



An Ecclesial Analysis of Child Sexual Abuse in Ghana: Implications for Pastoral Response

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Abstract

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is a pervasive problem in Ghana that has long-term negative consequences for survivors. Churches in Ghana are not immune to this menace. Although, there is no reliable data on the prevalence of CSA in churches, in some cases, Christian religious leaders have been accused as perpetrators of CSA, covering up abuse or failing to take appropriate action when abuse occurs. Using the second phase of the Pastoral Cycle, the study undertook a contextual examination of child sexual abuse in churches and the church's role in child protection in Ghana. The paper posits that pastoral ministry of care and safeguarding of children could contribute significantly to the fight against CSA in Ghana. This article adds to the literature on curbing child sexual abuse in Ghana.

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INTRODUCTION

CSA is a global public health concern due to its devastating effects. It has a lifelong effect on victims, families, and society at large. It can be described as a sin that affects both spirit and body (1 Cor. 6:18). This position is affirmed in most societies, where CSA is considered a crime. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), CSA is “the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or still that violates the laws or social taboos of society.”¹

The WHO estimated that in 2002, 73 million boys and 150 million girls experienced various forms of violence before the age of 18.² Additionally, Africa is considered to have the highest prevalence rate of CSA at 34.4%.³ In Ghana, there is no clear national data on CSA. However, the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVSU) of the Ghana Police Service intimated that CSA is a public concern. It is reported that 11% of all crime cases recorded between 2013 and 2017 were CSA. The report further revealed that 38% of girls between 15-19 years experienced some form

¹ World Health Organization. (WHO) “Child maltreatment” (2014): Accessed October 12, 2021.

http://www.who.int/topics/child_abuse/en/

² WHO, “Child maltreatment.”

³ Prakash Balkrishna Behere and Akshata Nandu Mulmule, “Sexual Abuse in 8-Year-Old Child: Where Do We Stand Legally?,” *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine* 35, no. 2 (2013): 203–5; John Wihbey, “Global Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse,” *Journalist Resource* 15, no. 4 (2011): 25–30.

of CSA.⁴ Böhm indicates that 27% of girls and 11% of boys have experienced sexual abuse in Ghana.⁵ A recent study exploring sexual abuse of children during the Covid-19 lockdown in Ghana observed that 32% of the adolescent girls (13-19 years) surveyed had experienced sexual abuse.⁶

Due to the alarming nature of CSA and the public health concerns, all stakeholders are called upon to institute measures to respond to this menace. In Ghana, the Children's Act (Act 560) enjoins persons and institutions working on behalf of children to act in the best interest of the children. Additionally, the Child and Family Welfare Policy 2014 mandates churches to provide practical measures to ensure child protection.⁷ Churches have been the source of care, protection and support for people in crisis. Congregational life is found to be a community that provides opportunities for growth and enhances the holistic well-being of congregants, including children.⁸ There is evidence that child protection efforts began with religious institutions way before government and non-governmental organizations such as UNICEF. In Ghana, churches are found to be the first point of call for support and religious leaders are becoming front liners in times of crisis.⁹ However, there are concerns that child sexual abuse occurs in churches and some religious leaders have been found to be involved in condoning and concealing child sexual abuse, and in some cases, victims are denied justice.¹⁰ This calls for churches to intentionally undertake a ministry of caregiving that responds to the menace of CSA.

According to Lartey, pastoral care reflects the caring activities of God and human communities.¹¹ Pastoral care could be conceptualized to include both the proactive and reactive functions of the ministry of care undertaken by faith communities. Molla opines that pastoral care, aimed at addressing the holistic needs of children at risk could be described as pastoral care in the living web.¹² She argues that pastoral care in the living web “examines traditions, cultures, structures, and ideologies that oppress groups on the basis of age, sex, gender, race, and physical ability”. In this regard, Molla described pastoral care as a ministry of resistance, nurturance, empowerment, and liberation. Thus, the concept of pastoral care has moved from the care of exclusively individuals to communal care. This implies that churches could create a ministry of caregiving by the whole faith community to address the abuse and dehumanization of children.

The aim of the study is to conduct a contextual ecclesial analysis of CSA in Ghana. The article starts with a brief discussion of the general picture of CSA in Ghana; undertakes a comprehensive examination of CSA in the Church and society; and finally, discusses the implications for pastoral caregiving ministry that addresses structures and practices that maintain CSA in Ghana. The paper posits that an adequate understanding of the contextual situation of child sexual abuse and protection in Ghana could provide a stronger foundation for a pastoral ministry aimed at addressing CSA.

⁴ Department of Children. “Children Need Rights, Not Rites.” Data Gallery 2017, and Annual Report from Ghana Police Service for the year 2013 to 2017 available on its website and 2017 and 2018 Annual Statistical Report of DOVVSU (2018).

