRACT

In South Africa, racial prejudices and cultural insensitivity affect and define relationships. These social forces constitute enormous challenges and present immense barriers to non-relative child fostering and protection. This paper reports findings of a doctoral study that adopted a qualitative approach to explore the experiences of foster parents caring for non-relative foster children in De Deur, Gauteng Province, South Africa. A sample of 20 non-relative foster parents who fostered children from another cultural or racial group was purposively selected from the caseload of Vereeniging Child and Family Welfare Society, De Deur satellite office. Data was collected using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Thematic analysis was used for data analysis. The findings indicated that the foster parents experienced stigmatisation and discrimination; undue external interference; rejection and isolation and care scrutiny and suspicion. The study concluded that negative public perceptions and attitudes towards non-relative foster parents are pervasive. They have not been properly dealt with in the South African context and undermine the concept of 'Ubuntu'. These could result in resentment and hamper relationship building between foster parents and foster children. Deliberate positive government policy intervention and social engineering is recommended for attitude and behaviour change in this regard.

Key Words: Challenges, Cross-cultural, Inter-racial, Non- relative fostering, South Africa.

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Introduction

A vast number of South African children are vulnerable and in need of care and protection due to a combination of social forces (Department of Social Development, 2009: 2). Bower (2014:106), Department of Social Development (2009:2) and Mathambo and Gibbs (2009:22) identify these social forces. They commonly include poverty and inequality, racial prejudices and cultural insensitivity, crime, high levels of violence against children and women and domestic violence. They further includes drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, a lack of basic social services, parental irresponsibility, absence, illness and the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). These social forces have been argued to have a dual impact on child care and protection(Martin, 2010:1).While these social forces have engendered incidences of child abuse, neglect and maltreatment, the HIV and AIDS epidemic particularly has led to the weakening of familial and parental capacity to provide for the welfare and other psychosocial needs of children(Bower, 2014:113).This is due to its combined impacts of loss of family and household income through loss of jobs arising from the illness and expense on healthcare and loss of young, energetic carers.

The foster care programme is a major component of the formal alternative care continuum of care choices available to children in need of care and protection in South Africa. This caters for vulnerable children who are found to be in need as highlighted in terms of Section 150(1)(a)-(i) and (2)(a) and (b) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005. As a key constituent of the country's child protection system, the Act epitomizes government's response to fulfil children's in terms of Section 28(1)(b) of the Constitution. The provision emphasizes that "every child has a right to family care or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment". Foster care

practice in South Africa aligns with the definition of foster care by the United Nations Guidelines on the Alternative Care of Children (UN, 2009 Article 28). It is defined as "Situations where children are placed by a competent authority for the purpose of alternative care in the domestic environment of a family other than the children's own family that has been selected, qualified, approved and supervised for providing such care" (para.29). Within this parameter, foster care is defined in Section 180(1)(a)(b) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 in South Africa as "the placement of a child in the care of a person who is not the parent or guardian of the child as a result of an order of a children's court or a transfer in terms of section 171". The Act also defines a child as any person under the age of 18. In terms of Section 180 (3)(a)(b)(c), the Act makes provision for the legal placement of children in the care of a person who is not a family member of the child or a person who is a family member or in a registered cluster foster care scheme. This allowance for formal placement in relative or kinship care marks the departing point and distinction between foster care in South Africa and what obtains in the international context such as the United Kingdom and America. In those contexts, foster care refers only to non-relative or non-kinship care arrangement (Rochat, Mokomane, Mitchell and The Directorate, 2016:121). Pretorius and Ross (2010:469) and Rochat et al. (2016:121) note that foster care is the most preferred form of formal alternative care option for children in need compared to institutional and cluster care models. They posit that the preference stem from the fact that care giving is executed in a domestic family setting, entail lower monetary cost and results in better child outcomes when compared to the other two forms of care.

