The Lived Experience of Ghanaian Trained Social Workers in Child Protection in England

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Abstract

This is an exploratory study which critically examines the lived experience of Ghanaian trained social workers in child protection in England. The increased rate of child abuse in England has called for pragmatic strategies to achieve a better outcome for children and their families. One of the measures has been to increase the number of frontline child protection social workers to help plug the gaps in child protection services. Consequently, various local authority children's service departments have recruited social workers from abroad to augment their workforce. Among these international social workers are Ghanaian-trained social workers.

Using the Free Association Narrative Interview method, my research focuses on a sample of 10 Ghana-trained social workers with a view to understanding what it is like to be a Ghanaian social worker in child protection in England. I also wanted to find out what informs their decision-making processes, with specific focus on the extent to which culture plays a part in their decisions relating to child protection.

The findings from this research clearly point out that the experiences of Ghanaian trained social workers in England are multifaceted and put considerable strain on their personal and professional lives. A significant finding arising from this research has been the pain and suffering the participants endured in their bid to work in this country. It emerged that the participants have traversed a long process of struggle with a good deal of injustice and discrimination in their journey. The phases of the journey could be traced to the lack of preparation, leaving their family/loved ones back home, poor knowledge of the child protection process in England, the performance culture in the host nation, racism and difficult work environments among others.

The findings are contextualised in relation to social work education and practice in Ghana, Ghanaian culture and its implications for social work practice in England, difficult transitions from Ghana, and lack of knowledge on the policies/legislations and guidance that underpin social work practice here.

Most importantly, the study is underpinned by a theoretical perspective that relates to the work of the British sociologist, Anthony Giddens.

Declaration

This thesis has not been previously submitted for any degree. This represents my own research and original work. It cannot be attributed to any other person or persons.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACTION AID: Is an international non-governmental organisation whose primary aim is to work against poverty and injustice in the world

BA: Brong Ahafo

BCG: Ghana Commercial Bank

BAME: Black, Asian and other Ethnic Minorities

CAB: Citizens Advice Bureau

CHRAJ: Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice

CIN: Child in Need

COVID-19: Coronavirus

CP: Child Protection

CPS: Crown Prosecution Service

CSE: Child Sexual Exploitation

DANIDA: Danish Assistance for International Development

DOVVS: Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit

ECOWAS: Economic Commission of West African States

EEA: European Economic Area

EU: European

FANI: Free Association Narrative Interview

FGC: Family Group Conference

FSSW: International Federation of Social Workers

GASOW: Ghana Association of Social Workers

GES: Ghana Education Service

GHASWU: Ghanaian Association of Social workers, UK

GP: General Practitioner

GSCC: General Social Care Council

HCPC: Health Care Professions Council

HIV/AIDS: Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

IASSW: International Association of Social Work

ICMPD: International Centre for Migration Policy Development

ICT: Information and Communication Technology

IOM: International Organisation for Migration

ISWs: International Social Workers

KNUST: Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology

LA: Local Authority

LAC: Looked After Child

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

OPEC: Organization of Petroleum Exporting Companies.

PQ: Post Qualification

Q&A: Quality Assured

S7: Session 7 (of the children Act 1989)

S47: Session 47 (of the children Act 1989

SCR: Serious Case Reviews

SIHMA: Scalabrini Institute for Human Mobility in Africa

TA: Thematic Analysis

UK: United Kingdom

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund.

USA: United States of America

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

Acknowledgement

<center>**Introduction**</center>

Background of the study

The aim of this research project is to explore what it is like to be a Ghanaian trained social worker in child protection in England. In particular I was interested in understanding how their cultural and educational backgrounds influence their decision-making in child protection in England. The study does not cover the whole of the UK, as the participants were chosen from England.

Being a Ghanaian social worker myself who trained and practiced in Ghana before relocating to work as a social worker in England, and having experienced some challenges in my practice as a result, I wanted to contextualise and document the experience of Ghanaian social workers in England and, by so doing, contribute to the body of knowledge on overseas trained social workers.

The increased rate of child abuse and neglect in England has called for pragmatic strategies to achieve a better outcome for children and their families. One of the measures has been to increase the number of frontline social workers to help curb the menace of child abuse. Consequently, various local authority children's service departments have recruited social workers from abroad to augment their workforce. These are social workers who trained and qualified in their native countries before migrating to this country to practice. Interestingly, social work remains on the list of "shortage occupations" in the UK. Consequently, the reliance on international social workers to meet workforce targets/shortages will continue. Wittenburg *et al.* (2008) pointed out that the demographic and social factors (such as homelessness, social isolation, poverty, employment status, and the total number of people living in households and living arrangements) in developed nations call for an increase in the employment of international care workers. The myriad of social problems emanating from poor socio-economic situations, shortage of social housing, low income, loneliness and the increasing rate of domestic violence and substance misuse means that the state intervention is vital to keep children and other vulnerable members of the society safe from harm. In a similar vein, Anderson (2007) postulates that migrant workers will increasingly become an essential component of the social care sector because of the nature of the industry which is characterised by

high turnover, increased levels of anxiety within the workforce and the struggle of employers to retain staff. [1]

Social work is a contextually oriented profession and the context determines the approach used by professionals, although several schools of social work are increasingly attempting to internationalise the social work curriculum (Nikku and Pulla, 2014). This contextual paradigm is evident across the world in both social work education and practice (Palattiyil, Sidhva and Chakrabarti, 2016). For instance it is reported that the individual paradigm is represented in American and European social work (Cox and Pawar, 2013) while social development is the focus of social work in Africa (Healy, 2008). Social work across the world is committed to eradicating poverty and inequality and promoting social justice; however, the way and manner social workers approach these challenges is contextually and culturally shaped. Thus, there is no single way of defining what social workers do across the world (Palattiyil, Sidhva and Chakrabarti, 2016). Osei-Hwedie (2008) argues that the social reality of a context is mainly about values, norms, and social relationships and processes. Thus, it is crucial for social workers to have knowledge about these parameters in order to work effectively in the discharge of their primary duties.

Social work practice in England, especially London, has increasingly come to rely on people of different backgrounds and experiences. Additionally, practitioners are working with families and children from backgrounds different to their own. The practice implications of these facts are highly significant in terms of how it influences perceptions, behaviours, and responses to interventions. In particular, I have come to notice that a considerable number of Ghanaian social workers who were born, trained and educated in Ghana have relocated to practice in England. I am also from Ghana but moved to practice in England some 11 years ago. They bring with them a different experience, knowledge and world view. The culture and way of life in Ghana is completely different from that which pertains in England.

However, despite the large number of international social workers involved in children's social work in England and the impact this has on practice and wider society, there is relatively limited research exploring the migratory journeys of this

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[1] This study does not cover the whole of the UK, as the participants were chosen mainly from England; as such, the findings are limited to what pertains in England.

group, their experiences, their cultural perspectives and background training as well as the challenges they face and what can be done to help them.

As this is an insider research, I draw on my experience so as to enrich the research data and also to document my vast social work experience in England. It has also enabled me to remain in touch and informed about the literature on international social workers.

The following paragraphs discuss the researcher's background and experience which influenced his choice of topic for this research.

The researcher's background

I was born in Ghana where I had my primary, secondary and university education. I came from a family of nine siblings, from a farming community in the Volta Region of Ghana. My father was the leader "chief" of the village who led his people through thick and thin and made sure they were protected from attacks from neighbouring communities. He helped settle disputes amongst his subjects, defended their interests and made sure the people were empowered economically. In fact, he was responsible for caring for the vulnerable in his jurisdiction by giving moral and financial support as well as settling disputes/giving advice among the people. He was a highly respected and trusted leader whose children were expected to behave in a particular way to maintain the moral and social norms and values of the community. Even though he had never been to school, my father made sure all of us attended school to the highest level. He gave priority to education and helped us to attain the best standards according to our individual abilities.

I qualified as a social worker in 2002 and then did a Master's degree in 2007 from the University of Ghana. I worked in the non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector until 2008 when I moved to England to practice as a social worker. This was after an agency was recruiting social workers from Ghana to the UK and I decided to give it a trial. At that time I was torn between staying in Ghana as a social worker with a meagre salary that could not pay the bills, let alone put food on the table, and accepting to travel to the UK with the hope of securing a well-paid job and a change in my life chances. After consultation with my family members and friends, I decided

to take the risk of travelling to England for "greener pastures". I had to make the painful decision to leave my wife and my two-year-old son in Ghana to travel to the UK with the hope of getting a better career opportunity. My wife, son and other family members came to the airport to wave me goodbye. It was a very painful occasion as I did not want to separate from my family.

Having no relative in England, coupled with the uncertainty of the journey, was a situation I battled with during my initial years in this country. My expectation was to live in a privately rented apartment (as promised by the guys who recruited us) for about four months before sorting myself out and looking for a social work job as promised. We were led to believe that the recruitment agency would accommodate, train and support us to make social work applications within a few months of our arrival in England. There were about six of us on the same flight to the UK to start a new life. We were met on arrival at Gatwick airport by the programme coordinator. After exchanging pleasantries, and having been given some "kenkey" and fish (Ghanaian food) to eat, we were asked if we had made arrangements to reside with family members/friends in England. My response was I had no family member in this country. After making some frenzied phone calls, I was told to move in with a former university mate. I had not met or spoken to the guy since we completed university in 2002. This guy came over to collect me from somewhere in East London to Northwest London that evening. Because I had no means to pay the rent, I was forced to "sofa surf'" for the three months I stayed there, from August until November 2008 when I moved out of his place. I would wait until everyone was done in the kitchen/lounge before I would sleep on the sofa, just for a few hours before daybreak. I was not allowed to turn on the radiator in the winter when I slept: I slept in the cold for the period I was there. Nevertheless, I had enough food to eat and was allowed to use their laptop to make job applications.

The next day after our arrival in the country, we were made to attend a "training workshop'" at Seven Sisters, East London. The training was basically on what we were supposed to do to apply for DBS, register for a provisional drivers' licence, and so on. It had nothing to do with social work. It came to light during the training that there were no social work jobs for us as we had been led to believe when in Ghana. We were to work in a residential home as "residential social workers''. Even the owner of the home did not know the programme coordinator had used his company

name to obtain work permits for us to come to this country. Consequently, there was no job for us even at the home on our work permits. On average, I was to work a shift per month at that home. At this point, I became frustrated, let down and worried for myself and my well-being. The money I had come with was already gone and I had nothing on me. I wanted to go back home, to Ghana. I called my wife and explained my circumstances and tried to get her consent to return to Ghana, but she would not allow me. She insisted that I stay and look for other job opportunities. The guilt of leaving my job and family in Ghana, the anger, anxiety and despair was too much to bear. I then contacted my senior brother, who was a lecturer at the University of Ghana Medical School and expressed my frustrations to him. He also encouraged me not to give up and that I should persist and speak to people in the Ghanaian community for help. Eventually, he linked me up with a friend who was in East London at the time. This friend came to visit me and listened to my story. He advised me to give up the idea of working in the social care industry, and rather join him to work for a London Underground Train company. I objected to his suggestions and made it clear that I was trained to work as a social worker and that I would not abandon my skills and expertise and become a track engineer. This did not go down well with him and he asked me not to contact him again.

I gathered courage and decided not to give up the fight: I then intensified my job search and applied for a number of social work positions across the country. Luckily, I was invited for interviews in a number of local authorities in the London area. Within a few months of being in the country, I secured my first job in a Local Authority in East London as an agency social worker. I was so excited and overjoyed. As usual, I called my wife and shared the "good news" with her. However, during the second week of my employment, I was told they could not pay me as my visa was limited to a particular employer. Thus, I was asked to leave my post with immediate effect.

After consultation with some Ghanaian social workers, I was told the differences between an agency and permanent worker(s) and the requirements for the same. I then opted for permanent social work roles with the hope that my work permit could be changed. Again I was fortunate to secure two permanent jobs with two London Boroughs, who were willing to change my work permit. I opted for the Local Authority in West London, even though I did not know the area that much.

The initial stages of my practice in England were challenging and emotionally distressing, to say the least. I was regarded as a highly qualified social worker and was expected to "hit the ground running". There was no structured training or induction course. I had no knowledge of the ICT system, no understanding of the threshold criteria, and no knowledge of the CP procedures/processes. I was like a "stranger in a strange land". I didn't even know how to use public transport or how to communicate with service users and other professionals. There was limited support from management at the time as I had three different managers within the first six months of my practice. All this added to my anxiety levels and my ability to discharge my primary function of protecting children was impacted.