⁵ Bettina Böhm, “‘She Got Spoilt’: Perceptions of Victims of Child Sexual Abuse in Ghana,” *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 26, no. 7 (2017): 819.

⁶ E Owusu-Addo et al., “Prevalence and Determinants of Sexual Abuse among Adolescent Girls during the COVID-19 Lockdown and School Closures in Ghana: A Mixed Method Study,” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 135 (2023): 105997.

⁷ MCG, *The Policy, Bye-Law and Child Protection Manual of The Methodist Church Ghana* (Accra: Alpha Royal Publications Limited, 2019).

⁸ Emmanuel Nii-Boye Quarshie et al., “Clergy-Perpetrated Sexual Abuse in Ghana: A Media Content Analysis of Survivors, Offenders, and Offence Characteristics,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 61, no. 4 (2022): 3029.

⁹ Joseph Osafo, “Seeking Paths for Collaboration between Religious Leaders and Mental Health Professionals in Ghana,” *Pastoral Psychology* 65 (2016): 403.

¹⁰ Quarshie et al., “Clergy-Perpetrated Sexual Abuse in Ghana: A Media Content Analysis of Survivors, Offenders, and Offence Characteristics,” 3029.

¹¹ Emmanuel Y Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013), 14.

¹² Rode Shewaye Molla, “Pastoral Care in the Living Web for At-Risk Children in Ethiopia,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 28, no. 3 (2018): 194.

METHODOLOGY

The study undertakes a contextual ecclesial analysis of child abuse in Ghana, with the aim of providing data that could inform the pastoral response. The study adopts the second phase or moment of the pastoral cycle. The pastoral cycle is an approach to practical theology that was developed by Joe Holland and Peter Henriot.¹³ This approach presents a broader vision of pastoral theology and faith praxis. This approach emanates from the tradition of contextual and liberation theologies, with a strong emphasis on action and change, with the context in mind.¹⁴ The ecclesial analysis includes the examination of the church's role in the community and the factors that influence the role of the church. This examination will help identify the existing paradigms of theory and praxis of the faith with regard to pastoral ministry with children vulnerable to CSA.

Child Sexual Abuse in Ghana

The Children's Act of Ghana 1998 (Act 560) defines children as all persons below the age of 18. However, the legal age for consent to sexual activity is 16 years. As a result, any sexual activity involving children 15 years and below is considered CSA. Child abuse is not uncommon in the Ghanaian society. It is reported that approximately 90% of children in Ghana have experienced some form of abuse.¹⁵ This includes various forms of abuse such as physical, emotional, sexual, and neglect. In 2015, UNICEF conducted research to determine the cost of child abuse in Ghana. The findings indicated that the cost of CSA is huge, not only to the victim and family but also to the nation. The report further concludes that Ghana spends between GH¢ 926 million to GH¢ 1.442 billion annually on child abuse (UNICEF 2015).¹⁶

Ghana launched a Child Welfare and Family Policy in 2015 as part of reforms in her child protection efforts. This policy calls on all stakeholders to institute evidence-based measures to respond to child abuse in the country. In line with this, the Ministry of Health through the Ghana Health Service (GHS), with support from UNICEF conducted a study to ascertain the capacity and gaps in the health sector's response to child abuse. The study was carried out in six (out of the then ten) regions of Ghana; Upper West, Northern, Ashanti, Western, Volta, and Greater Accra regions.

In order to obtain nationwide and relevant data for effective decision-making, the study lead engaged in discussions with strategic partners in child protection including government, NGOs, UN agencies, health professional training institutions, and other relevant stakeholders in health and child protection at the national and sub-national levels.¹⁷ That particular study represents perhaps the most recent and comprehensive research on child abuse in Ghana. Consequently, it is extensively cited in this section of this study. In the first place, the study revealed that CSA is a serious public health problem in the regions where the study was conducted in Ghana.¹⁸ The study further indicated that child marriage is another form of CSA, and it was common in all the study areas. It was observed that girls as early as nine years are betrothed, and given out to such men, who engage in sexual activities with them. The research team obtained narratives from the communities visited on sexual abuse and defilement of girls by men and older boys. The situation of child abuse in Ghana extends beyond the

¹³ Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, "Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice (Revised and Enlarged Edition)," *Dove Communications, Victoria, Australia*, 1983.

¹⁴ Brian Macallan and H Jurgens Hendriks, "A Post-Foundational Practical Theology? The Pastoral Cycle and Local Theology," *Dutch Reformed Theological Journal= Nederduitse Gereformeerde Theologische Tydskrif* 53, no. 3_4 (2012): 196.

¹⁵ United Nations Children's Fund. "Investing in Children Earns Huge Dividend" (2015): UNICEF Ghana. Accessed May 20, 2020. <https://www.unicef.org/ghana/media/1941/file/Investing%20in%20children.pdf>

¹⁶ United Nations Children's Fund. "Investing in Children Earns Huge Dividend."