The extended family traditionally existed as the basic resource and safety net for the care and protection of these orphaned, abused, neglected and maltreated children (Abebe, 2014:3;Mathambo and Gibbs, 2009:22).Researchers however note that the extended

family system in contemporary South African society, as in other parts of the sub-Saharan region, is enormously strained, depleted and weakened. This is due to a number of factors of which poverty and the HIV and AIDS epidemic are paramount(Hlabyago and Ogunbanjo, 2009; Mathambo and Gibbs, 2009; Patel, 2012; Richter and Naicker, 2013; Tanga, 2013; van Deventer and Wright, 2017:1)Studies suggest a possible consequence for the depletion and erosion of the extended family safety nets regarding the care and protection of orphans and other categories of vulnerable children. They note that in the face of these identified social forces, it has necessitated the exploration of alternative care options outside the confines of the extended family. This has culminated in the inevitable emergence hence the importance of non-relative fostering (Kiggundu & Oldewage-Theron, 2009: 309; Snyder, 2012; Tanga, 2013).

The emergence and importance of non-relative child fostering as an alternative care continuum in the South African child protection system has been acknowledged and regarded as inevitable and difficult to gloss over (Snyder (2012). However, little attention has been accorded this care arrangement by policy makers, child protection experts and researchers. This has resulted in little research and published literature about this important care arrangement. Instead, available scant literature, for example, Kange and Kausi (2014) and anecdotal evidence indicate that this care arrangement is surrounded by a general atmosphere of apathy and suspicion. This is argued to arise from the perception that the children's best interest, racial and cultural identity may be jeopardized and compromised simply because caregiving is happening outside of kinship circles by non-kin carers. This defines challenges associated with the foster parent's status as a non-kin carer. Contrary to this however, research has found that non-relative foster parents motivated by altruistic motives have good intentions for taking up care roles. As the child best interests

are at the core of this fostering arrangement, they are likely to achieve better and more positive outcomes for the children in their care and overall placement stability (Emovon, Gutura and Ntombela, 2019). This paper argues that such unfounded views and perceptions regarding the apathy and suspicion surrounding non-relative fostering have led to a situation where non-relative fostering has garnered little attention thus constituting challenges to knowledge building.

However, knowledge about the challenges associated with the foster parent's status as a non-kin carer is important and warrants attention. This is as they provide care for South Africa's increasing AIDS-orphaned and other categories of vulnerable and at-risk non-relative foster children. This could be useful and important in building a grounded theoretical and knowledge base which could foster more understanding about this important care category. It could provide powerful insights in developing and building on what is already known about the foster care system by pointing to new directions and areas for investigation. This is especially with regards to understanding how pervasive and enduring negative public perceptions and attitudes towards non-relative fostering could result in hampering relationship building between foster parents and foster children thus undermining the concept of 'Ubuntu'. Knowledge in this dimension is essential and vital in being able to understand how these dynamics unfold. This is so as to be able to develop evidence-based support measures and intervention useful in mitigating their impact on fostering and on the mental, emotional, physical health and wellbeing of these non-relative foster parents. This paper aims to explore the challenges which non-relative foster parents encounter because of their status and relationship as non-kin carers while they provide care for the non-relative foster children in their care.

Theoretical Framework

This paper situates non-relative fostering within the context of Urie Bronfenbrenner's (2005) most recent and developed ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of human development provides a unique and holistic orientation for viewing children's development (challenges of non-relative fostering). It stresses and points to the importance of considering a child's development (challenges of non-relative fostering) as a result of multiple interrelationships and interconnectedness of influences between the child (non- relative foster parents) and his/her social environment. Orme and Buehler (2001:4) posit succinctly that Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory is a useful and instructive model of "determinant of parenting". This is because it postulates that parenting was a "central proximal socialisation influence in a child's development and that both child and parental characteristics shape parenting". Bronfenbrenner contend that to understand the development of the individual (non-relative fostering challenges), focus must be placed on the child (non-relative foster parents) and his/her interaction with the social environment (e.g. socio-cultural contexts, birth family, foster parent-child relationship). This he expressed in the concepts of microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. In his conception, the microsystem refers to the immediate setting or environment (non-relative foster family) where the child is situated and spends most of his time. Understanding the primary mechanism of development known as the proximal process expressed in the child-carer relationship and attachment defined as influence within the foster family is crucial to been able to understand human development (non-relative fostering challenges) according to Bronfenbrenner.

The rationale for selecting the ecological systems theory as the guiding framework for this study hinges on its usefulness in providing insights and knowledge of how context and the

complexity of human development and experiences can impact a population (non-relative foster parents and their foster children). It is instructive in the understanding of how factors in all five levels (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem) of the ecological systems or strata affect child development. It shows how these interacting influences could drive children's adversity and vulnerability and foster parents' competence and willingness. This could play significant role in determining children's wellbeing and placement outcomes in non-relative fostering.