While I was going through these practice issues, my family joined me here in England. My son could not remember me; he also experienced his own kind of "cultural shock" which impacted his behaviour and presentation at the nursery he attended. He was then made the subject of a child protection plan because of an allegation he made of being physically chastised by his "dada". While the Local Authority (my employers) were investigating these allegations, I was suspended from work for four months. The emotional trauma and burden I carried during those periods was indescribable.

I was determined to make amends and pressed on. I read lots of literature on social work practice in England and also consulted other senior practitioners and managers. My experiences in this country have been the primary motivation to undertake this research project. I wanted to document what I went through, the struggle and the torture I experienced. I want people, especially Ghanaian and other international social workers who intend to travel to the UK to know what awaits them.

In September 2014, I made the decision to do further studies and got admission to attend the Tavistock and Portman Centre. Tavistock provides a useful platform for reflective thinking and knowledge acquisition through reflective supervision, lectures and seminars. In this way, I have been able to build reflective capacities in myself which lead to an improved service delivery and better outcomes for children and their families. I have also been able to understand the role of anxiety and the unconscious defences social workers like us use to protect ourselves from distress.

Aims of the research

The central aims of the research are summarised below:

1. To explore the lived experience of Ghanaian social workers in England in order to understand what it is like to be a Ghanaian social worker in child protection in the country.
2. To identify and investigate the key factors that impact on the capacity of this group of social workers to deliver their primary task of protecting children.
3. To examine how the training in their country of origin, as well as their upbringing & background, impacts on their decision-making in child protection in England.
4. To identify and understand the emotional issues that Ghanaian social workers experience as a result of their work.
5. To critically examine the defence mechanisms that Ghanaian social workers use to manage anxiety in their practice.

Thus, the overarching aim of this research was, therefore, to explore their experience in order to understand what it is like to be a Ghanaian social worker in child protection in England. I also wanted to find out what informs their decision-making processes, with specific focus on the extent to which culture plays a part in their decisions relating to child protection. Understanding the lived experience, motivation, cultural background, and migratory journeys of this group of social workers has enabled me to outline measures to help prospective social workers from Ghana who might want to work in this country in the near future. The suggestions in this thesis would ensure a smooth transition, integration, and assimilation into England's labour market and an improvement in social work workforce delivery in the country.

I must point out that I have not changed the aims and purpose of the research as the research progressed. The above stated aims therefore remained relevant and guided the conduct and development of this research process. In addition to the research aims, I have also found a suitable theoretical framework which helped me to understand why the participants could not function and perform their primary task of protecting children in England effectively. The work of Anthony Giddens has been

very useful and insightful in helping me to understand how the rules, guidelines, policies and procedures governing social work practice in England served both as constraining/inhibiting elements which thwarted the efforts of the research participants to excel in the discharge of their duties as qualified social workers, and as a catalyst which invariably helped to facilitate them to work effectively to keep children safe. Giddens describes this phenomenon as "the duality of structure" (1976 p.121), which he explains to mean that social policy guidelines, laws, policies and processes of a social phenomenon serve two purposes: both facilitating and preventing a social agent from working effectively. I discuss Giddens' theory of "structuration" in detail in Chapter Three of this research work.

The research question

The main research question was:

> What is it like to be a Ghanaian trained social worker in child protection in England?

The subsidiary questions were:

- In what ways does their experience of Ghanaian social work education and their cultural background impact on this group's child protection practice in England and what particular challenges do they face as a result of this?
- To what extent do Ghanaian trained social workers feel they possess sufficient professional expertise to carry out child protection work in England?
- What is the emotional experience of being a Ghanaian social worker in child protection in England and how do they manage anxiety in this area of practice?

This research was largely inspired by my experience as a Ghanaian born social worker who found himself working in child protection in England. Having explored what it is to be a Ghanaian social worker in England, the overarching theme to emerge is that this group of social workers (including the researcher) have traversed a long process of struggle and suffering with a good deal of injustice and

discrimination in their journey from being qualified social workers in Ghana to working practitioners in England.

Outline of the thesis

Chapter 1 examines the literature that underpins the study, pointing out the gaps that make this research unique and relevant. The areas covered in the literature include: social work education in Ghana, the influence of colonialism in social work education/development in Ghana, Western knowledge and social work education in Ghana, cultural identity and how it influences practice.

Chapter 2 gives an account of the methodologies used in undertaking this study while Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework which underpins this study. Chapter 4 gives an overview of the participants and their background experiences.

Chapters 5 and 6 set out the main findings from the study. These chapters focus on the turbulent journey of this group of social workers, the influence of culture on practice in England, the emotional burden of being a Ghanaian social worker in England and social work practice in England.

Chapter 7 discusses the main findings. Chapter 8 is the conclusions, recommendations and implication for practice.

Chapter One

Literature Review

Overview

International social work is increasingly becoming a new phenomenon in social work practice in England. As already stated in the introduction, this study sets out to understand the lived experience of Ghanaian trained social workers in England, with a particular focus on how their cultural upbringing and education in Ghana impact their social work practice in England. Thus, this chapter presents existing scholarly literature on issues relating to the theme of the study.

This literature review is a critical evaluation of research and theory which is central to the research question about the lived experience of Ghanaian social workers practice in England and the extent to which this has been addressed by current and past social work research. I aim to highlight what is missing from the existing literature on overseas social workers in the UK and I will cover a number of areas in relation to the topic of my study which include historical influences affecting social work education/practice in Ghana; how social work is organised in Ghana; culturally relevant education in Ghana; the African and migration; Ghanaians and the philosophy of work; recruitment of overseas social workers in England; issues confronting international social workers in England; psychosocial positions: the defended position/coping with stress in social work; social work practice, procedures and decision-making in England; and social work as a global phenomenon.

I consequently designed the research questions in an attempt to fill the gaps identified in the literature. It is obvious that there is limited information on the recruitment of international social workers in England. This literature review reveals the scarcity of research information on the topic, apart from a few largely general studies and limited data. There are, however, a few studies on Zimbabwean social workers' experience in the UK. In his thesis, Tinarwo (2011) researched the Zimbabwean social workers' experience of migrating and working in the UK with a particular focus on social capital. His research found out that Zimbabwean social workers' strategy of survival in the UK is by relying heavily on and investing in social

capital. He pointed out that "the family" is at the centre of social capital for these social workers, yet migration was a key factor which impacted negatively on the bonding within the family upon their arrival in the UK and that it takes up to three years for some to recover the bond and cohesion in the family. According to Tinarwo, the Zimbabwean social workers were not treated fairly at their workplace (where the study was done) hence most of them left to become independent/agency social workers.

Chogugudza (2017) researched into the phenomenon of social work and knowledge transfer across international borders, with a particular focus on the experience of Zimbabwean social workers in the UK. His research established that a Zimbabwean social workers' decision to relocate to the UK was largely informed by the belief that their social work skills, knowledge and values were transferable across international borders. However, upon arrival in the country, these social workers found out that the transferability of their skills and knowledge is not that straightforward and that the process was complex and depended on a number of factors that the participants did not consider before moving to the UK.

Thus, Chogugudza and Tinarwo have given a gist of the struggles international social workers go through upon their arrival in the UK. Among the challenges they confront are racism, mistrust on the part of their employers and lack of promotion on the job. I must point out that they did not research how their cultural background as well as their social work education in Zimbabwe impacted their practice here in the UK.

I have not come across any research work or publication on the experience of Ghanaian social workers in England.

Historical influences affecting social work education/practice in Ghana

Ghana is a democratic independent country in West Africa with an estimated population of 28 million people and covers an estimated total area of 238, 500 square kilometres. It shares borders with Cote d'Ivoire to the west, Burkina Faso to the North, Togo to the east and Gulf of Guinea to the south respectively. Ghana became a British Colony around 1900 and gained independence in 1957. The

country's economy is dominated by agriculture, which employs some 40–50% of the working population. Ghana is one of the leading exporters of cocoa in the world and also a significant exporter of gold, timber, bauxite, aluminium, tuna, manganese, diamond ore and a host of horticultural produce. The country recently discovered oil in commercial quantities and has since become a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Companies (OPEC) as an oil exporter (www.gov.gh).

Historically, Ghana was and still is a heterogeneous society with different tribes who speak diverse languages (US Department of State, 2009). A number of tribes coexist, each with their own culture (Avendal, 2010). English is, however, the official language of Ghana, which is a legacy of British colonial rule. While they speak their native languages in their communities for everyday conversations, English language is the official means of communication across the country.

In order to appreciate how social work evolved in Ghana, it is critical to have some knowledge about the traditional system and also understand how colonialism, urbanisation and industrialisation made way for social work as a formal occupation in Ghana/Africa. Social change is a common phenomenon of every society and Ghana is no exception. Even though colonialism brought foreign influences and involved drastic social change, change was an aspect also of pre-colonial Africa (Nukunya, 2003).

Prior to the advent of Western social work education and practice, Africans had their own way of meeting the welfare needs of its vulnerable members. All cultures had traditional social support systems in place to support their more vulnerable members (Midgley, 1981; Kendall, 1995). The centre of the social system in pre-colonial West Africa was the kinship traditional system (Nukunya, 1992). Within this system were clans and lineages (Busia, 1951; Nukunya, 1992). The setup of the traditional system included extended families characterised by strong family ties, which guaranteed the social security of its members. The system "dictated social norms, safeguarded moral values and conserved economic base" (Apt & Bravo, 1997 p.320).

A peculiar characteristic feature of the Ghanaian culture is the strong family and community ties, which assured the security of its members. The extended family was the most common form of family organisation within the kinship, and remains so

today. The extended family constituted a large number of relatives who have far-reaching reciprocal duties, and obligations and responsibilities. The family helps its members in need, and renders emotional, moral, as well as financial and material support (Avendal, 2010). Each and every member of the family is expected to honour family ties, share his property with the rest of the family members and contribute to the survival and continuity of the family. Thus, all the family members have the responsibility to help establish and maintain social order. As adults, ''children have a wide-ranging responsibility to care for their aged parents'' (Gyekye, 2003 p.75–92; Nukunya, 2003 p.49–52).

In pre-colonial Africa, political, judicial and religious functions were closely interwoven. This system and its organisation was built on kinship and lineage ties. Tasks, obligations, authority and executive power were determined by a person's position in the lineage/kinship (Evans Pritchard & Fortes ,1940; Goody, 1957; Nukunya, 2003; Radcliffe-Brown, 1940). The chief or the king was the highest authority in this system. The chief's office was the single office and his duties and rights covered all aspects of the society. "He was the head of the society's constituent parts: executive head, legislator, judge, supreme ritual head and chief priest" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940: xxi).

According to Nukunya (2003 p.109), "the year 1900 is often regarded as the baseline for social change in Africa where the colonial rule started to have influence on social institutions". The introduction of formal institutions, formal classroom education, currency-based economy and Christianity were among the factors that greatly contributed to this social change. Consequently, the introduction of formal institutions such as government and courts of law made the chiefs lose their power. The power and influence of the traditional system including family heads, lineage heads and elders were also weakened. It was also recorded that roles and positions of traditional elders were further altered by the introduction of formal classroom education. This is mainly because education changed people's perception and outlook on the world. Children were brought up by their teachers whom they looked up to, instead of family members. The interplay of these factors made social change far-reaching and profound for the people of Africa.

Colonialism, industrialisation, modernity and the introduction of Western education led to the erosion of traditional support systems and structures. Consequently, the colonial powers introduced Western social work in Ghana to help address these challenges. The organisation of social support became the sole responsibility of the central government, which was organised via social work activities. This meant social workers had to be trained to take up the challenges of social change as described above. Consequently, in 1940, social work received official status as it was incorporated under the Colonial Development Act of 1940 (Apt & Blavo, 1997). At that time, a selection of educated Ghanaians travelled to the UK to train as social workers. When they finished with their training, they returned to Ghana to work as social workers and development officers across the country (Kreitzler, 2009).

The progression of social work education in Ghana was slow and painstaking. The development of social work as a discipline or an area of study and profession did not progress as originally thought. It took so many years before social work took its professional identity in Ghana. In 1946, the Department of Social Welfare and Housing was established in Ghana, which was immediately followed by the establishment of The School of Social Work, in Accra. The School of Social Work offers a two-year sub-degree/diploma programme in social work. Teachers are practising social workers who work at the Department of Social Welfare (Apt & Blavo 1997; Laird 2008). The School of Social Work is one of many institutions which train social workers in Ghana. The tertiary institution responsible for the training of social workers is the University of Ghana, founded in 1948.