¹⁷ Ghana Health Service (GHS). "Capacity and gaps of Ghana health sector's response to child abuse" (2018) Ghana Health Service/UNICEF, 22.

¹⁸ GHS, "Capacity and gaps of Ghana health sector's response to child abuse," 35.

abuse of only girls. Some studies also cited the abuse of boys as well. It was noted that boys were also sexually abused by other boys and men, especially, in boarding schools.¹⁹

In a descriptive and exploratory survey, information collected from 490 school children, 116 parents and 49 headteachers from 4 out of the 110 districts in the country, showed the incidence of CSA in Ghanaian public schools. About 11.2% of the children who participated in the study had been victims of either rape or defilement.²⁰ Further, the data suggested that gender plays a role in the severity, as the incidence showed that 92% of the victims were females. A recent study exploring sexual abuse of children during the Covid-19 lockdown in Ghana observed that 32% of the adolescent girls (13-19 years) surveyed had experienced sexual abuse.²¹ The data points to a staggering situation of CSA in spite of the efforts by the Government and other Civil Society Organizations to curb the menace.

Ecclesial Analysis of Child Sexual Abuse and Protection

The ecclesial analysis briefly undertakes an exploration of child sexual abuse in churches and the church's role in child protection. This examination identifies the existing realities of CSA and faith praxis with regard to pastoral ministry with children vulnerable to CSA. This is because the State has key expectations of churches when it comes to children. The church is expected to institute measures to respond pastorally to CSA in Ghana.

The church as a family is expected to care for members, and also be an instrument of God to care for members of the community. Couture presents a social work family system model, which supports the idea that churches are valuable in child protection.²² This model includes churches as one of the important layers in the protective cover for children. It is also observed that child protection traces its earliest commitments to communities of faith, with many Protestant congregations and Catholic religious orders providing the majority of services related to child protection and family support.²³ Similarly, the church is also a valuable resource for those recovering from abuse.²⁴

The World Council of Churches (WCC) conversation on the advocacy for the rights of children concluded that "the church is called to care for children in the community and the church by advocating for their rights in partnership with other organizations, by empowering them to stand up for their rights and by implementing policies and procedures to protect children."²⁵ This consensus by the WCC is in the right direction. The global church must act now due to the alarming proportion of abuse of children in societies across the globe. The WCC indicated that "many children in every part of the world are at risk, particularly as a result of violence, conflict, and a neoliberal globalized economy. Children are among the most vulnerable victims of injustice, poverty, and abuse. Furthermore, children have been abused even within the churches. It is our responsibility to protect them, to nurture them spiritually and to advocate for them."²⁶ It is important to note that this call for churches to respond to the world's problem of CSA is also coming from governments and other Civil Society Organizations across the globe.

UNICEF reports that "faith communities were, and have been significantly involved in advocacy for millions of vulnerable children and disadvantaged families even before the inception of

¹⁹ GHS, "Capacity and gaps of Ghana health sector's response to child abuse," 37.

²⁰ Augustine Obeleagu Agu et al., "Perspectives on Sexual Abuse of School Children in Basic and Secondary Schools in Ghana.," *African Journal of Criminology & Justice Studies* 11, no. 1 (2018), 122.

²¹ Owusu-Addo et al., "Prevalence and Determinants of Sexual Abuse among Adolescent Girls during the COVID-19 Lockdown and School Closures in Ghana: A Mixed Method Study."

²² Pamela D. Couture, "The Fight for Children: Practical Theology and Children's Rights," *Contact* 142, no.1(2003):28-40.

²³ Diana R Garland and Rick Chamiec-Case, "Before--And After--The Political Rhetoric: Faith-Based Child And Family Welfare Services," *Social Work & Christianity* 32, no. 1 (2005).

²⁴ Shannon S Carothers et al., "Religiosity and the Socioemotional Adjustment of Adolescent Mothers and Their Children.," *Journal of Family Psychology* 19, no. 2 (2005): 263-275.

²⁵ World Council of Churches (WCC). "Churches' Commitments to Children". Geneva: (2017), 126.

²⁶ WCC, "Churches' Commitments to Children," 141.

the work of UNICEF. Consequently, faith communities continue to be indispensable partners in UNICEF's work to advance children's rights and enhance their well-being. Such partnerships are especially important in our renewed focus on reaching the poorest, most vulnerable, and hardest to reach children and families."²⁷ In addition, the WCC, during the 10th General Assembly in 2013, invited churches globally to commit to the promotion of the protection of children both in the churches' environment and the larger society.²⁸ The commitment acknowledges that "all forms of violence against children - individual or structural neglect, sexual, physical or verbal are completely antithetical to God's will, revealed in Holy Scripture and the life and the teachings of Christ."²⁹