Research Area And Methods

Study site

The study was conducted in De Deur which is located in Midvaal local municipality in Gauteng Province of South Africa. It is near the city border of Johannesburg and is north-west to the town of Meyerton. The Midvaal local municipality (MLM), which is a category B municipality within which De Deur is located, spans an area of 1722 km2. It has a total population of 111,612 and a per annum population growth rate of 3.59% (MLM IDP, 2018:44-45). It can best be described as a local/rural agricultural community of low-income settlement with extensive farming constituting approximately 50% of the area. The Midvaal Economic Analysis (2015) relying on 2011 census data reported a general unemployment rate of 18.8% and 25.4% unemployment rate in the 15–34 age group. The dependency ratio per 100 according to the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) report for 2016 for the population group (15-64) was 45.3%.The data showed that house hold income in the MLM was broadly distributed with households earning the highest portion falling within the R21 350–R42 698 per annum range with 13.9% of all households earning no income (MLM IDP, 2018:44-45). These statistics which speak to the socio-economic demographic of the area informed the choice of

the area for the study as it reflected in triggering fostering and impacted fostering experiences.

Population and sampling

Sixty participants who were caring for children from another cultural/family or racial group in the caseload of Vereeniging Child and Family Welfare Society in their De Deur Satellite office made up the study population. A sample of twenty foster parents was selected by means of the non-probability purposive sampling technique to participate in the study. This was achieved by a list of non-relative foster parents being made available to the researcher who then proceeded to contact them to invite them for the study. Twenty of the foster parents indicated interest and willingness to participate in the study. They incidentally were all females and the primary caregivers of the children. This was even though placement was in both care of couple as the men were always away at work leaving the women to be in the forefront of caregiving. Majority of the foster parents (fifteen) were black Africans. Four of the foster parents were white and one participant was coloured. Foster parents' age ranged between forty-two years and sixty-seven years while that of the foster children was one to seventeen.

The number of children in the placement ranged from one to seven. Foster parents' caregiving experience and placement showed a minimum of two years while the maximum was thirty-six years. Majority of the white foster parents (three) cared for black children while one cared for both white and black children. In the cases of black placements in the study, a majority (eight) of foster parents with Sesotho speaking background and identity cared for children who shared similar identity as they. Seven foster parents of Zulu speaking background and identity fostered children of Zulu and Sesotho origin. All the participants reported to be of the Christians faith. The majority of them (ten) reported to

be Pentecostals, five were Catholics, three were Baptists and two reported to be affiliated with the Dutch Reformed Church. Marital status indicated that majority of the foster parents (ten) were married and living with their partners. Six of them were single; three reported to be widowed while one participant was divorced. Three of the participants were formally employed in professional capacity while ten were self-employed running their own businesses. The remaining seven were not employed but received pension which they relied upon as additional support. Participant inclusion criteria included being a primary caregiver to non-relative foster children in order to ensure the collection of information-rich and first-hand experiences of the phenomenon under investigation. It further included willingness and availability to participate in the study and ability to speak and understand English and describe and express thoughts and experiences fluently.

Data collection

The study utilized in-depth interviews method to collect data as a qualitative study and were conducted in English. Interviews were conducted in English because participants opted for its use and it was the commonly shared language of communication between the participants and researcher. Twenty in-depth individual interviews was conducted with the foster parents. A semi-structured interview schedule with open ended questions was used to guide the interview. The interviews were conducted in a manner that was dialogical in order to elicit wider and deeper explanations pertaining to the phenomenon under study. The participants were provided with an opportunity to fully explore and give expressions to their opinions, facts and perceptions regarding their experiences in caring for non- relative foster children. An audio recorder was used by the researcher during the interview to record data with the consent of the participants. This was so as to prevent the loss of data since one cannot jot responses down and at the same time

interview the participants. Field notes was used to include the observed non-verbal data during interviews. The individual interviews with participants took place in their own homes because they indicated it was the most comfortable place for them. However, one participant opted to be interviewed at work place in Vanderbilj park because she worked late and it was most convenient for her. The interviews and the focus group discussion lasted for 50 minutes. Six foster parents, made up of three whites and three blacks, participated in the focus group discussion. It was conducted at the office of Vereeniging Child and Family Welfare Society, De Deur satellite office due to its central location and proximity, easy accessibility and availability of space.