The Department of Social Work at the University of Ghana holds a four-year (Level 100–400) Bachelor Programme in social work. According to Darko-Gyeke and Gilbert (2018), there is currently a revised bachelor's degree, a master's degree and a doctoral degree programme at the department which commenced in 2004, 2003, and 2011 respectively.

In recent times, other universities such as KNUST (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology) in Kumasi and other private universities also offer four-year programmes in social work. Indeed, most graduates from the Department of Social Work occupy various positions in state and private institutions in Ghana while

others travelled abroad to practice their trade. All the respondents for this study qualified from the Department of Social Work and have been in the UK for a number of years.

How social work is organised in Ghana

Munro (2002) indicates that the work of the social worker in helping to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect is influenced by the society around them. It is the social context that determines what constitutes abuse and how the abuse can be prevented or reduced by professionals. It also determines the role and powers of the professionals in the helping process. Indeed, the role and responsibilities of parents in bringing up children is also largely determined by the nature of the society. Again, state intervention in families also varies according to each country. The level of state intervention is influenced by the norms, values and resources of the country. It can then be said that the system of child protection in each country is the combination of its culture and history.

Historically, chiefs, opinion leaders, community leaders and family elders wielded power in determining how the needs of vulnerable members in society were met. However, with the advent of colonialism, formal education as well as social change, the opinion/community leaders and chiefs lose their influence and power over members of the community. The government officials, politicians, civic servants (social workers) and community development officers have taken over the roles of the chiefs in meeting the needs of the community members. Interestingly, there is a continuous power struggle between traditional leaders/authorities, chiefs and opinion leaders on the one hand, and social workers and government officials on the other, as the latter do not want to relinquish their power or control to the statutory agencies.

Social work practice in Ghana has consequently suffered an identity crisis for a number of years as there was lack of clarity as to the role of social workers in national development. The profession has been on the periphery to the extent that qualified social workers do not even want to be identified as such. Kreitzer (2012) pointed out that throughout the 1970s and the 1980s there was confusion as to the role of social workers in relation to national planning, social welfare and social development. The identity crisis in social work "affected the way social workers are

able to respond to the confusion of individuals, groups and communities concerning cultural change in society" Kreitzer (2012, p. 65). Indeed, I felt the same way and was in a state of confusion as to my role in mobilising community resources to address the needs of the people. This means that there is no conventional child protection system (where the state intervenes in situations where children are in an abusive situation) in Ghana at the moment.

Social work interventions are largely ad hoc and based on needs assessment and the political will of those in position of authority. In this way, the nature of social welfare in Ghana is largely around efforts by the state and non-state actors in eradicating poverty, famine, water shortage, flood and other natural and man-made disasters. Social workers in Ghana are employed in public, private and voluntary organisations. They mainly work in areas such as child welfare, family welfare, rehabilitation services, disaster relief/management, and community development (Apt & Blavo, 1997, p. 321–326). Others work at the Department of Social Welfare, Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), and Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU). Most of the qualified social workers in Ghana work in the private and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as World Vision International, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), ACTION AID and Danish Assistance for International Development (DANIDA).

The professional body which regulates the practice of social work in Ghana is the Ghana Association of Social Workers (GASOW). This body was established in 1971. Its core aim is to strengthen and unify social work practice in Ghana. It is affiliated to the International Federation of Social Workers. As a result of the identity crisis facing social workers in Ghana, some of these Ghanaian trained social workers have relocated to practice in the UK, USA, Australia, Canada and other Western countries. In doing so, they bring with them cultural values and ways of life that are completely different from the culture of the host country. Culturally, a Ghanaian social worker would expect the family or community members to help address the needs of its vulnerable members; they do not have the experience of the state intervening in the lives of families.

Culturally relevant social work education in Ghana

Social work education in Ghana has its origins in British colonialism and, as such, the content of the social work curriculum is similar to what pertains in England and Wales. However, there is a dichotomy between social work practice and the culture and way of life in Ghana. According to Healy (2001), Kendall (1995), and Midgley (1981), the social work profession including its values, theories and ideologies, originated in Europe and the United States. Also, Nagpaul (1993, p. 214), avers that social work education and values "were and still are dominated by ideologies of capitalism, Social Darwinism, the Protestant Ethic and individualism". The colonies adopted the social welfare policies and theories from their European masters. This means that the colonies continued with the nature of the education and social system they inherited from their colonial masters.

The debate about the universality and transferability of social work knowledge/method from one context to another has been raging on for years. Gray *et al.* (2008) argued that in order to be relevant to the needs of the people, social work has to take into account local factors such as socio-economy, environment, culture and the political organisation of the people. As Mafile (2004, p. 254) points out, "social work theory and practice is socially constructed and culture is a key factor in that construction". Knowing one's culture and identifying strongly with that culture will strengthen appropriate social work practice. If one is confused, uncertain, and torn between a Western culture and traditional culture, "chances are the resulting social work practice will reflect that confusion and ultimately end up reflecting the dominant beliefs" Kreitzer (2012, p 65). Consequently, from the early 1970s, social work researchers and academia from the non-Western world have begun to challenge the universality of Western social work knowledge in developing countries. Walton & Abo El Nasr (1988), Lebakeng (1997), Noyoo (2000), Osei-Hwedie & Jacques (2007), Gray *et al.* (2008), Osei-Hwedie & Rankopo (2008), have argued that the Western social work values and methods seemed to be inadequate and inappropriate for dealing with the consequences of colonialism, poverty, government corruption, religious practices and other philosophical orientations. Social workers in non-Western countries learned theories and methodologies alien to their cultures.

It is a fact, also, that the advent of colonialism and Western imperialism has adulterated and altered the Ghanaian culture and world view. In my view, people of Africa, and for that matter Ghana, have the tendency to copy everything 'Western' and regard their own culture and way of life as inferior. Researchers such as Kreitzer (2012, p. 61) have established that "[the] people of Africa are going through an identity crisis which is reflected in the organisations and institutions of society". There is, therefore, a misfit between social work education on the one hand, and social work practice and the culture of Ghanaian society on the other. While they are trained in the British approach of individual therapeutic intervention, they end up working most often in the community-based approach of problem-solving where the whole family unit and, for that matter, society tends to collectively be responsible for the needs of its vulnerable members. This takes the form of group work activity with parent-teacher associations in the schools, public health education on HIV/AIDS and advocacy for the protection of workers' rights.

Talking about the methodology of teaching social work in Africa, Kreitzer (p.130) expressed her disgust and frustrations about the perception Africans have about the Western style of social work education, which they considered superior to theirs. She writes,

> It is discouraging that in parts of Africa, western social work education is still considered superior, not because it has been critically evaluated, but because being educated in a western curriculum and teaching style allows social workers to move to the western world, escaping from the challenges of living and working in their own countries.

It is interesting to point out that the curricula of social work training at the University of Ghana (where all the participants attended) are geared towards the Western system. The curricula involve courses such as history of social work, research methods, theoretical framework, social theories for social policy, philosophy of social work and human growth and development. Other courses include community organisation, working with older people, deviance and correctional services, women and children's rights and protection, social welfare and social policy, medical social work and working with personality development (University of Ghana 2014). Researchers such as Darko-Gyeke and Gilbert (2018) aver that the curricula at the Department of Social Work, University of Ghana mainly emphasise courses that take

into account the uniqueness, worth and dignity of Ghanaian people, especially vulnerable and disadvantage members of the society.

At the time the research participants were attending the University of Ghana, it felt like little attempt was made to inculcate our cultural values and issues of contemporary nature in the Ghanaian setting as part of the curriculum. What this meant was that upon completion of our social work course, we struggled to make use of the skills and knowledge we acquired to address issues of poverty, HIV/AIDS, environmental concerns, chieftaincy disputes and cholera outbreaks in the community. It is therefore not surprising that many Ghanaian-trained social workers, including myself and the research participants who benefited from the Western style of social work education eventually moved to the UK to practise.

Migration from Ghana

The general migration of the active labour force from Ghana provides an indication of the trend of social work migration to the UK and other destinations. Ghana's population is currently around 27 million, and, out of this, 801,710 Ghanaian emigrants live abroad. This represents about 3% of the total population (IOM & ICMPD, 2015). It is recorded that Ghanaian migrants mainly work in sectors such as retail and sales, construction, the medical sector and as mechanics and carpenters. The preferred destination of these emigrants has changed from the ECOWAS region in the 1990s, to Europe in recent times. About 30% of them are in the US and UK alone (SIHMA, 2014). The Ghanaian population in the UK continues to grow tremendously each year. According to the 2011 UK Census, there are 93,312 Ghanaian born residents in England, 543 in Wales, 1,658 in Scotland, and 162 in Northern Ireland respectively. Most of the emigrants come to the UK for the purposes of work, study, tourism and to improve their economic situation. Among the reasons why Ghanaians migrate to the UK are authoritarian political regimes, corruption among state institutions and poverty. In addition, the economic difficulties in the 1970s to 90s, and the close ties between Ghana and the UK based on their colonial history and a common language, English made it possible for people to move from Ghana to the UK.

According to SIHMA (2014), in 2010, the majority of Ghana's emigrants – 76% – were employed in their host countries. This is a clear indication that a large proportion of the Ghanaians are labour migrants who travel abroad to improve their economic well-being. This means Ghana as a country suffers from what has been described as "brain drain" where the economically well-educated citizens leave their country of birth to another country for greener pastures. The population of Ghanaian migrants is concentrated in the Greater London area such as Southwark, Lambeth, Newham, Haringey, Lewisham and Croydon (Van Hear *et al.* 2004). There are other Ghanaian migrants in places such as Manchester, Milton Keyes, Birmingham and other cities across the country. It has been recorded that the London economy has served as a very strong pull factor for undocumented migrants who undertake cash-in-hand jobs, tax-free payments and work extra hours (Vasta and Kandilige, 2007). In their article titled "London the Leveller: Ghanaian work strategies and community solidarity", Vasta and Kandilige point out that Ghanaians are generally thought to be hard-working and tend to make the best of whatever situation they find themselves in. They went on to report that even though Ghanaians who came here to study may not be able to achieve their objective, they see hard work and financial accumulation as amounting to the same objective.

Vasta and Kandilige also made a point that Ghanaian migrants focus their attention on doing extra shifts or hours at their respective workplaces and put more effort into the acquisition of property both in the UK and in their home country, which they equally perceive as an achievement. The authors conclude that the socio-economic and environmental conditions in the UK that immigrants find themselves in go a long way to shape their identity and life choices. The immigrants' work strategies, their ability to develop social and community networks and the participation in the community activities is a complex mix. If these factors are not property balanced and adjusted to, it can result in downward mobility, exploitation, and racism in the host country.

It is therefore not surprising that the research participants and I faced similar challenges when we arrived in the UK. The issues of discrimination, racism, work-place injustice, employer bias and maltreatment meted out to us cannot be overstated.

The African and migration

The migration of social workers from one country to another forms part of the global phenomenon of movement of economically active and youthful labour/people. Migration can be said to be as old as humanity, but the theories to explain this phenomenon are relatively new (Massey *et al*., 1994). There are various factors and issues that explain or underpin why people move from one place to another. Among these are economic, social, political, cultural, religious and educational (Mejia *et al*., 1979). These have been classified into push and pull factors respectively. The push factors relate to the sending/home countries while the pull factors have to do with the receiving/foreign countries (Chogugudza, 2018). It has also been argued by Yaro (2008) that both the push and pull forces must be at play for migration to occur. The "pull" factors have been identified as the strenuous efforts local authorities in the UK make to recruit social workers abroad to fill vacancies in the labour market. Thus, recruitment agencies target social workers from English-speaking countries (such as Ghana, Nigeria, Australia, Canada, US, Zimbabwe) and entice them with juicy salaries and working conditions which are not common in their home countries. Castles (2000) went further to itemise the "push" factors as the lack of opportunities for paid employment and unattractive conditions of service in the country of origin.

The other reasons why people migrate from one country to another include structural considerations such as the receiving country's attitude towards migrants, colonial relationships between countries and the kind of social networks that exist between people in the home and receiving countries. It has also been noted that people travel abroad due to irrational and wrong opinions they have about the receiving country. Lee (1966) explained it better by saying the decision to migrate is not entirely rational as it is at times based on people's emotions and the imaginations about life in another country. Indeed, the risky attempts by economically active migrants from Africa to travel through the Sahara desert to Libya, and then on dinghies with no lifesaving jackets to the coasts of Malta, Italy and other Western destinations speaks a lot about the social and economic problems in Africa, which is forcing this group of people out of their respective countries.