In Ghana, the Children's Act 1998 (Acts 650) stipulates among other provisions, that "the best interest of the child shall be the primary consideration by any court, person, institution or other body in any matter concerned with a child."³⁰ As a result, faith communities are also mandated to do ministry with children in such a way that the best interest of the child is brought to bear in all matters. In addition, the Child and Family Welfare Policy 2014) calls on all stakeholders to be advocates, and also institute measures to safeguard children. The policy further recognizes the key role faith communities play in society, consequently, postulates that faith communities can contribute in the following areas: "provide communication and education initiatives that promote positive family values; provide direct help to vulnerable families and serve as their advocates; provide care and support services to families, children and adolescents; and participate in national co-ordination activities to minimize duplication and enhance the establishment of complementary programmes, projects and activities."³¹ It could be of interest to explore the extent to which faith communities in Ghana adhere to this, in the wake of CSA in faith communities, and also, in the larger society.

Child Sexual Abuse in Churches

CSA has frequently been reported in the Catholic Church globally.³² Additionally, some studies have also found Christian religious leaders as perpetrators of CSA.³³ In Ghana, it is difficult to establish the incidence of CSA among faith communities just as it is difficult to establish national data due to the cultural influences on disclosure. Thus, the evidence showed the reported cases of CSA are often below the actual state of the problem. To date, there are limited studies that established the actual situation of occurrence in faith communities in Ghana. However, some media reports contain sexual abuse of children by church leaders. It was reported that there were 73 media reports of child sexual abuse in Ghana from March 2000 to March 2019 involving the clergy.³⁴

One study examined some epidemiological characteristics of perpetrators and victims of incest in contemporary Ghana through the analysis of media reports of incest from 2008 to 2015. It was observed that 6.3% of the perpetrators were pastors.³⁵ In addition, the researchers expressed grave concern about the involvement of church leaders in crime against society and sin against God since they are seen as role models for their congregation.

²⁷ United Nations Children's Fund. "Investing in Children Earns Huge Dividend," iii.

²⁸ WCC, "Churches' Commitments to Children," 2.

²⁹ WCC, "Churches' Commitments to Children," 8.

³⁰ Children's Act 1998 (Acts 650), 1998, 6.

³¹ *Child and Family Welfare Policy 2014*, 22.

³² Karen J Terry, "Child Sexual Abuse within the Catholic Church: A Review of Global Perspectives," *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice* 39, no. 2 (2015): 139.

³³ Diana R Garland and Christen Argueta, "How Clergy Sexual Misconduct Happens: A Qualitative Study of First-Hand Accounts," *Social Work & Christianity* 37, no. 1 (2010): 1-27; Perry C Francis and Tracy D Baldo, "Narcissistic Measures of Lutheran Clergy Who Self-Reported Committing Sexual Misconduct," *Pastoral Psychology* 47, no. 2 (1998): 81-96.

³⁴ Emmanuel Nii-Boye Quarshie et al., "Clergy-Perpetrated Sexual Abuse in Ghana: A Media Content Analysis of Survivors, Offenders, and Offence Characteristics," *Journal of Religion and Health* 61, no. 4 (2022): 3028.

³⁵ Emmanuel N-B Quarshie et al., "Some Epidemiological Characteristics of Perpetrators and Victims of Incest in Contemporary Ghana: Analysis of Media Reports," *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 26, no. 2 (2017): 127.

In some cases, church leaders have been cited, especially in media reports as being a hindrance in the fight against sexual abuses in Ghana, for instance, in one media report, the Northern Regional Coordinator of the DOVVSU of the Ghana Police, lamented that “most of the families of the victims report to the unit when the cases get worse, with the explanation that their Pastors and Imans have sat on the case to resolve it properly between the victim and the perpetrator.”³⁶ The lament from the police is worrying. This is partly because CSA is a criminal case, in which case, it is illegal to be settled at home by religious leaders. This interference of religious leaders has been reported by other studies. For instance, one study that examined sexual violence against girls in schools in the Ashanti Region of Ghana observed that although faith communities play a significant role in the lives of people, leaders sometimes combine forces with community leaders to oppress the abused and discourage the reporting of CSA.³⁷ In addition, the study reported that religious leaders have contributed to the hindrance of comprehensive sexuality education at home and schools, especially, by parents and teachers.

Child Protection in the Church

This section explores the extent to which the Christian faith communities in Ghana are living up to the expectation in this regard. It is estimated that approximately 71 percent of Ghanaians profess to belong to the Christian faith. Consequently, almost every community is housed with at least one church denomination. All the churches factor children into their ministries. Some of the churches have special programs for children known as ‘Children’s Ministry’ or ‘Sunday school’. These programmes are aimed at teaching the word of God, and also the Christian faith to children. These churches have trained volunteers often known as ‘Sunday School Teachers’ or ‘Children Workers’ who are assigned to holding separate Sunday morning church services (Sunday school or children’s services), where children are engaged with the Holy Scriptures.³⁸ The authors’ observation and interaction with leaders of different church denominations indicate the ministry to children in Ghana by the churches seems to be homogenous. It could be described as leaning more towards the educational paradigm of children’s ministry, as the language of the educational system such as teachers, age-graded classes, syllabus, and the like, are used in their programs.³⁹ Besides the regular Sunday school services, some churches organize camp meetings and other outreaches with children.