Data analysis

The researcher followed the advice of Nieuwenhuis (in Maree, 2010:104) and Merriam (2009:110) to transcribe their own collected data as it provides the opportunity to become more acquainted with the collected data. The individual in-depth interviews data were recorded, analysed and coded separately. The data collected from both the individual interviews and focus group discussion was thereafter analysed using the thematic method of data analysis following the guide by Tesch (in Creswell, 2014:186).The steps were: " (1)write down, word for word, the interviews you audio-taped.(2)Select one document (one interview) – Go through it. (3) When you have completed this task for several informants, make a list of all the topics. Put similar topics together. (4) Find a fitting abbreviation for each of the identified topics. (5) Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into themes or categories.(6) Make a final decision on the abbreviation for each theme or category and alphabetise the codes. (7) Using the cut and paste method, assemble the data or material belonging to each theme.(8) If necessary, recode the existing data. Otherwise, start reporting your

research findings". Findings were presented in such a way that data from both instruments were reported in a complementary manner to amplify themes.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance (UZREC171110-030) was granted for conducting the study. This was in line with the University of Zululand's policy and procedures on research ethics and its policy and general requirement of research involving human beings as subjects or participants. Permission was also obtained from Vereeniging Child and Family Welfare Society to conduct the research with the participants as they were foster parents at their De Deur satellite office. The researcher took the following ethical issues into consideration and attended to it with precaution: informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality, deception, avoidance of harm and debriefing, publication of research findings and actions and competence of researcher.

Findings and discussion

Challenges Faced By Non-relative Foster Parents

Four themes emerged from analysis of the data from the individual interviews regarding challenges encountered while providing care. They are: stigmatisation and discrimination, undue external interference, care scrutiny and suspicion and rejection and isolation.

Theme 1: Stigmatization and discrimination

A significant theme that emerged from the study was that foster parents and their foster children experienced stigmatization and discrimination due to the foster care placement. Ten of the participants reported with utter dismal and disappointment the

grim realities of experiences of stigmatization and discrimination which they go through on a daily basis. This was because of the race and health and care status of their foster children and their relationships. The other ten foster parents did not however report to be experiencing this. The five foster parents involved in transracial placements where white and coloured foster parents cared for black children in the study particularly reported that they faced harsh, negative criticism, discrimination and stigmatization and wondered why the phenomenon was still persisting in the new South Africa. The following comments from participants during the individual interview and focus group demonstrated this:

Yea, there is still a big problem with racial differences in South Africa. People of my colour (whites) think it is not right to live with or care for a black child and so when I go to Shoprite or Pink N' Pay for example, all the white folks keep looking and staring at us. You know that kind of 'what are you doing with a black child' look that makes you really look odd and angry at the same time. But we deal with it. We don't have any problem with it. We are used to it. We just go ahead and give these children love and care and support (Participant 9).

The other challenges were that like living in this side, there is still quite a lot of racial tendencies for people to speak out when they see cross-cultural, transracial family and I don't know how to respond to that when people will swear at us and say unkind word at me and the stuff like that. And my children were little and you know they were at an age when I couldn't explain to them why people were behaving like that or explain to them to try to help them to deal with it. I couldn't deal with it myself frankly speaking. I used to just sometimes go home and start crying and say to my husband, 'I don't know what to say, I don't know what to do'. People were vicious about the fact that you know we had children of colour and they say 'why are you doing something that is stupid'. But the boys and I are now coping

and it doesn't affect me that much, but it used to affect me emotionally (Participant 13).

When I started at first to take them in the beginning, they wouldn't invite us anymore or they would say to me, 'look you can only bring your white children with' and I would say, 'thank you very much, I will never enter your house. We are one, ok. You have to accept the black and white kids the same otherwise we can't be anymore visiting each other (Participant 6).

Many of the participants (six) reported experiences of stigma regarding their foster children's HIV and care status as a major challenge which they faced as they provided care for the children. The children were reported to be stigmatised by both educators and health workers and they related the traumatic experiences associated with this. Participant said this to this effect:

One major challenge we face is the way people react and see us caring for children   that are having HIV and are not our relations. They see us as strange people who are cursed and the way they talk and treat me and the children is really worrying and depressing though some understand our situation. People think it is abnormal to care or a sick person that is not from your ancestral lineage and would regard you as abnormal and mad (Participant 18).