Ghanaian social workers move from their country of birth to the UK for similar reasons. Some of these factors include the search for greener pastures, better

economic well-being and further education. Lack of job opportunities in Africa, poor working conditions and low remunerations mean people will always move from Africa to find better working conditions in Europe and other Western countries. Lindsay and Findlay (2001) pointed out that the emigration of highly skilled labour from developing countries to the developed world has increased over the past decade. The shortage of skilled labour, including social workers in the developed countries mean workers from the developing countries will be automatically attracted to the better working conditions, improved wages and faster service delivery in the Western world. It has also been noted that social work itself is a global phenomenon, which is practised in hundreds of countries across the world. Bartley *et al.* (2012) pointed out that the spread and development of social work across the globe has to do with the drive to attain a professional status and a coherent international identity. This is facilitated by the activities of a number of organisations and institutions concerned with social work practice and education, such as the International Association of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (FSSW). Thus, social workers are highly ranked amongst the skilled labour in the world and social work is the most sought-after global profession (Chogugudza, 2018).

The following paragraphs give a synopsis of the recruitment of overseas social workers in England.

Recruitment of overseas social workers in England

As already indicated in the introduction to this thesis, there has been a considerable increment of overseas social workers in this country. Various local authorities have targeted social workers who trained abroad to augment their workforce in England.

Existing literature has it that there has been an increase in the movement of social workers across countries; in particular, the scale of international migration of social workers to this country has gone up considerably in recent years. Batty (2003) reports that the figure increased from 227 in 1990–1991 to 1,175 in 2001–2011. The increment was as a result of shortage of UK-trained social workers which came about because of the decline in the number of people entering social work training institutions in the country (Moriarty and Murray, 2007; Perry and Cree, 2003). Indeed there has been a continuous influx of overseas social workers coming over to

practise their trade in the UK. In addition, there has been an increment in the employment of social workers from EU countries as well. Hussein *et al.* (2010) note that as of July 2010 the number of registered social workers to practise in England was 84, 297 of which 6,705 (8%) qualified outside the UK. Out of this number, 23% trained within the European Economic Area (EEA) while 77% trained outside the EEA.

The GSCC (2010) country statistics put the number of Ghanaian trained social workers in the UK at 123. While this figure is relatively small compared with social workers recruited from other populous countries, nevertheless, this number is significant as a proportion of social workers in Ghana. I believe the number of social workers employed from overseas will continue to grow. This is mainly because the Ghanaian Association of Social workers, UK (GHASWU) currently has a membership of 75 Ghanaian trained social workers, (and I am one of them). I have also come across a number of social workers from Canada, Zimbabwe, US and Australia who have just arrived to practise in this country.

Issues confronting international social workers (ISWs) in England

The recruitment of social workers from abroad is a complex phenomenon in that it involves bringing people of different backgrounds, cultures, experiences and educational experiences into this country. Others come over with a unique world view, different capabilities and language skills. All these characteristics have implications for practice. It is obvious from my experience that the process of adjusting to the UK system and way of life can be a difficult and daunting task for these social workers. Bartley (in Cooper, 2014) indicates that the globalised market of social international workers is based on the perception that social work keeps/adheres to a particular set of values, ethics that cuts across national and international borders. Again, most Schools of Social Work across the globe now emphasise the universality of social work values and ethics such as individualism, confidentiality, a non-judgemental attitude and self-determination. I am of the view that these assumptions are inaccurate. It is wrong to assume that these values can be transferred from one country to another irrespective of the cultural, historical and geo-political issues of that country.

While this might be true to some extent, the local and community context, coupled with the world view and the background experience of the worker also contribute to the level of output to be achieved. The values and ethics might be the same across the world, but a better service delivery and the need to achieve better outcomes for children and vulnerable members of the society calls for frontline practitioners to be familiar with the local and societal issues and how to manage them. Thus, Bartley (in Cooper, 2014) went on to point out that professionals who decide to travel to another country not only cross national borders, but also enter unfamiliar professional territory, which comes with its challenges. Each and every country has its own way of organising its social system to meet the needs of the needy and vulnerable people in that country. As such, there are social, legal, legislative and bureaucratic bottlenecks which a newcomer has to familiarise him/herself with in order to function well. In this way, bringing qualified social workers from abroad without equipping them with the relevant training and procedures in the host country would not help them function effectively. In a similar way, Zubrzycki *et al.* (2008) point out that in Australia, while international recruitment of social workers attracts committed, dedicated, experienced, and well-qualified frontline social workers, it can also, especially at the early transition stages mean workers are overwhelmed, frustrated and worried. This is mainly because the bureaucratic challenges, lack of familiarity with the social work processes and procedures as well as complex ICT systems may hinder their ability to discharge their duties to an appreciable standard.

This group of social workers therefore have a responsibility to educate themselves about the culture and how child protection work is conducted in the host country. "Cultural competence" is the capacity to work effectively with people from a variety of ethnic, cultural, political, economic and religious backgrounds. It is being aware of how our own culture influences how we view others. When we overlook culture or when we do not understand what is normal in the context of the culture, we can make harmful decisions. We limit our ability to engage families and communities and build on their strengths (Williams, 1997). Laird and Tedam (2019, p. 86) indicate that

> in the era of super diversity, the multiplicity of backgrounds from which social workers and those they seek to safeguard are drawn, requires that all practitioners reflect upon their own racial and ethnic backgrounds. Only then are they likely to be able to identify the assumptions emanating from their

backgrounds concerning the values, beliefs and behaviours of families from different backgrounds to themselves.

By this way, social workers are able to sit back and engage in critical reflection, which promotes their understanding and awareness towards valuing, identifying and appreciating the lived experiences of the service users.

Hussein and Manthorpe (2014) who wrote extensively in the social care sector found that British black and minority ethnic staff sometimes are confronted with issues of racism and discrimination from their colleagues and managers as well as service users. This eventually adds to their stress and anxiety levels as they go about doing their job. Indeed, I have been a victim of racism and discrimination from my service users as well as colleagues who are supposed to support me. Hussein and Manthorpe also indicate that social care workers from the minority ethnic groups are usually recruited via employment agencies where they are most likely to face challenges when it comes to promotions and better conditions of service. As Ghanaian social workers practise their trade in England, they are also confronted with issues of racism and discrimination.

Welbourne *et al.* (2007) identified factors such as stress, adjustment difficulties, unfamiliar legislations/policy, and culture issues that new recruits face when they move to practise in the UK. In addition, Zubrzycki *et al.* (2008) raised questions about the level of training and support local authorities provide to social workers from abroad to make them adjust to the UK system. The research participants and I received limited training and support when we first started to work in the social work sector in England. The provision of adequate training, guidance and support is crucial and ethical in making the best out of this group of social workers. The support provided to this group of practitioners will go a long way to help them, as well as the services users and, for that matter, the Local Authority. In this regard, Welbourne *et al.* (2007) expressed that employers and recruitment agencies must note that social work practices, values and standards may not necessarily easily translate across national borders, and that contextual and cultural elements of practice may differ. They therefore called for a thorough assessment of the role and the impact of international social workers in any given time.

It is vital to always consider the challenges the recruits face, the transferability of their skills/knowledge and expertise and the impact this group of social workers

make in the delivery of their primary task: protecting children in England. While there has been a considerable increase in the recruitment of international social workers in the UK, there are currently no international requirements or standards for social workers. Consequently, each country determines its own standards/requirements (International Federation of Social Workers & International Association of Schools of Social Work, 2004). Zubrzycki *et al.* (2008) argue that each social worker must be responsible for his professional standard and practice issues; at the same time, recruitment agencies must be aware of how equivalence issues of training and qualification can undermine the social worker's identity, professional development and status in the profession.

Psychosocial positions

I approach this aspect of the study from a psychodynamic perspective drawing on the work of Freud, Bion, Menzies, Rustin and Cooper. The psychoanalytic approach is useful in understanding the defences people use to deal with anxiety that comes with their situation. This prospect is vital in understanding the distress, anxiety and challenges social workers face in their daily work. Thus, defence mechanisms may sometimes be adopted by social workers as a means of managing anxiety. The Kleinian concept of "object relations" is key in explaining the processes emanating from anxiety. Many authors and writers have established that child protection work can be emotionally demanding and challenging to the worker. Cooper (2005), Ferguson (2005) and Rustin (2005) all highlighted the complexities of child protection work and the demands it places on the worker. Thus, the concept of "defence mechanism" came about as a result of the need to manage anxiety so that it does not impact on people's mental health.

Additionally, social workers from ethnic minority backgrounds such as Ghana experience racism in their day-to-day practice in England. According to Bradley (2014), the "spectre" of racism in the UK, either real or imaginary, is dangerous and uncomfortable in that it goes a long way to affect the conscience of the worker, making him feel unworthy and useless. Some service users, family members, and professionals in the UK regard ethnic minority social workers with suspicion and mistrust, and disregard their decisions and opinion due to the "racial other". During my practice in England, for instance, some service users called me names and told

to go back to my home country as they claimed they did not understand me when I spoke. This kind of experience and treatment can be very demoralising and emotionally traumatic to social workers. Bradley went further to quote the definition Dalal (2020, p.3) gave to racism, which he likened to parasites:

> Parasites mutate and evolve to mimic the functioning of the host in order to fool the host into thinking that the parasite is a good and healthy part of itself. This leads to the parasite dropping "below the radar" of the defence systems of the host in order to sneak into its body. Once ensconced the parasite leeches on the resources of the host, depleting and weakening it.

Dalal used this imagery to describe racism because he viewed it as a crisis in the world of equality where people are marginalised because of the colour of their skin or where they come from. It is pervasive and deeply rooted in British society. It cannot be overemphasised that the issue of racism is a matter of concern in the UK, inhibiting and preventing professionals from making a meaningful impact in their service delivery. Holmes (2006) raised the concern about difficulties therapists encounter in an environment of racism and ethnic division. She went further to point out that while learning, supervision and professional development are essential tools for service delivery, they are not sufficient to achieve a better outcome for the client. She concludes that "only the therapist's own treatment attuned to racial meanings, can help a therapist master his own or her own racially related issues" (p.65).

By this, Holmes meant the therapist and for that matter the social worker must be in a position where they can be aware of and make sense of the representation of race within themselves and the clients. Social workers/therapists must be mindful of the presence of ethnic and racial tendencies in their practice. Bradley is clear when he said clients find it difficult to mention or name issues such as "race" during their encounters with the therapist, but some do so through the use of associations and descriptive adjectives such as black or dark. Bradley advised that therapists must adopt what he calls "benevolent neutrality" in their working relationships with the clients. He advised that therapists must evaluate their own background and matters so as to avoid prejudice while ensuring the client's projections and behaviours do not affect their service delivery. It is therefore vital for the therapist/social worker to adopt Bion's concept that the pain of the patient must be the paramount concern while at the same time being sensitive to the matters of race and ethnicity during therapeutic encounters.

Chapter summary

This literature review explored the trajectory and the history of social work education and practice in Ghana and how Ghanaian culture played a major part in affecting the influence of social workers in bringing about change in the socio-economic development of the country. It also revealed how theoretical concepts of culture, migration, globalisation, knowledge and people's background and training can influence their decision-making in social work practice. The similarities and differences in the training and practice of social work in Ghana and the UK is also noted in the literature review.

Again, the literature (Kreitzer, 2012; Osei-Hwedie, 2001a, 2001b; Osei-Hwedie *et al.*, 2006) clearly pointed to the confusion and identity crisis the Ghanaian trained social workers faced in their country, as the traditional authorities, chiefs and opinion leaders were reluctant to give up the power and influence they wield in helping the needy and vulnerable in the Ghanaian society prior to the emergence of social work as a profession. This antagonism and mistrust between the traditional authority, chiefs and opinion leaders on the one hand and the government officials, community development officers and social workers on the other meant that the Ghanaian trained social workers did not find it useful to stay and practise in Ghana. As the content of their training was somewhat similar, and even some of the lectures were from Europe and the Americas, some of the trained social workers eventually decided to travel abroad to practise their trade. The literature highlighted the recruitment of international social workers in the UK to fill vacant posts.

While the existing literature has clearly outlined some difficulties and challenges such as racism, discrimination and maltreatment by their employers, it is silent on the emotional trauma and burden international social workers face in the UK.

Clearly, the review has identified gaps and scarcity of information in relation to how Ghanaians' cultural background and training in Ghana influenced their decision-making in England. The literature did not elaborate or indicate if their training and practice experience in Ghana is able to equip the research participants with enough skills and expertise to practise safely in England. Therefore, there is a yawning gap in the existing literature about the lived experience of Ghanaian social workers in child protection in England, which this study partially attempts to address.