A recent study by Kpalam focused on examining child protection in the ministry of the Church of Pentecost in 39 local congregations in the Winneba township of Ghana.⁴⁰ The study obtained data from clergy and lay leaders in the 39 congregations. The findings revealed that the participants understood child protection as the plans, activities and structures put in place to safeguard children. Also, the church as an integral part of the community is a major reason why it should be actively involved in child protection. However, there were no specific measures of child protection by the churches. The congregations relied on activities such as church services with children, child naming and dedication ceremonies as measures contributing to child protection. Additionally, there are no strategic alliances between the Church of Pentecost in Winneba and state agencies that are tasked with the responsibility of child protection.⁴¹ These findings point to weaknesses in the churches’ efforts toward child protection.

³⁶ Nana.K. Agyeman, “Catholic Church Sensitises Children to Report Abuses”. Daily Graphic, 31 October 2018. (2018) Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/catholic-church-sensitises-children-to-reportabuses.html>

³⁷ Geneviève M Proulx and Andrea Martinez, “Sexual Violence against Girls in Schools: Addressing the Gaps between Policy and Practice in Awaso, Ghana,” *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk* 4, no. 2 (2013): 16.

³⁸ Ebenezer Tetteh Kpalam and Vernon E Light, *Our Children: The Place of Child Protection in the Church’s Ministry* (Kinder Foundation, 2020), 63.

³⁹ J Grobbelaar, “The Grammar of Combining the Vocabulary of Theology, Children and Africa,” *Theologies of Childhood and the Children of Africa*, 2016, 51–91.

⁴⁰ Ebenezer Tetteh Kpalam, “Child Protection in the Church of Pentecost in Winneba Municipality, Ghana,” *Religion and Development* 1, no. aop (2023): 1–16.

⁴¹ Kpalam, “Child Protection in the Church of Pentecost in Winneba Municipality, Ghana,” 10.

For instance, Kpalam and Light authored a book titled ‘Our Children: The Place of child protection in the church’s Ministry.’⁴² This book advocated for the need for churches to develop their own guidelines for the protection of children. Consequently, attempts were made to search for samples of churches’ child protection guidelines in Ghana, to be included as an appendix. It was observed that most churches do not have any specific guidelines. It was the Methodist Church of Ghana and the Catholic Church of Ghana that have child protection policies, giving specific guidelines on the church’s response to the abuse of children in their ministry, and also in the larger society.⁴³

The policy of the Methodist Church Ghana, which is titled ‘Guidelines for Child Protection’ provides detailed directions for key stakeholders such as volunteers in children ministry, ministers, other leaders, and the entire congregation with regard to the steps to be taken when child abuse occurs in the church and the community.⁴⁴ The policy also emphasises the need for taking steps to prevent the occurrences of child abuse. The policy, among other things, contained that the “Methodist Church, Ghana, is opposed to all forms of child abuse and exploitation and will do everything within its power to ensure that no harm comes to any child within the Church and in the communities in which we serve. The Church recognizes that the promotion and protection of the rights and welfare of the child also imply the performance of moral and Godly duties and reaffirms adherence to the principles of the rights and welfare of the Child contained in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the African Union’s Declaration of the Rights and Welfare of the African Child.”⁴⁵

It was observed that the guidelines from the Methodist Church were adopted from Compassion International Ghana’s Child Protection Policy for their church partners. Compassion International partners with churches in Ghana for Christian holistic child development. Child protection is at the centre stage of Compassion’s ministry with children. As a result, it is mandatory for all its church partners to commit themselves to child protection. For instance, in 2014, Compassion Ghana organised a three-day conference on child protection for 220 pastors of their church partners. The conference which was titled ‘Child protection: action for all’, saw the Country Director of Compassion Ghana, Mr. Padmore Agyepong admonishing the pastors that “church leaders have the mandate to put in a voice to protect children in their care, and if the church, for that matter, has the voice, how is it using that power to change the societal evil.”⁴⁶

The Catholic Church in Ghana is actively involved in child protection and has its own child protection guidelines. The document, titled ‘The Child Protection Policy for the Catholic Church in Ghana’ provides extensive coverage of the subject of child abuse, child protection and the role of key stakeholders such as children, caregivers, pastors, and pastoral agents to safeguard children in the church and society. The policy among other things indicated that “it is regrettable and sad that the Church which identifies herself with the poor and vulnerable is itself accused of covering up and not doing enough to protect children and the vulnerable. The release of painstaking investigative documents on years of child sexual abuse has not only dented the image and credibility of the church but has also compromised her very mission to children in society.”⁴⁷

The Policy paved the way for the Catholic Church in Ghana to embark on comprehensive interventions that target all stakeholders such as the clergy, parents, teachers in schools and traditional leaders. In a media report on July 26, 2019, it was indicated that the Navrongo-Bolgatanga Catholic

⁴² Kpalam and Light, *Our Children: The Place of Child Protection in the Church’s Ministry*.