The thing is my heart bleeds when I see these children face a lot of shame and bad treatment from their peers and some of their educators who know their status in school. They look down on them because they are sick and in foster care. They don't treat them and accept them as other normal children. They call them orphans and all sorts of names. I want to see them free as other children. They must be free. I don't want other people to see them as orphans, they must see them and

treat them as other normal children. I feel for them and my heart breaks because people don't want to accept them and make them feel loved and welcome (Participant 5).

Foster parents and their non-relative foster children's experience of stigmatization and discrimination on the bases of their racial/familial/cultural, health and care status and relationship feeds into the macrosystem level in the ecological systems framework. Burgess, Rossvoll, Wallace and Daniel (2010:297) state that the macrosystem level is commonly regarded as the aspect of 'cultural blueprint' that includes, for example, race, ethnicity and policies. They affirm that this relates to the impact which wider society and its social and cultural structures have on the particular condition and processes occurring in the microsystem such as caregiver – child relationships. The ecological systems theory in this regard, provides the framework for understanding how racial prejudices, cultural beliefs, norms and preferences in terms of familial care and HIV/AIDS prejudices and attitudes (macrosystem) levels of influences interact to produce foster parents challenge (stigmatization and discrimination) in the foster parents – foster children relationship (microsystem).

The findings of this study presented in regard to challenges associated with the status of the foster parents as a caregiver to children who are of a different racial, cultural and familial/ancestral/lineage background are interesting. They throw light on the fact that non-relative, cross-cultural and interracial child fostering, is not an easy task but involve significant strains. This theme came out of the narratives of ten of the participants. The other ten did not report to experience it. The reality of transracial placements in the study are seen in four White and a coloured foster parent caring for Black foster children. All the five participants of transracial placement in the study reported experiencing stigmatization and discrimination and some reported having been isolated by their extended family members or their racial communities. This stigmatisation and discrimination of foster

parents was reported to arise from the racial differences which foster parents noticed was a serious issue with people both of White and Black backgrounds. It was apparent from the interviews with participants that people who stigmatised the placements saw it as 'abnormal' and an 'aberration'. The affected participants seemed to suggest that stigma was associated with feelings of perceived White cultural and racial superiority. This could be noticed from the reactions of White people from the community as one of the comments of a participant presented above in the findings who was thought to be stupid for caring for Black children revealed.

Jaynes (2010) rightly observed that such a quote clearly reemphasizes the need for transformation within communities and the entire South African society. This was because it portrayed transracial foster care placements or families as something that is still 'abnormal'. Participants hinted that white resentment, stigma and discrimination may be due to perceived white superiority rooted in the history of South African race relations. This saw White minority domination over the majority of Blacks. Flowing from that, it would be considered an abnormal sight for Whites to provide care for Blacks. This was because it would seem the Blacks were worthy to be bequeathed with the White honour or to be served with esteemed White labour. Black resentment and antagonism on the other hand, stemmed from a feeling of perceived White insensitivity and ignorance of Black culture, tradition and values associated with child rearing and upbringing. This is believed to result inevitably in defilement and desecration of core Black values of child rearing thus touching on ancestral and cultural pride and identity. This finding resonates with other South African studies by Ogunmefun, Gilbert and Schatz (2011) and Warwick and John-Langba (2017) who found that children in care and their foster parents were stigmatized and discriminated based on their race, culture, familial and health and care status.

Theme 2: Undue external interference.

Another major theme that emerged from the analysis of data from the individual interviews was undue external interference. Seven participants reported to experience severe undue interference from social workers, placing agency and biological parents and family members of the children whose whereabouts were known. Participants made the following comments to this effect:

> *You know what, it is very frustrating when these social workers come here and tell you what kind of clothes and food you need to buy and what kind of way you need to discipline these children. These are things we can sort out ordinarily internally by ourselves as a family. It makes you feel powerless, useless and stupid as if you don't know what to do. I raised my own children and didn't have anybody telling me how to do it or what to do. I know they are interfering because of the grant because that is only when they come to visit, when they know you have received the grant. You don't see them when you have problem. They suspect that we are not using the grant well for the children and this is very sad (Participant 2).*