The ensuing chapter provides a detailed account of the methodical framework, research strategies and techniques that were used to gather empirical data to address the gaps identified in the existing literature.

Introduction

There are various reasons or purposes for conducting research; among these are exploratory, descriptive, analytical and predictive (Saunders *et al.* 2003). Collis and Hussey (2003) made it clear that exploratory research is carried out on a problem or issue when there are few or no earlier studies from which conclusions can be drawn. The research in this thesis, therefore, is exploratory to seek more insight into the stories of Ghanaian social workers in England.

Research design

The nature of the subject matter called for the use of a qualitative methodology that is able to appropriately capture the lived experience of Ghanaian trained social workers in England. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) postulate that qualitative researchers study things in their natural environment and attempt to make sense of the meaning people bring to them. Another aim of qualitative research methodology, in the words of Ohman (2005), is to come up with new knowledge based on participants' beliefs, words and experiences, not on predefined hypothesis. It has the capacity to delve into the world of the participants and makes it possible for the researcher to understand and interpret phenomena from the participants' perspective.

Smith (1983) is of the view that in qualitative research, complete objectivity and neutrality cannot be achieved; that the values of the researchers and participants most often form an integral part of the research process. I am aware that the unconscious intersubjective relationship between the researcher and the research subjects tends to play a major role in the quality of the data produced. I therefore found myself playing a major role in the production and interpretation of the data for this research. This is because my background and experience is similar to that of the research participants. My experience in CP social work practice in England and the challenges I faced have similarities to that of the participants in many ways. More so, I knew some of the research participants from my previous work places and within the Ghanaian community prior to carrying out this research. These familiarities, in a way, have contributed to the manner the research participants behaved during the

course of the interview. According to Hollway and Jefferson (2000, 2013), qualitative researchers place more emphasis on the need to understand the role of the interviewer in the production and analysis of data. In this way, I used the Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) technique to capture the lived experience of this group of social workers. This approach allows for a narrative and uses an in-depth interviewing process which permits interpretation as a means of gathering psychoanalytically-informed data.

The FANI also enables the researcher to obtain and interpret personal experience narrative of phenomena in a unique way. In the words of Hollway and Jefferson (2000, 2013), FANI allows the researcher to respect the narrator's *gestalt (*pattern or configuration of thought) and the psychoanalytic method of free association where participants are allowed to say whatever comes to mind during the course of the interview. This means the interview session follows pathways defined by emotional motivation by the research environment rather than the researcher. By this approach, the interviewee is able to freely express himself, talk about anxieties and has the opportunity to defend against them during the course of the interview session. This approach throws more light on the person's *gestalt*. It is able to pick up on inconsistencies, incoherencies, avoidances and elisions and accord them significance in the interpretation of the research data. Thus, this approach has the capacity to reveal significant personal meanings which other approaches do not.

This method has been selected to bring out the rich biographical data in relation to the research questions, placing the narrative account within the person, by bringing to the fore the particular features and characteristics which distinguish the research participants (Andrews *et al.*, 2008). I chose this approach because it helps to bring to the fore the experiences of the research participants and what it means to be a Ghanaian trained social worker in England.

It is an approach that has the following features:

- The ability to capture the narrator's emotional sequencing of their stories

- It allows silences and awkwardness that may be difficult in other research contexts

- It values the contradictions, silences, hesitations or strong or unusual patterns of emotion that emerge within the interview sessions (Andrews *et al.,* 2008)

In the words of Atkinson (2002), the life stories and individual accounts of the research participants go a long way to manifest people's feelings of fear, awe, wonder, humility, respect and gratitude. Atkinson further reports that stories we tell about our lives go a long way to help clear our minds, bring more meaning and purpose to our experiences and help us to form objective and subjective views of ourselves while at the same time aiding us to form our identities in the communities we find ourselves in. Stories also help us affirm, validate and support our experiences socially and clarify our relationships with others around us. This means that storytelling goes a long way to establish and cement social bonds which are the foundation for social and economic enterprise. In the words of Gbadegesin (1984), storytelling is an approach and means of recording and expressing feelings, opinions and attitudes, about one's lived experiences and the environment.

Africans and, for that matter, Ghanaians are people who like storytelling. We are a group of people who have been brought up in communities where storytelling is the order of the day. It is in our blood; we grow up with it and it is at the centre of our community life (Achebe, 1958). In every village, town or community, one can see people gather, mostly in the evening (by the fireside), to listen to folklores and tales of our history/ancestry. Achebe indicated that in many parts of Africa, after the evening meal, at the sound of a "tantalising" drum, villagers usually gather around a central fireside to listen to many interesting and captivating stories told by experienced storytellers. A key function of storytelling in African communities has been identified as mediating and transmitting knowledge and information across generations, and educating the younger generations about world views, and the culture, moral values and norms of the society (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1982; Asante, 1987; Kouyate, 1989; Alidou, 2002; Chinyowa, 2004).

Storytelling unravels the mysteries about our origin, our intellect and the skills and competencies we are endowed with. Campbell (1970 p. 34) put it in a better way when he said "myths and folktales have traditionally served the classic function of

bringing us into accord with ourselves, with others, with the mystery of life and the universe around us".

As I reflect on the challenges I encountered in using the FANI method, what readily comes to mind is what Hollway and Jefferson (2000, p.156) described as "recognising the role of defences against anxiety in mediating our relationship…".In this way, people have the natural tendency to defend themselves against difficult and painful moments in any situation. As such, the participants such as *Enyo, Beki* and *Mike* were reluctant to openly and sincerely talk about the difficult and painful aspects of their social work practice in England. This reluctance on the part of the participants to freely express their views and thoughts about their experiences in England could be due to my familiarity and association with some of them prior to this research. I had worked with some of the participants in other workplaces prior to this research and I knew some from my membership with GHASWU.

Another limitation of the FANI method as Hollway and Jefferson (2000, 2013) indicated in the second edition of their book is the interpretation the researcher gives to the information the interviewee presents during a research encounter. Hollway and Jefferson also consider the implications of a broad spectrum of interpretation, acknowledging how the term covers the way in which we all accord meaning to experiences, sensations and feelings ourselves and others have, and that it is not a term exclusive to psychotherapy (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013, pp. 152–157). Authors such as Braddock (2010), Clarke (2002, pp. 187–188), Kvale (1999), Ewing (1987, p. 36) and Jervis (2011, p. 127) have made a clear distinction between what happens in interpretation "in session" in psychotherapy and clinical psychoanalysis and interpretation as data-based in research encounters. While these authors agree that the researcher seeks an awareness of the psychodynamics of interviewer–participant relations, they point out that researcher does not get involved interpretively in a comparable manner to the psychotherapist (Archard, 2020). The lack of an ongoing therapeutic relationship between the researcher and the participant means the former is not in a position to question a participant's self-understanding as directly as the psychotherapist can through the use of interpretation in a sustained manner. In using the FANI method, the researcher usually gives an analysis/interpretation of the information, conscious and

unconscious communication after the data has been collected. Thus, the interpretation the researcher may give to the information might be different from what the participant intended it to mean.

Sampling procedure

In an attempt to identify samples for this research, I made use of my knowledge of professional contacts in the Ghanaian community. Talking about theoretical sampling, Silverman (2000) refers to a definition given by Mason (1996). In accordance with this definition, a theoretical sample in relation to this study can be said to consist of the participants chosen on the basis of the relevance to my research questions and how I intend to explain their involvement in this study. In a similar vein, Yin (1994a) also suggests that a sample is usually selected based on the relevance, feasibility, access and willingness of participants to fully participate in the study.

As already mentioned, this approach resulted in a purposive sample of 10 Ghanaian trained social workers from a group called the Ghanaian Association of Social Workers, UK (GHASWU) based in East London. This is a group of social workers originally from Ghana who now find themselves working in this country. This group which has been in existence since 2011 seeks to promote, develop and protect social work and social workers in the UK. It also aims to enhance the effective functioning and well-being of individuals, families and communities through its work and advocacy events in the UK and Ghana. It also provides financial and other support services to vulnerable families and children, especially in Ghana (www.ghaswu.com).

The participants met the following criteria:

- Born in Ghana

- Trained and qualified in Ghana

- Working legally in England

- Registered with HCPC/Social Work England.

- Currently working in statutory children and family social work services in England.

I had written a letter to the leadership of the group (of which I am a member) to allow me to officially approach the members who were interested in taking part in this research. This process was smooth and easy as I was able to recruit the research participants within a matter of one month. In all, 10 participants involving 3 women and 7 men of diverse age and practice experience were recruited from the group. Participants travelled to the office of GHASWU to meet with me for the interviews. The participants were offered the opportunity to withdraw from the research process at any time they wanted. I must point out that some of the participants did not keep to the appointed dates/times and the meetings had to be rearranged a number of times. It is important to mention that one of my participants (Mensah) died during the course of this study. I subsequently spoke to his wife who gave me permission to include his data as a memorial to him.

Two sets of interviews were conducted with the 10 social workers at the GHASWU office in East London. The first interview enabled me to engage and form appropriate relationships with the participants with a view to obtaining data for the research project. It served as a platform to gauge and guide the symptomatic reading of what the participants said and how their body language and behaviour could be interpreted. I was able to notice the inconsistencies, change of mood and tone and contradictions in what the participants shared. This in a way led me to prepare for the second interview which helped clarify some of the contradictions.

To buttress what Hollway and Jefferson (2000, 2013) pointed out, the second interview enabled me to cross-check some of the things the participants told me during the first interview. It allowed me to seek further clarification and evidence on what had been said already and also gave the interviewees an opportunity to reflect and think through what they had said in the first interview. Also, the second interview served as a means of sharing the preliminary findings with the participants to guarantee the validity of what had been said in the first interview. Tong, Sainsbury and Craig (2007, p.356) indicate that

> obtaining feedback from participants on the research findings adds validity to the researcher's interpretations by ensuring that the participants' own meanings and perspectives are represented and not curtailed by the researcher's own agenda.

In short, the second interview helps participants to have an understanding and insight into how the researcher has understood and interpreted the information they disclosed in the research setting thereby giving the data credibility.

Reflexivity

In qualitative research, reflexivity has become a critical aspect of the research process which enables researchers to understand data that is embodied, unspoken or unavailable to consciousness (Clarke and Hogget, 2009; Henwood, 2008). It helps to learn about the unconscious, taken-for-granted and practical elements of identity formation between the researcher and the researched participants. Frosh (2010) further explained that the research encounter is akin to a co-created space where the researcher and the research activity are considered as part of the production of knowledge with the participants. It is also said that researchers are reflexive when they are aware of the multiple influences they have on the research process and how the research process impacts and affects them.

As a social worker who trained in Ghana before relocating to practise in England, I have critically considered and pondered over the topic of this research, what it means to me personally and professionally and from the perspectives of the research participants. My interaction and engagement with the participants, the interview process, and the conscious and unconscious communication of the participants have all been considered in the production of this research data. The use of reflective space has helped me to understand the spoken and unspoken words of the participants, their worries, fears, anxieties, aspirations, hopes and the emotional dilemma of being a Ghanaian trained social worker in CP in England. Also, the biographical similarities between me and the participants assisted me to easily notice these anxiety-laden issues they experienced which eventually aided me in critically analysing the data in this research.

The methodology I deployed provides ways in which the complexities of identification and misidentification have been used as contribution to reflexivity (Elliot, 2011). I was able to establish suitable rapport with the research participants and by actively listening to their stories and accounts of life experiences, we have been able to somewhat bridge the differences of class, education and work experiences between

us, thereby making me an informed listener in the research setting. This meant that the participants felt at ease and were able to relate easily with me during the interview sessions. The use of FANI (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000) helped me to become sufficiently aware of myself in the fieldwork process, whereby I was able to acknowledge and explore the awkwardness, emotional distress and pain the participants exhibited in the course of the research encounters.

The use of fieldwork notes, supervision and guidance and support from the seminar sessions helped me to gather rich data and an added meaning and interpretation to what the participants shared with me. It helped me gain more insight and clarity into the unconscious role my presence in the research setting played in the research environment. The use of fieldwork notes as well as reflective supervision is vital in bringing to the fore the researchers' experience of the research process, how they feel and what they are able to hear and listen to (Hubbard *et al.,* 2001; Kleinman, 1991; Hunt, 1989). Supervision and seminar group sessions usually make use of psychoanalytic skills of listening and noticing, and allowing oneself to be affected by the other whilst maintaining a reflective distance at the same time. It helps to process and overcome the disturbing aspects of the interview process. In this way, I was able to have more understanding of the experience of the research participants, what motivated them to leave their country of origin to England and the challenges they faced in the course of their practice in the country.