⁴³ Kpalam and Light, *Our Children: The Place of Child Protection in the Church’s Ministry*.

⁴⁴ MCG, *The Policy, Bye-Law and Child Protection Manual of The Methodist Church Ghana* .

⁴⁵ MCG, *The Policy, Bye-Law and Child Protection Manual of The Methodist Church Ghana*, 2.

⁴⁶ Ghana News Agency. (GNA) “Churches Must Promote Child Protection Issues” General News, 24 November 2014 (2014) Accessed May 24, 2020 <https://www.ghananewsagency.org/social/churches-must-promote-child-protection-issues-mr-agyapong--82733>

⁴⁷ Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference. “Child Protection Policy for The Catholic Churches in Ghana” (2019), Accessed April 12, 2020. <https://www.cbcgha.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Child-Protection-Policy-BOOKLET-signed.pdf>

Diocese in the Upper East Region which also operates in some parts of the Northern Region has been instrumental in fighting the menace of CSA. The report further indicates that “apart from engaging and offering a series of training programmes for stakeholders on how to help curb child abuse, the Diocese had developed its own Child Protection Policy (CPP) document, drawing its contents from the Child Protection and Family Welfare Document of the Gender Ministry and UNICEF to protect children.”⁴⁸ In addition, the Catholic Church has inaugurated Child Protection Policy Teams in the aforementioned Regions.

Further, the Catholic Church initiated a nationwide campaign to empower children to report CSA to relevant authorities. In a media report titled ‘Catholic Church Sensitizes Children to Report Abuses’, the Most Rev Charles Palmer-Buckle, who is the vice president of the Ghana Catholic Bishop Conference urged all children to be bold to report all forms of abuse meted out to them in their communities. The Bishop made this remark when he addressed a durbar of school children in Accra; “as little children, do not allow yourself to be abused in the church by any church elder, in school by teachers and at home by parents and guardians.”⁴⁹ This implies that the Bishop, who is a high-ranking member of the Catholic Church in Ghana recognized that child abuse occurs in faith communities as well. This is supported by this statement he made; “there are abuses in the church and it is shameful; if a priest, a religious or a church elder is asking something of you that is not allowed, tell the person straight in the face that you will report it to your parents.”⁵⁰

It could be said that the high-ranking status of Bishop Palmer-Buckle will help the children to recognize that abuse is unacceptable, and will be encouraged to report, especially, those that occur in faith communities where church leaders are the perpetrators. The Bishop further reiterated “I am not here to defend us; it is bad, it is shameful, and the Pope has told us that as Catholic bishops, priests and leaders, we must make sure that in the church the children feel safe and should come to the church knowing fully well that they are safe.”⁵¹ Similarly, the Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church Ghana, Rev. Dr. Paul Bofo has urged all religious leaders to work together to ensure children are protected. The religious leader made this call at the Golden Jubilee and Biennial Conference of the Methodist Church Ghana held in August 2022. According to the Bishop, there were reports that religious bodies were either culprits for condoning or concealing child abuse, as a result, some victims of child sexual abuse do not get justice.⁵²

The implication of the submissions by these religious leaders is that CSA should not take place among faith communities that have a biblical mandate and a moral responsibility towards children (Matt. 18:5-6). It could be argued that the active participation of the Catholic Church in Ghana with regard to protecting children from CSA could be due to the global scandal of CSA among the clergy in the Catholic Church.⁵³

Another area of child protection efforts by the churches is the need for effective collaboration with other stakeholders for the safeguarding of children. Since the introduction of the Child and Family Welfare Policy, the government continues to seek pathways of collaboration with Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) for child protection.⁵⁴ In 2022, the Department of Children (under the auspices of the Ministry of Gender Children & Social Protection – MoGCSP) with support from UNICEF Ghana, held a Two-day Consultative Workshop with Religious Leaders on Child Protection issues in Ghana. The aim of this engagement is to strengthen religious leaders’ capacity to prevent and respond to violence, abuse and exploitation, and protect children affected by violence. Additionally, the meeting

⁴⁸ Samuel, Akapule. “Tackling the Child Abuse Menace - The Navrongo - Bolgatanga Diocese Set the Pace”. Ghanaian Times, 26 July 2020. (2019) Accessed April 22, 2020 <https://allafrica.com/stories/201907290455.html>

⁴⁹ Agyeman, “Catholic Church Sensitises Children to Report Abuses.”

⁵⁰ Agyeman, “Catholic Church Sensitises Children to Report Abuses.”