> *I get a lot of interference from the social worker who is supervising this placement. She comes here every now and then especially at the period of payment of grant and tells me what to do and how to do it. Quite honestly, some of her ideas are weird. You know I have been fostering now for 30 years before she even started practising social work or was born and I do not need them to tell me that I have to take a child to school or buy clothes for them. I know it is about the money so I told them to keep their money because they think I am using the children's money for myself and family. This is painful because they don't know how much of my pension I am spending on these children but I am not complaining. I think it is a lack of trust on their part (Participant 9).*

I have a problem with the grandmother of the two orphan sibling children in my care. Whenever they do what is wrong and I discipline them, they would run to their grandmother and report to her and maybe tell her many stories and lies.
She would come here and make trouble for me demanding for the grant money and accusing me of not spending it well for their needs. The grant money is a big problem because they think I am caring for the children because of the money involved and so every time they always ask and want to see what and how it is used. It affects the children because it makes them to misbehave and disrespect you and be ungrateful (Participant12).

The challenge of undue external interference fits into the mesosystem level or strata of influence in the ecological systems theoretical framework of analysis. As Green and Goodman (2010:1357) noted succinctly, the mesosystem refers to links between contexts in which the child and foster parents are directly situated and indirectly located. The experience of the foster parents and their non-relative foster children (undue external interference) in the immediate context where they are directly situated (microsystem) was affected by their interaction with or link between the secondary contexts where they were indirectly situated (mesosystem). In the study, this secondary and indirect context were represented in such contexts as birth family, social worker, placing agency and community. Though the foster parents and foster children were not primarily and directly situated there, they however exacted indirect influences that shape outcomes in their immediate setting.

The ecological systems theory adopted for the study provides tremendous insight in understanding how the link and interaction between the microsystem of the immediate and direct foster family and other microsystem of birth family, social worker, placing

agency and community impact their developmental and challenge trajectories.

Seven of the participants reported to be under constant social worker's and agency's 'surveillance' by their unwarranted home visits. The other thirteen did not report to experience it. These visits were undertaken for inspection and financial inquiries, foster parenting style and behaviour and discipline management. The agency and caseworker's interference and involvement mainly under the disguise of ensuring the child's rights and best interests often left the foster parents feeling powerless. The participants narrated how this on-going undue interference led them to become involved in matters that were considered by the foster parents as issues that would ordinarily be dealt with internally as a family. This was because the action was viewed as maternally disempowering and potentially harmful for the children's well-being. They felt such intrusion was invidious, divisive and undermined the unity of their family.

Participants also identified interference from the parents or family members of the foster children as potential sources of contention and trouble to them. Three of the seven participants who reported to be experiencing interference recalled several instances where the biological mothers or family members of their foster children came to the house. This was to accuse them of not utilising the foster care grant in the best interests of the children or to accuse them of denying them contact and visitation. The bitterness and hate that accompanied such interference with its attendant accusations and confrontations were reported to often cause friction and dysfunction in the foster parent-foster child relationship. This had the potential of undermining the foster child's loyalty, stability and well-being. This finding is consistent with other South Africa research by Hearle and Ruwanpura (2009)

and Nyasani, Sterberg and Smith (2009).

Theme 3: Rejection and isolation

Rejection and isolation was a very important theme that came up in the study. Eight foster parents reported suffering from rejection from loved ones due to their choice to care for non-relative foster children. The remaining twelve did not report experiences of rejection and isolation. The following comments from participants in the individual interviews highlighted this theme:

> *A major sacrifice and cost I pay for chosen to care for non-family related foster children is the rejection and criticism from my family. They can't just understand why I have decided to help people who are not our kin and wonder why I want to bring curse to the family. But I have made up my mind and know that they will gradually accept my decision and these children though some of them are beginning to see reasons with me. There is a big need and we must be prepared to extend love and care to these orphans and poor children in our community (Participant 5).*

> *Yoh, my family, they have rejected me because I am taking care of other people's children. Some however are now coming to relate with me now. They are angry with me because of financial issues because they feel that I am no longer caring for them but now concentrating on the foster children. Before the children came, I used to help them with their children's needs and even take them to spend holiday with me. But now things are a bit different because my responsibilities have increased with these additional children but my family will not understand Participant 15).*

> *Some of my siblings and extended family members have since stopped coming to my house or talking to me. The*

saddest of all is that they don't even inform me about family matters anymore because they feel I value outsiders more than the family and it is painful. It is even telling on the kids because they are feeling guilty for being the reason for the fight and now they are beginning to be stressed because now everybody is calling them names referring to them in derogatory terms as orphans and abandoned children. It is stigmatizing (Participant 7).