By conducting second interview sessions with the participants, I have been able to engage and resolve researcher subjectivity by helping to clarify and explain their concerns and worries about what they told me and how this was going to be used. This ultimately enhanced the productive use of reflexivity to address the emotional demands of the research activity. This also helped me in staying focused on the aims of the research, and staying engaged emotionally as well as creating reflective distance and space with the research subjects. I have been able to effectively manage the emotions and feelings of the participants by creating and sustaining a short-term relationship for this research activity. I must also point out that the demand of reflexive work implies remaining open and amenable to the always unpredictable challenge of each research encounter, and accepting the provisionality of such knowledge. This simply means there can be varied/different meanings and

interpretations to spoken, unspoken and unconscious communication which the researcher must always have in mind.

In summary, reflexivity as a vehicle has helped enhance the quality of this research process and outcomes by increasing the researcher's awareness/sensitivity to participants for the purposes of producing reliable and holistic data. I have thus been able to acknowledge the issues of power imbalance and social and educational differences, as well as taking into consideration the context of the spoken and unspoken words of the participants to ensure the credibility and reliability of the research data.

Insider positioning

I decided to undertake this research as a way of evaluating and reflecting on my experience as a Ghanaian social worker who has been practising in England for the past 11 years. I also want to document my story for future reference. Thus, I want a written account of my "journey" so far as someone who trained in Ghana and decided to relocate to practise as a social worker in child protection in England (see the introduction).

I experienced a lot of challenges during my initial years of practice in the UK. I came to this country with a background and cultural heritage which meant my decision-making in child protection was blurred and distorted. Consequently, I struggled when it came to conducting assessments and making decisions to protect children. I was told I could not do the job, as I had no previous experience in child protection work prior to my sojourn to England.

I did not retrain when I arrived in this country. I went straight into making applications for social work positions when I arrived in England. I thought I could "fit into" the system so I focused all my energy and resources into job searching. After attending one or two interviews, I was lucky to get the job as a children's social worker in one of the London Boroughs. The initial feeling was joy and excitement. I was so overwhelmed with joy and happiness that I called my wife back home in Ghana and disclosed the "good news" to her and the family. I did not even think of how I was going to "hit the ground running" when I started the job. The one thing I had in mind

was that once I became a qualified social worker, I could fit in well in any country and practise competently as required under the code of practice for social workers. Alas, I was wrong. The litany of challenges and obstacles that followed as soon as I started to work speaks volumes. I did not understand the IT system, there was no management structure at my workplace and within four months I had five different managers and I was lost to myself. I struggled with communication and interviewing my clients, was told my accent was horrible, couldn't do my home visits on time and had no support from my colleagues and managers. The details of the challenges I faced are captured in the introductory and discussion chapters.

There are obvious demographic similarities between me and the research participants. We are all originally from Ghana; we had our basic education in Ghana and attended the same University of Ghana. I have similar cultural and historical backgrounds as the participants. We speak the same local language(s) and the food and the way we dress is also not different. Almost all of us migrated to England in search of greener pastures. Our struggles and hassles are also similar in nature. In addition, I worked in the same local authorities with some of the research participants.

As I have argued in the earlier paragraphs, there is nothing like researcher objectivity in qualitative research. Holliday (2016) pointed out that the researcher cannot pretend to escape or ignore subjectivity; rather, we must account for that subjectivity as much as possible. As Giami (2001) put it, the objective can only emerge through the subjective self; therefore, the researcher becomes object and subject at the same time. I capitalised on my presence within this research setting to understand the complexities and dynamics between me and the participants in a methodical way by employing my natural human instincts and propensity to obtain data for the research. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, p. 6) advised that "research must be carried out in ways that are sensitive to the setting". In this way, I used my presence as a springboard to produce suitable changes and outcomes (Holliday, 2016).

It is crucial to point out that these biographical similarities assisted the production and analysis of the research data. On the one hand, it enabled good rapport which implies that some of them were very interested in the research process as they also wanted their experiences to be documented and shared with other people, and, on

the other, it led to some participants being slightly guarded and defensive, thus making it difficult for them to open up about their experience in this country.

In a similar vein, these biographical similarities produced points of identification, which to some extent enabled me to listen more attentively and engage meaningfully with the participants to produce reliable data. I have been able to learn about unconscious, unspoken communication and practical aspects of identity formation for the purposes of the research project. The social workers involved in this project also trusted and relied on the researcher as one of their kind who could understand them on a deep personal level.

On the other hand, being an insider researcher also comes with its challenges. The differences of age, education and signs of success have had an impact on the research process. Some of the participants could not understand why I should be asking them questions about their background and practice issues. Some were very economical with the truth. They resisted my efforts to delve more deeply during the interview process. They declined to delve deep and speak about the personal life experiences and how these impact their practice. I was at the receiving end, as some of the participants projected their worries, frustrations and difficult moments onto me. For instance *Abi* was very emotional and tearful as she recounted her experiences and added that she did not have an opportunity to talk to anyone about her frustrations until I approached her for the interview. I had to quickly adapt and contain the issues they projected in me. I ended up taking the burden of processing and managing these depressive moments of the social workers involved in the research.

I was able to calm *Abi* down with words of assurance that she is not alone in this struggle and that I have also experienced similar difficulties with my employers. This served as a point of identification and helped her to come to terms with her experience. This is in line with the assertion Padgett (2008) made when he said narrative interviews with a personal-centred, holistic and contextual emphasis are appropriate to manage the likely sensitivity and emotional depth of the data. Thus because of the confidential space of the interview session as well as the rapport between us, I was able to listen attentively to *Abi's* account of events and helped her to resolve this painful experience.

I also sought guidance and support from my supervisors and the seminar group to resolve such issues. Consequently, I was able to ensure the well-being of the participants when emotional issues arose.

Indeed, this research provided an opportunity and space for the participants to express their views and feelings about their social work practice in England in a reflective way. Some gave vivid and sweet memories of their work so far, recounting how lucky and happy they are coming over to practise their trade in England, while others were dejected and burdened with the workload, the anxieties and frustrations they encounter in their daily work. They clearly did not mince words when expressing their strong emotions of anger and the rejection they face. In all these situations, I remained calm and managed to help the participants to make sense of their experience. This went a long way to help me to produce data that is credible and reliable enough to answer my research questions.

Data analysis

Data analysis is a process which commences when a researcher formulates a research topic/question and continues until the research enterprise comes to an end with the write up and submission of the whole project. Rapley (2004. p. 26) states that "[data] analysis is always an ongoing process" which commences when a researcher has an idea about the research topic and continues through to the finished work. In this way, I started thinking about data analysis in this research as soon as my topic for the research was approved by the university authorities. This enabled me to be more sensitive to the themes and ideas emerging from when I started collecting the interview data. Merriam (1998) advised that data collection and analysis in qualitative research has no particular formulae, that it can take place simultaneously and it has no particular sequence to follow. This implies there is no particular method or guideline in analysing qualitative data to ensure a successful outcome of the research process. One rather needs to be sensitive and curious in the information contained in the data set. The skills of being open-minded and ready and able to identify the hidden aspects of the data are critical to an effective analysis.

"...but good qualitative analysis is primarily a product of 'analytic sensibility', not a product of 'following the rules'" (Braun and Clarke, 2013 p. 201).

Braun and Clarke (2013) further explained "analytic sensibility" to mean the skills of reading and interpreting data through the particular theoretical lens of your chosen method. It also means being able to have insights into the meaning of the data that go beyond the obvious, to realise and identify patterns or meanings that link to broader psychological, social or theoretical concerns. It concerns taking an inquisitorial and interpretative dimension on data.

Thematic analysis (TA)

I chose the thematic analysis (TA) method to analyse my data set. This approach is increasingly becoming the centre stage for analysing qualitative research data as it has the added advantage of being "systematic and thorough" in its application to data sets. TA means the ability of the researcher to produce an insightful understanding of the data which goes beyond ordinary interpretation of information gathered during the course of a research process. It can be applied to answer various kinds of research questions and helps to describe detailed accounts of a phenomenon. Braun and Clarke emphasised that TA is an approach which is theoretically independent and characterised by open-coding. It is one of the many qualitative methods which make use of patterned meanings across data sets.

Hall and Hall (2004) also recommended the use of TA in analysing qualitative data produced from semi-structured interviews as this fits in well with making sense of texts and information about personal and professional experience of research participants. Braun and Clarke (2006) went further to note that TA is appropriate because it is flexible, easy to use and quick to adapt to by a novice researcher.

By this approach, I have been able to code and identify patterns and themes in the interview data. This means I was able to read and familiarise myself with the data set and write an analysis accordingly. In this way, I was able to pinpoint the semantic themes with the analytic claims which are clearly illustrated by the extracts from the data. For instance, I read through again and again the data set, and identified themes which I grouped and properly analysed. I also looked out for the recurrence of similar themes from the data to affirm and ensure they answered the outlined research questions.

Two sets of interviews were conducted with the research participants. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Before starting the interview process, I did carry out a pilot interview with another Ghanaian social worker in Birmingham. This helped me to test the use of FANI which revealed the potential difficulty and challenges in using this approach. It emerged during the pilot session that the main question about the lived experience of Ghanaian trained social workers in England needed further clarity and detailed explanation. Researchers such as Brace (2004), Ghauri and Gronhaung (2002) and Saunders *et al.* (2003) aver that piloting gives an opportunity for the researcher to critically assess some questions or ambiguity he might have in mind prior to commencing the actual research project. It helps give clarity to the research questions, which improves participants' understanding of them and the time frame it takes them to respond. During the pilot interview, I realised the participant was reluctant to open up and talk through her experience generally. I had to come in intermittently to prompt her to respond to the questions. Even with this experience, some of the research participants exhibited similar characteristics and were a bit laid back and not forthcoming with the information about their experience in social work practice here in this country.

More importantly, Cooper (2014) introduced another dimension of data analysis when he said researchers must learn to "ask questions of the data" whenever they engage in data analysis.

> I think this overall approach of 'asking questions of the data' owes something to my recollection that Galileo once described a scientific experiment as 'a question put to nature'. Our raw research data equates to 'nature' and our questions to the procedures for discovering 'what it tells us' or what answers does it give when we ask it to 'talk back'. This approach seems to entail a broadly realist epistemology – we do not think that the researcher is involved only in a process of interpretation or construction, and neither do we think that our subjects' communications are just constructions of reality…there is 'real' suffering, real states of mind, real social processes etc. to be apprehended and disclosed by the research endeavour (Cooper, 2014 p. 9).

By this, Cooper implies that data is "personified" and having human characteristics and features such that one can ask questions of data and expect responses that would help answer the research questions. I found this analytic strategy useful, which went a long way to help me organise and shape the fundamental assumptions inscribed in this research work. Some of the questions I asked of the data corpus included the following:

1. Why did these social workers choose to leave their home country to practise in England?
2. What does the data tell me about what motivated them to engage in this journey
3. What does the data tell me about what was in their mind about life in the UK?
4. What does the data tell me about what arrangements they made in England prior to their arrival?
5. Did they think their qualification in Ghana would equip them with the skills and expertise to practise in England?
6. Were they under the impression that their social work experience in Ghana would enable them to practise safely in England?
7. What did the data tell me about the impact of their cultural background on their decision-making as social workers in England?
8. What does the data tell me about what knowledge they had about the legislations, policies, procedures and guidance of social work practice in England prior to undertaking their journey?
9. What does the data say about what feelings or emotional state the participants appear to be in and communicate during the interview sessions?

All the above questions aided me to delve deep into the data set to find appropriate responses in line with the research question outlined in this study. This approach also helped me to identify a suitable theoretical framework which captured the lived experience of Ghanaian trained social workers in England.

The following table is an example of the thematic analysis as described in this session:

Table 1: Thematic analysis of data

Extract from transcript pointing to the theme	Theme	Sub-theme	Description of tone/body language	Analysis

Abi… but then it was daunting at the same time because I didn't know what I was doing. I mean, literally, I was clueless as to what I was doing.	No knowledge of CP process in England	Participants struggled to fit in England's social work practice	SW sounds worried and overwhelmed by her experience	Children may have been placed at risk by social workers who did not know what they were doing
Yaw…. again, the African way of protecting children, the Ghanaian/African way of socialisation is totally different from the Western way to CP. African socialisation means children are brought up to accept the norms of the society, so it's normal to smack a child, it is normal to ignore a child and in some cases even children are	Influence of Ghanaian culture on social work practice in England	Difficulty in making threshold decisions due to influence of culture	SW presents confident as if pointing to a matter of fact	Potential concerns around the safeguarding decision-making process

starved as a form of punishment.				