⁵¹ Agyeman, “Catholic Church Sensitises Children to Report Abuses.”

⁵² Morkporpor, A. “Let us work towards safeguarding the child” Ghana News Agency, 21 August 2022 (2022): Accessed May 18, 2022. <https://gna.org.gh/2022/08/lets-work-towards-safeguarding-the-child-rev-dr-bofo/>

⁵³ Terry, “Child Sexual Abuse within the Catholic Church: A Review of Global Perspectives,” 139.

⁵⁴ *Child and Family Welfare Policy 2014.*

sought to empower FBOs to advocate for concrete strategies in their communities to tackle systemic issues that leave children vulnerable to exploitation such as inequality, discrimination, disparities, and injustice. These stakeholder engagements took place in the Greater, Western, Northern and Ashanti Regions of Ghana.⁵⁵

In a nutshell, the ecclesial analysis of child sexual abuse in Ghana revealed some realities that could inform the pastoral ministry of churches in Ghana. Firstly, it was observed that child sexual abuse is evident in churches as well as communities where churches serve. Thus, churches are not immune to this issue. In fact, in some cases, religious institutions have been accused of covering up abuse or failing to take appropriate action when abuse is reported. On the other hand, some churches such as the Catholic Church and the Methodist Church are actively involved in a ministry of child protection in Ghana. There is therefore the need for all churches to undertake a comprehensive ministry of caring and safeguarding of children in Ghana.

Implications For Pastoral Response

A pastoral response reflects the caring activities of God and human communities (Lartey 2006:14). Pastoral care could be conceptualized to include both the proactive and reactive functions of the ministry of care undertaken by churches to address CSA.

Firstly, a pastoral response to child abuse could be influenced by child theologies. Theology is about faith-seeking understanding. Therefore, child theology is seeking the understanding of God with regard to children. It is about seeing children through God's eyes. Without a clear vision of children, Christians cannot seek to reform spirituality and praxis that will respond to their needs holistically.⁵⁶ Churches should develop a statement of belief with regard to children. The ecclesial analysis revealed that although churches have a ministry to children, there are no specific theological statements with regard to their view of children and how entire congregations should view children. A theological understanding of children that views children through the image and the likeness of the Triune God is crucial in addressing the dehumanisation and abuse of power, which contributes to CSA in Ghana.

In addition, churches in Ghana could develop their own child protection policy. A child protection policy is a set of guidelines that direct a coordinated response to child abuse in a particular context. The Children's Act of Ghana (Act 580), 1998 enjoins all institutions to act in the best interest of children and to institute pragmatic measures to ensure the welfare and protection of children. In addition, the Child and Family Welfare Policy of Ghana requires faith communities to be actively involved in the protection and welfare of children.⁵⁷ In order that churches could lead the way, there is a need for faith communities to develop their own guidelines for child protection. This guideline ensures children are secure and safe in the congregations and the communities in which they serve. The policy will also provide the need for churches to sanction members who are involved in child abuse.⁵⁸ The ecclesial analysis revealed that most churches do not have a child protection policy. In a country where over 90% of children experience some form of abuse, including CSA, investing in child protection is imperative for churches in Ghana.

Churches should embark on praying for, and with children. In the community of believers, one critical aspect of life is carrying each other's burdens (Gal. 6:1-2; Rom. 15:1-2). It is an indication of the mutual love and fellowship in the congregation. With the staggering rate of CSA in Ghana, churches are called upon to intercede for and with children. Kpalam and Light⁵⁹ suggest that Christians and churches should pray with all children, especially, the vulnerable (Lam. 2:9). Malherbe making

⁵⁵ Ministry of Gender Children & Social Protection, Ghana "Engagement of Religious Leaders N Child Protection" (2022) <https://www.mogcsp.gov.gh/engagement-with-religious-leaders-on-child-protection>

⁵⁶ Kpalam, "Child Protection in the Church of Pentecost in Winneba Municipality, Ghana," 13; Marcia J Bunge, *Child Theology: Diverse Methods and Global Perspectives* (Orbis Books, 2021), iii.

⁵⁷ *Child and Family Welfare Policy 2014*.

⁵⁸ Victor Ifeanyi Ede and Dominic Zuoke Kalu, "Child Abuse in Nigeria: Responses of Christian Churches and the Way Out," *International Journal for Innovative Research in Multidisciplinary Field* 4, no. 4 (2018): 46.

⁵⁹ Kpalam and Light, *Our Children: The Place of Child Protection in the Church's Ministry*, 46.

reference to the story of Ishmael and Hagar in Genesis 21: 17-20, comments that God hears the cry of children.⁶⁰ This implies that when churches cry on their behalf, and with them, God hears.