The finding that foster parents encountered the challenge of rejection and isolation from loved ones and extended family can be explained within the microsystem and macrosystem levels in the ecological system framework. As has been noted earlier, Bronfenbrenner (2005) conceives of and depicts the microsystem as the most immediate setting or environment with the most influence on foster parents challenges and child development. He believes that it includes 'patterns of activities', 'social roles' and 'interpersonal relations' experienced by the foster parents and children in a direct setting such as the foster family or extended family. In the study, microsystem was represented by the foster parent-child relationship and attachment between them and foster parent-child relationship and attachment between them and the extended family.

The macrosystem, as Burgess et al. (2010) posit, consists of the 'cultural blueprint' embedded in norms and beliefs that influence how families function and view themselves. They argue that these social and cultural structures and forces impact and affect particular condition and processes which unfolds in the microsystem such as relationship between foster parents and extended family. The ecological systems theory enabled us to understand how the interpersonal relationship between the foster parents and loved ones and extended family (microsystem)

manifested in rejection and isolation. This challenge of rejection and isolation was brought about by the society's view of interracial and cross-cultural and family fostering as an aberration and abnormal owing to beliefs and norms regulating and prohibiting it (macrosystem). This hampered relationship building and caused physical and mental strain and stress for foster parents and children in the care.

Regarding the challenge of rejection and isolation, the eight participants affected reported that it took the form of hostility, isolation, refusal to visit with the foster family and frequent antagonism. Rejection and isolation were reported to be due to perceived violation of the norm, beliefs and values surrounding cross-cultural and family care which is believed to attract ancestral wrath. Family members thought foster parents had done the 'unthinkable' and therefore isolated them to avoid incurring or participating in the consequences. The rejection and isolation had also been due to the perceived and actual diversion of attention from the family members. This was in terms of care and assistance and placement of priority on the foster children by the foster parents.

Participants shared the negative impacts this rejection and hostility had on their health and relationship with the foster children. Feelings of elevated stress and anxiety pervaded their discussion on the issue. This is consistent with evidence from the literature which revealed how these stressors may further compromise the quality of care children receive and placement stability (Carter and van Breda, 2016:210). Samrai, Beinart and Harper (2011:38) have also noted that non-parental caregivers may harbour resentment and a discriminatory attitude towards orphaned children. Despite this rejection, all of the eight affected foster parents indicated their resolve to continue to love the children. They said they were

resolved to do everything in their power to ensure a safe, loving and caring atmosphere that supported the children's healthy psychosocial and emotional growth and physical development.

The fervent conviction of providing care as a matter of service and call from God was reported as some of the forces which they mustered to overcome this care challenge. They expressed disappointment with their relatives for not understanding their genuine intention and desire to help the needy, poor and vulnerable.

Theme 4: Care scrutiny and suspicion

Care scrutiny and suspicion came out of the analysis of data from the individual interviews and focus group discussion as a very important theme in the study. Some participants (seven) described their lives as foster parents to non-relative foster children as subjected to on-going scrutiny by social workers, the community and the biological parents/family of the children in their care. However, the remaining thirteen did not report any undue interference, scrutiny or suspicion. The following statements from participants revealed this:

People suspect us that we are caring for this children just because we want to make money out of it because they cannot see why we will want to help other people's children in these difficult times. They know that it is difficult to take a person from another family and care for the person so when they see us they think it is business (Participant 18).

The problem I have with the mother of one of the boy I am caring for is scrutiny and suspicion with the spending of the grant money. She would normally accuse me of not looking after the child well and would threaten me to give her the child so she could get the grant and care for him. She forgets that I am just helping her. Now the boy is acting

weird and strange. The other day, he came with some neighbours and they started making trouble and demanding the grant money. Because I didn't want trouble I

gave them the money and they ended up spending it on drinking. The boy is only 13 but he will say it is his money and deserves to spend it the way he likes. This is a big trouble but we live with it (Participant 3).