Ethical considerations

The participants of this research project are all registered and practising social workers based in England. I have taken extra care to ensure the involvement of this group of social workers did not breach their code of practice, as the participants are expected to maintain a high standard of professionalism in order not to disclose any sensitive information about their service users. I also informed them that they could opt out of the research process anytime they wanted to. My ethical position is one of transparency and best practice which naturally abides by professional boundaries that are appropriate to members' professional discipline. Robson (2002) pointed out that in order to gain a "scientific attitude" real-world research should be carried out systematically, sceptically and ethically. In this way, I was mindful to follow the ethical protocols to ensure the integrity of the date for this research. Accordingly, when one of my participants (Mensah) died during the course of this study, I spoke to his wife who gave me permission to include his data as a memorial to him.

I sent a gateway letter to the leadership of the Ghanaian Association of Social Workers, UK (GHASWU) to seek permission to contact individual members for the purpose of recruiting them as participants for this project. This was necessary to send a signal to the participants that this is a formal research process which must follow the due process, and to ensure the participants take their involvement seriously. It took just a few weeks before I received positive feedback from them and then proceeded to contact the members. I also obtained written consents from the participants before the interview process commenced. I provided information about the research and what it would be used for, and assured the participants of their anonymity and confidentiality of the information they were to disclose to me. I also made it clear to the participants that as a researcher I would be obliged to report bad professional practice/conduct if I picked this up in the course of the interview. Even though confidentiality applies, it would be disregarded in the event of me becoming

aware of safeguarding concerns in respect of any service users they had not followed through on.

A copy of the consent form and the gateway letter can be found in the Appendix. The University of East London ethics committee approval letter is also attached in the Appendix.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have laid down the research design, data collection method, the analytical technique used to make sense of the corpus as well as the theoretical framework which makes it possible for the findings of the research to be understood. In any research endeavour, the methodology and technique one chooses to employ must help find answers to the research question to be investigated. This enables the researcher and the research participants to produce data which is relevant to the research activity. Consequently, I made use of the Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) and Thematic Analysis (TA) to produce and analyse this research data. Frosh (2010) pointed out that the research encounter is akin to a co-created space where the researcher and the research activity are seen as part of the production of knowledge with the research participants. In this regard, I worked in collaboration with the participants to gather relevant information for this research.

Being an insider researcher, I made sure my identification with the participants was constructively used to validate, reinforce and affirm what I already knew about being a Ghanaian trained social worker in England. I have benefited much from the quality of the individual supervision I have received and the seminar group sessions to understand and become familiar with the data set and to make sure my familiarity with the research participants does not impact negatively on the outcome of the project. The participants were informed of the core reason(s) for this research work and they voluntarily agreed to take part. The above method means that the participants have been able to eloquently express their diverse views, feelings and thoughts about what it is like to be a Ghanaian social worker in this country.

They were supported to talk about their practice as social workers in a culture which is completely different from their home country. This made it possible for the

participants to explore and discuss the differences between Ghana's and the UK's education, policies and culture and how that has implications on practice in England.

The next chapter discusses the theoretical framework which underpins this research.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Perspective: Giddens

Introduction

In an attempt to find a theoretical framework to analyse and capture the findings of this research work, various thoughts came to mind. Why should professionals move across international boundaries to practice their trade in another place? What is the nature of the new work environment? What rules, policies, procedures and processes facilitate or constrain the research participants to discharge their main duty of protecting children in England? Do the participants have moments of reflection to evaluate and think through their actions and inactions?

The work of a British sociologist, Anthony Giddens seems to provide the needed theoretical framework in which to situate this study.

My effort to find a theoretical framework for this research made me read various literature on social work theories, particularly the work of Gray and Webb (2013). As a contributor in the 'Social Work Theories and Methods' , Ferguson's exposé on Giddens' theory of structuration and how he went about explaining it caught my attention. I then took time to read books and articles written by Anthony Giddens to have an in-depth understanding of his theory.

At the centre of Giddens' Structuration Theory is an attempt to address the sociological problem of the relationship between social structures and individuals in organising institutions and everyday life (Ferguson, 2013). His argument is that social science had created a false dualism/premise of social "structure" and human "agency", in that they had been split off from one another. He was particularly against the notion created by sociology that human beings are always constrained by social structures (Giddens, 1984). Giddens further made a point that social structures are themselves made up of human actions from which people generate what he terms "rules" and "resources".

Giddens (ibid.) talks about how social structure is made up of rules and resources that enable as well as constrain what people can do. This is what Giddens calls "duality of structure". This simply implies that structure can facilitate actions, decisions and initiatives of people, yet at the same time serve as barriers, constraints

and setbacks for progress. He also made a point that his structuration theory attempts to explain the nature of relationships the human agency has with institutions or structures they work for.

I found his theory appropriate and thought-provoking, especially relating it to the research participants who came from Ghana to England to work in various local authorities as social workers.

Giddens theory helps me to understand better the experience of the participants by clearly highlighting how their Ghanaian cultural heritage as well as the policies, procedures and CP processes in England served as a two-edged sword, facilitating and inhibiting their social work practice. Giddens theory therefore opened my mind to appreciate the confused state of the research participants and the reasons why they could not fit well into the English social work world when they first arrived here.

The following concepts are critical to Giddens' Structuration Theory: agency, structure, resources, rules, structuralism, reflexive monitoring, reflexive modernisation, and empowerment practice.

The following paragraphs discuss these concepts in detail and how they relate to this research project and social work practice in general.

Structuralism

In Giddens' view, the basis of structuralism theory is the identification of the relationship between people or individuals and the structures that act upon them. Giddens attempted to juxtapose the role that actors play with their limited options available to them with the dynamics or forces of the society they operate in. Giddens is mindful that people have limited knowledge and the preferences of their actions are limited by this, yet these same people are the elements that recreate social structure and bring about social change (Craib, 1992).

In the *Constitution of Society*, Giddens explains that just as an individual's autonomy is influenced by structure, structures are maintained and adapted through the experience of agency. He went further to argue that the interface at which an actor meets a structure is called "structuration" (Giddens, 1984). Throwing more light on

this definition, Craib (2011, p. 44) explains that structuration is "what goes on in social practices, and it is the process of the production, reproduction and transformation of structures".

Just like any social theory, structuration has two philosophical components: Ontology and Epistemology. According to Cloke *et al.* (1991, p. 95) "Ontology is the theory that suggests the existence of phenomenon while Epistemology places the emphasis on the theory of knowledge"*.* Social scientists therefore place emphasis on the two aspects/sources of knowledge acquisition and the limitations that come with the same.

As already indicated above, Giddens is more interested in the existence of this duality between structure and agency rather than trying to define or explain what causes its existence. Giddens is clear that structure and agency cannot and should not be separated; they are linked or connected to one another in what he terms "duality of structure". Craib (2011, p. 44) explains that "the duality of structure" refers to the fact that structures are both produced by human action and are what Giddens calls the "medium of human action". In *New Rules of Sociological Method* (1976), Giddens uses the analogy of language to explain the duality of structure:

> Language exists as a 'structure', syntactical and semantic, only insofar as there are some kind of traceable consistencies in what people say, in the speech acts which they perform. From this aspect, to refer to rules of syntax, for example, is to refer to the reproduction of 'like elements': on the other hand, such rules also generate the totality of speech-acts which is the spoken language. It is the dual aspect of structure, as both inferred from observation of human doings, yet also operating as a medium whereby those doings are made possible, that has to be grasped through the notions of structuration and reproduction.

Giddens (1976, p. 121–2)

As indicated above, speech is usually used to demonstrate the system of interaction between people. The words or monologue of a speaker are understood by the people listening to him/her if they understand the language (structure). Thus, languages use strict rules to ensure the audience understands the words of a speaker. If the rules are not clear, or properly defined, the audience would not understand the words of a speaker. This is what Giddens means when he talks about the element of structure. The use of the actor's voice as well as the knowledge of the language being spoken (structure) makes it possible for systems of human

interactions to be understood. In other words, the system of human interactions exists as a result of the structure of the language spoken. This is what Giddens has in mind when he talks about "rules" and "resources" established by structures that facilitate and reproduce interaction between human agents.

Linking this with the research participants, Giddens stipulates that institutions have codes of conducts and other sets of regulations and expectations that govern the workers to deliver the aim of the organisation they work for. As has already been established in this research, the rules, guidelines and CP processes and procedures in social work practice in the country meant that the participants could not function as well as expected. They did not understand the structure, and for that matter the bureaucratic nature of social work practice in this country, hence their inability to make safe decisions to protect children from harm and abuse.

Action/Agency

At the core of Giddens' theory is the concept of action. This concept is basically about rule following or keeping to laid down boundaries and expectations of a social system. In his first two rules of structuration theory, Giddens gives the following meanings of action in line with the importance it plays in his conception:

> A.1. Sociology is not concerned with a "pre-given" universe of objects but with one which is constituted or produced by the active doings of subjects.
>
> A.2. The production and reproduction of society thus has to be treated as a skilled performance on the part of its members.
>
> Giddens (1976, p. 160)

By this definition, Giddens is affirming what Winch (1958) says about social action, which he likens to language and says it's about "rule-following". Giddens also makes a distinction that there are always two ways of following a rule: the right way and the wrong way (Craib, 2011). In this manner, action can be described as being right or wrong. This comes from the saying that there are always two sides of a social phenomenon. Another way of saying the same point is that every action has intended and unintended outcomes/consequences. Giddens postulates that unintended consequences are as much the outcome/result of action as intended consequences, since they would not have taken place if action did not occur. For

instance, if a child is removed from a parent due to concerns of child cruelty and the parent eventually takes his own life as a result, the death of the parent can be attributed to the action of removing the child.

In other words, Giddens makes a clear distinction between acts as a separate progression of action, and action as a continuous flow of involvements by different human agents (Cloke *et al.*, 1991). As I understand it, action is a continuous flow, a process which cannot be broken down into reasons, motives, intentions, or episodes to be accorded different treatment. Instead, it is an ongoing process which we monitor and justify. My action is largely based on my knowledge of myself and the world around me (Craib, 2011).

Furthermore, Giddens gives the difference between what he calls "event-causality; and agent-causality"; the former includes regular, invariant relations between cause and effect, whilst the latter involves "necessary connections" and an idea of causal efficacy (Craib, 2011, p. 34). My understanding of this is a reflective monitoring of one's action, such that one does not repeat the mistakes made in a previous undertaking; in other words, critically examining one's actions and deeds to make sure they conform to the norms of society and make a positive impact in the lives of community members. Consequently, Giddens indicates that individuals have the tendency to investigate what they are doing – the self-examination process – which he describes as reflexive monitoring (Giddens, 1984).

In this way, Giddens outlines three elements of action: reflexive monitoring, rationalisation and motivation of action. Each element has a role to play in the ultimate role of action. I found this very useful and applicable to social work practice which of late has been investing heavily into reflective practice where social workers as well as managers have reflective moments to think through their actions and inactions. I discuss these elements in detail in the next pages.

Reflexive monitoring

Giddens expanded his theory to include the ability of people to reflect on their actions and to make the necessary corrections to right what went wrong. He calls this "reflexive monitoring" of conduct. This is akin to the saying that "an unexamined life is not worth living". In the words of Giddens, human beings have the capacity to

sit back, and critically examine their actions and inactions and take appropriate actions to amend the situation for the better. Giddens went further to point out that the ability of people to make the best decisions depends largely on their environment as well as the amount of information available to them.

In his book, *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990), Giddens gives a critical analysis of human wisdom and what happens to expert knowledge when professionals' judgements and decisions are questioned by laymen and the media. The domain of child protection and the recurrent issues or incidents of serious case reviews come to mind here. That's the constant criticism by the media and the general public whenever a child who is known to the local authority dies. The general public tends to question the judgements of professionals who handle such cases and come to the conclusion that the system is failing the vulnerable children and their families.

By this, Giddens helped to place risk on the agenda of professionals' decision-making processes because of what was going on in society at the time – "Risk Society". He went further to describe the concept of "manufactured uncertainty"; by this, he meant the risks of today are the creation of expert bureaucratic systems (Gray and Webb, 2013).