Another important area of pastoral response is advocacy. The church is the prophetic voice of God to society and the advocacy ministry of the church plays this function. Scripture admonishes Christians to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves (Prov. 31:8). Firstly, churches should speak against the cultural factors that support the abuse of children. Molla described this advocacy as pastoral functions of resistance, which involve acts that seek to resist socio-cultural, political, and religious ideologies and structures that dominate and manipulate others based on age, gender, and ethnicity.⁶¹ In Ghana, it was observed that children are socialized to esteem adults' instruction as always good without asking any questions, even if the child sensed danger. In addition, girls are socialised as helpers at home, which put them at risk of sexual abuse.⁶² The churches' advocacy ministry should respond pastorally to these socio-cultural factors.

There is a need for churches to build the capacity of children to protect themselves. Children have the potential to be active partners in the pursuit of child protection and should be empowered to become key players themselves in their own development and protection.⁶³ A study in South Africa to assess the perspective of children on how their communities can protect them from CSA revealed that children can be empowered to protect themselves and other children.⁶⁴ This implies that faith communities should consider child participation in their own protection and that of others. Empowerment of children is more likely to change labelling of being victims to active agents of change in the community.⁶⁵

Furthermore, churches forming strategic partnerships with relevant organizations is key. Ede and Kalu suggested that churches in Nigeria should partner with the government to address the menace of child abuse.⁶⁶ Child abuse is a multi-faceted and complex situation in the Ghanaian society. As a result, there is a need for a multi-sectoral approach to child protection. In Ghana, there are state agencies such as DOVSU, the Department of Children, Department of Social Welfare, among others tasked with the responsibility of child protection. Churches can come alongside the government to implement such initiatives. Churches are considered organized groups that have over the years partnered with the government in community development projects.⁶⁷ However, the ecclesial analysis showed that there is a limited partnership between faith communities and state agencies. Kpalam and Light observed that among the Church of Pentecost in Winneba, there was no strategic partnership between the local churches and state agencies with the responsibility of child protection.⁶⁸ This could be attributed to the fact that some churches do not have a clear child protection policy and programme.

In a nutshell, a pastoral response to CSA in Ghana could include developing contextual child theologies, church-specific child protection policies and strategic partnerships with relevant institutions tasked with the protection of children in the country. In addition, measures such as praying for, and with children, capacity building of caregivers and children as well as a ministry of advocacy for the protection of children could contribute significantly to addressing the menace of CSA in Ghana. It is recommended that churches should intentionally include the above-mentioned approaches in their ministry of caregiving to children in the congregations and also in the communities at large.

⁶⁰ Johannes, Malherbe. "Child theology in Africa." Paper presented at Hear the Cry Conference, 17–21 May 2004. Nairobi, Kenya (2004), 56.

⁶¹ Rode Shewaye Molla, "Pastoral Care in the Living Web for At-Risk Children in Ethiopia," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 28, no. 3 (2018): 195.

⁶² Mariama Ahmeda Mansaray, "Girl-Child Sexual Abuse as a Public Health Issue in Accra, Ghana" (2008), ii.

⁶³ Kpalam and Light, *Our Children: The Place of Child Protection in the Church's Ministry*, 36.

⁶⁴ Ansie Fouche, Elmien Truter, and Daniël F Fouché, "Safeguarding Children in South African Townships against Child Sexual Abuse: The Voices of Our Children," *Child Abuse Review* 28, no. 6 (2019): 455.

⁶⁵ Molla, "Pastoral Care in the Living Web for At-Risk Children in Ethiopia," 198.

⁶⁶ Ede and Kalu, "Child Abuse in Nigeria: Responses of Christian Churches and the Way Out."

⁶⁷ Carola Eyber et al., "The Role and Experience of Local Faith Leaders in Promoting Child Protection: A Case Study from Malawi," *Intervention*, 2018, 31.

⁶⁸ Kpalam and Light, *Our Children: The Place of Child Protection in the Church's Ministry*, 45.

CONCLUSION

The paper has indicated that CSA is a pervasive problem in Ghana that has long-term negative consequences for survivors. Churches in Ghana are not immune to this menace. Although, there is no reliable data on the prevalence of CSA in churches, in some cases, Christian religious leaders have been accused as perpetrators of CSA, covering up abuse or failing to take appropriate action when abuse occurs. In spite of the fact that churches such as the Catholic Church and the Methodist Church have well-coordinated systems, structures and practical measures of child protection as contained in their child protection policies, most churches do not have any structure for a ministry to care for and safeguard children. The article underscores that a pastoral response to CSA could include churches developing a contextual theological view of children and a child protection policy, which will provide guidelines for a ministry of child protection. Other measures such as establishing a ministry of advocacy aimed at eliminating cultural and religious practices that contribute to CSA, equipping children to protect themselves and forging strategic partnerships with relevant stakeholders for effective child protection can be developed. The paper posits that pastoral ministry of care and safeguarding of children could contribute significantly to child protection efforts aimed at addressing CSA in Ghana.

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