One big challenge that we face as non-relative foster parents is constant suspicion and scrutiny because people just think when you are caring for children that are not related to you or from your same race you are doing it for the money. They forget that the money we are talking about is small and that what we spend from our own pocket is far more than what the government gives. It is very insulting but we learn to cope with the embarrassment which even comes from the social workers themselves at times (Participant 1).

The finding of care scrutiny and suspicion could be interpreted from and located within the mesosystem and macrosystem levels of influences in the ecological systems theoretical framework. While care scrutiny by and suspicion from social workers, birth families and communities could be viewed as mesosystem since it relates to interaction between two microsystems, it could also be viewed in the context of policies and beliefs regarding interracial and cross-family/culture care (macrosystem). The adoption of this theoretical lens is useful in enabling us understand and explain how foster parents challenge of care scrutiny and suspicion in this regard emanates from the policy and cultural preference for kinship care.

This is based on the general belief and assumption that non-relative care placement are likely to compromise child best interest and attachment and incur ancestral wrath and sanctions (macrosystem). Seven participants reported to be subjected to on-

going scrutiny and suspicion by social workers, the community and the biological parents and family of the children in their care. However, the remaining thirteen did not report any undue care

scrutiny or suspicion. Participants reported curious and suspicious financial enquiries and questions normally asked by the social workers and at times neighbours and family members of children regarding the receipt and utilization of the foster care grants. They reported that their daily lives were constantly under the watch and that people took every chance to cast aspersions at them. This took the form of accusations of fostering the non-relative foster children due to the financial remuneration in the form of foster care grants involved. From the responses, it was indicative that case workers and people from the community were not actually convinced of the altruistic motive and sincere intentions of the foster parents for electing to care for the non-relative foster children. The seven foster parents affected in this regard verbalized that this was a painful and insulting experience which challenged their integrity and goodwill. They felt embarrassed and not trusted by this gesture but said it however made them resolve to do their best for the children in order to prove the accusers wrong. The finding that non-relative foster parents face challenge regarding care scrutiny and suspicion resonates with those of Hearle and Ruwanpura (2009), Nyasani, Sterberg and Smith (2009) and Samrai, Beinart and Harper (2011).

Conclusion and recommendation

The ecological framework adopted for this study proved invaluable. It assisted in understanding how interactions between factors in all five levels – (microsystem, e.g. child-carer and extended family relationship), (exosystem, e.g. foster child-carer relationship and own children and birth family relationship) and (macrosystem, e.g. race/ethnicity, policies) for example interact. It shows how this could promote children's adversity and

vulnerability and cause foster parents' challenges thus affecting competence and willingness to continue to care. Overall, findings indicate that non-relative, cross-cultural and interracial foster parenting in South Africa is associated with tremendous unique challenges which could impact significantly on foster parents' and children's wellbeing and placement outcomes.

Findings suggest that racial prejudices and cultural insensitivity and negative public attitudes toward orphans and HIV and AIDS are pervading. It reveals that they are prevailing issues that have not been properly dealt with in the South African context. The study concludes that racial prejudices, cultural insensitivity and stigma surrounding HIV and AIDS is still far from being effectively addressed and combated. This is because they are still sensitive issues pointing to the need for transformation within communities and the entire South African society. Findings further revealed the general societal apathy and indifference towards the vulnerable and less privilege reinforced by cultural expectations and prescriptions. The study concludes that unless poor societal attitudes and racial prejudices and perceptions of orphans, the poor and the vulnerable are deliberately positively altered, the notions of 'Ubuntu' will continue to dwindle into an oblivion. This would portend great dangers to the survival of this care arrangement as a safety net.

The study therefore recommends that government and relevant departments and stakeholders deliberately formulate and implement policies geared at social engineering. This could however be achieved through community and nation-wide awareness campaigns. This would seek to encourage new ways of social relations between black and white racial groups. This would encourage and emphasize the deconstruction of the basis of white privilege and reconstruction of the basis for mutual respect, social,

cultural and economic inclusiveness. This would be facilitated by genuine responsiveness to perceived or actual historical injustices represented by apartheid. It would involve the resocialization of communities and society at large into the value of respect for humanity and Ubuntu. Consultation with cultural and traditional leaders could be useful in discussing ways of altering beliefs, norms and customs surrounding cross-family/lineage care with a view to eliminating the hindrances. This would make attitudes and perceptions more accommodating and inclusive in this regard.

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