Linking this to social work practice, incidents of child deaths from the days of Victoria Climbie in the year 2000 up until this day mean that various attempts have been made by local authorities and employers to make the system less risky and to ensure better outcomes for children and families (Ferguson 1999, 2004).[2]

This means the nature and definition of risk has changed over the years. Yet, concerns of child deaths and other serious incidents of abuse/neglect have continued to be the order of the day. This is simply to say that no safeguarding system is vigorous enough to guarantee 100% safety for children and vulnerable adults. It is interesting how Giddens puts it; that risk in the modern-day sense is

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[2] Victoria Climbie was an 8-year-old child who was tortured and murdered by those caring for her, while subject to social work intervention. A commission of inquiry concluded that she was failed by professionals who were meant to safeguard her.

about "colonising the future" (Giddens, 1991). In this way, welfare states have been making attempts since the 1970s to manage risk through the development of rules and procedures which workers have to implement in their respective workplaces (Ferguson, 1997). The intention has been to address the knowledge-gaps which emerged as a result of the failings of the system.

Giddens explains further the process of constant reflection on failures, and the change of structures and rules to ensure the safety of people as "reflexive modernisation". Giddens argues that reflexive modernisation is accompanied by the ability of people to take stock of their lives, to reflect on structures and the rules governing their lives and everyday practices (Gray and Webb 2013). This means that people have the opportunity to decide which rules to follow and what to change and how to lead their lives. The self becomes what Giddens (1992, p.180) calls "a reflexive project". Human agents are now able to take their destinies into their own hands and to make rational choices and decisions about how to live their lives. Helping professions such as social workers and psychologists are also making use of Giddens' concept of life planning in their professional endeavours.

In this vein, employers of international social workers must engage in what I call "self-introspection", and critically examine their actions and choices when it comes to employing these groups of social workers. The employers must come to the realisation that international social workers face a myriad of challenges upon arrival in this country and that concerted efforts and deliberate measures must be put in place to support and empower these social workers to be able to perform at optimal levels.

The research participants, social workers in general, as well as me, are able to reflect on our lives and our journey from Ghana to the UK and the challenges we encountered and how we managed to overcome some of these obstacles. This ability to critically take stock of our lives as professionals has helped us to come to terms with our professional identity and what path we intend to carve for ourselves moving forward. It also helps us to identify our training and development needs and what we must do to keep abreast with the social work trends in this country. Indeed, some local authorities have incorporated the reflective supervision sessions in their

staff management methodologies in an attempt to serve as a thinking space to support workers emotionally.

Another domain of choice and personhood is what Giddens (1991) referred to as "life politics". In their day-to-day activities, social workers have been involved working and trying to shape the life politics of their services users (Ferguson 2001, 2003b). Social workers support children and their families to plan their lives, and empower them via the provision of information, ideas and resources. Social workers have become the key actors in the lives of vulnerable people in society making efforts to help them make the right decisions and choices which would make life more meaningful for them.

Rules

It has been said that structures are made up of rules and resources.

In the words of Craib (2011, p. 44), "rules are embedded in systems of social interactions – structures do not exist separately from systems of social interaction".

Rules make social interactions and relationships more meaningful and make it possible to identify deviants in society. While we cannot formulate the rules we follow in our daily life, it does not mean that we are ignorant of their existence. We do not take part in the formulation of the semantic rules we follow in our everyday conversations, yet we are obliged to follow them when we speak, otherwise people would not understand us. Also, when we speak in any way we like and use abusive language such as f*** words in our discourse, we are deviating from the rules of the language, thereby causing distress to other people by our choice of words.

In *The Constitution of Society* (1984), Giddens argues that rules have peculiar characteristics in that they come in sets. They are not singular and applicable to single items of conduct; instead they have two aspects. The first part is that rules relate to the constitution of meaning, and the other is about the sanctioning of conduct (Craib, 2011). More importantly, understanding of a rule of social life enables us to proceed and make boundaries and routines in our daily life more meaningful. For instance the rule about driving on the left side of the road in the UK which is taught by every driving instructor makes it possible for motorists to commute

safely with minimal danger to the general public. When foreigners or deviants drive on the wrong side of the road, this results in accidents leading to serious injuries, even the death of people. The Harry Dunn case comes to mind when he was killed by the wife of an American diplomat in the Northamptonshire area.

Similarly, when social workers and their managers do not follow the rules governing child protection and safeguarding issues in the country, this results in serious incidents of child abuse and neglect, leading to various serious case reviews across the country. In the same vein, when social workers from abroad who have limited knowledge of the rules and procedures in England make mistakes, the outcome is child death and other near misses we hear about in the media.

Resources

Another element of Giddens' theory is resources, which he includes to emphasise the centrality or importance of power in social interactions. He theorised that one cannot talk of rules (structure) without "resources since the latter provides the means by which transformative rules are incorporated into social practices" (Craib, 2011, p. 46). In this way, Giddens makes a distinction between "allocative and authoritative" resources. The allocated resources are the factors of production such as land capital and labour while authoritative resources are the power dynamics between a boss and his employees in an organisation. The allocative resources involve the domination over objects or inanimate things while authoritative resources involve domination over people in a social or organisational setting.

Giddens believes that resources are the means or vehicles of power. Unlike Carl Marx, who identified resources as the "means of production" in capitalist societies, Giddens' aim is to understand the power relationship as a form of relationship between the actor and the structure (Lamsal, 2012). In this way, resources are seen as authority exercised by people in positions of authority over their employees.

The nature and dynamics of the relationship between a social worker and his manager and/or senior management is a typical example here. This relationship, when managed well, can contribute to the improved performance of the employee; but if the relationship between the two is not clearly defined and the employee feels

threatened by the authoritative nature of his boss, this can result in agitation, mistrust and decline in productivity.

As I have clearly demonstrated in this study, the research participants traversed a long process of suffering when they first arrived in the country. The situation got worse when they started to work in a social work setting: their managers did not trust their skills and competencies to discharge their responsibilities as frontline social workers. Thus, they were maltreated, looked down upon and even taken through disciplinary processes. The emotional bruises and scars have remained with them.

Empowerment practice

Another aspect of Giddens' theory of structuration which is appropriate to this study is the recursive nature of human agency in any social setting. Throwing more light on this, Wheeler-Brooks (2009) explained that social structures are recursively created events bound together by social relationships. This simply means that society and its structures come about as a result of human actions. Put differently, society is not a static entity but rather a social construction brought about by the practices and activities of human agents. Therefore, human agents have a part to play in bringing about a change in the structure of society.

Wheeler-Brooks (ibid.) went further to highlight that "oppression is a set of social relationships, a set of social practices maintained by members of society who participate in the relationship" (p. 130). By this, if people (the oppressed) want freedom from their oppression, they must take decisive action to liberate themselves, because no outsider would rise against the oppressor on their behalf. Wheeler-Brooks (ibid.) then describes empowerment as the ability of "an individual recognising that a relationship is oppressive and consciously working to change the social practices that maintain the oppressive relationship" (p. 132). In this way, structuration theory helps us to rethink the concept of the oppressed and the oppressor. The current anti-racism protests and demonstrations taking place in the US and across the world following the death of an unarmed civilian, George Floyd, who was killed after a policeman knelt on his neck in Minneapolis on 25th May 2020 buttress this point. Black people (oppressed) are taking action by their protests

(Black Lives Matter) to have this "deadly menace" of racism and oppression by the white majority changed.

Relating this specifically to the research participants, they have experienced a long process of struggle and suffering, with a good deal of injustice and discrimination as well as racism in their journey of being qualified practitioners in Ghana to working practitioners in this country. The maltreatment and oppression they experienced in those early days of their practice has meant that the same people (participants) have had to take action to liberate themselves from this struggle by educating themselves and taking other strategic measures to progress in their professional development. Structuration theory has it that individuals have agency, are always knowledgeable, powerful and able to change social structures through their actions. Please refer to Chapter 7 for the details.

Chapter summary

This chapter has attempted to capture the theoretical framework that underpins the research project and how this relates to the participants as well as social work in general. I found Giddens' Structuration Theory relevant and appropriate to the research participants, in particular his definition of "structures" which are the rules and resources which facilitate social work practice.

This is mainly because the practice of social work in general and child protection work in particular has become very structured and bureaucratised. Due to the increased incidents of child abuse cases and serious case reviews, various Local Authorities have placed more emphasis on rules, policies, regulations and procedures governing social work practice in England. To the research participants, these "structures" (rules, policies, guidelines, regulations) were new to them and they found it difficult to understand them, let alone implement them. Because they were in a new environment, the research participants could not easily make sense of the rules governing their practice. This goes to confirm what Giddens talks about as the duality of structures where the existence of these rules are counterproductive, inhibiting the participants from carrying out their duties effectively.

The interpretation of these rules and procedures also depend largely on the individual social worker's background and life experiences. The cultural background, training and practice experiences of the research participants is such that they at times understand and interpret the rules differently, thereby placing children at risk of harm. On the other hand, proper understanding and interpretation of the rules would mean "good practice" and ensure safety for children.

Again Giddens' theory brings the concept of empowerment practice to the fore by helping the participants to come to terms with their oppression and subjugation so that they take proactive action to change the dynamics of the power relationships they have had with their employers and service users. I return to this issue in Chapter 7.

In summary, social work practice can best be described as the interplay of the relationship between structures and the actions taken by professionals and service users (Gray and Webb 2013). A good understanding of the rules, as well as effective inter-agency working and professional relationships with parents/carers can cumulatively result in better outcomes for children and families.

Chapter Four

Pen-Picture of Research Participants

Table 2: Information on participants

Name	Age	Gender	University attended	Year of arrival in England	Location in the UK
Mensah	42	Male	University of Ghana	2005	England
Mike	47	Male	University of Ghana	2007	England
Yaw	47	Male	University of Ghana	2005	England
Frank	41	Male	University of Ghana	2006	England
Enyo	56	Female	University of Ghana	2008	England
Sam	49	Male	University of Ghana	2006	England
Emma	48	Male	University of Ghana	2008	England
Beki	49	Female	University of Ghana	2007	England
Joe	45	Male	University of Ghana	2006	England
Abi	38	Female	University of Ghana	2006	England

Mensah: 42 years old

Born in the eastern region of Ghana some 42 years ago, Mensah is the second child of three.

Mensah and his elder sister did not grow up in the care of their parents; they were placed in the care of a maternal aunt who looked after them until they went to secondary school in their teenage years.

According to Mensah, his childhood was "tough" and "difficult" as his aunt would not allow him and his sister to be "normal children". He and his sister were not allowed to go out and play or associate with other children; they must stay at home all the time to help with household chores. He described how he and his sister were "hewers of wood and drawers of water" as they had to travel long distances to the farm to fetch firewood and go to the river/well to draw water for the use of the household. He and his sister were used as domestic labourers for his auntie and her family members. But he insists that this experience has taught him life lessons and that he has learned to treat people with respect and kindness and has vowed never to mistreat anyone. He disclosed that his decision to study social work at the university level was largely informed by his experience of growing up in the care of his auntie.

He completed secondary school in 1997 or so and was able to gain admission to attend the University of Ghana, where his mother worked.

His associations with friends and lecturers and other prominent members of the university community helped in his decision to opt for social work as his major subject area in levels 300–400. His aim at the time was to work in the NGO (non-governmental organisation) sector on completion. While at the university, he did his attachment at the Department of Social Welfare and a Children's Home respectively.

He completed his national service at the same Department of Social Welfare after which he decided to look for greener pastures. Mensah heard of a job opportunity in the UK when a gentleman had approached the Department of Social Work to recruit potential social workers to work in the UK. He put his name forward and was able to enrol on this programme. Mensah and four of his colleagues travelled to the UK on work permit visas to work for a particular children's home as "residential social workers" in 2005. He left behind his parents and siblings.

He spoke of some difficulties he had to overcome in those early days in the UK. Apparently, the residential home he was supposed to work for did not exist, and his visa had to be changed to enable him to work for another home. When all was said and done, he worked as a residential/support worker for the children's home for almost three years before eventually deciding to look for a statutory social work role. He described working long hours at the residential home and earning "good" money at the time.

From 2007 until early 2017, Mensah worked as a qualified social worker at different local authorities in London. He mostly worked in children's social care.

Unfortunately, Mensah fell sick in early 2017 and died suddenly in March 2019 and was buried in the UK. It is unclear what caused his death.

Because of this, I could not conduct the second interview with Mensah.

Upon discussions with his wife, it was agreed that the information he provided should be used in this research as a memorial to him.

Abi: 38 years old

Abi grew up in Ghana and travelled to the UK in May 2006. She is the youngest of five children.

Her mother is a business woman who owned various market stalls/shops in Madina and Accra central markets, and other properties in Accra and Keta in the Volta region. It can be said that Abi was born into a wealthy family where she had access to everything she needed. I understand Abi has since been made the heir apparent to her mother's wealth.

Abi attended Achimota primary and junior/senior secondary schools in Accra. She then continued to the University of Ghana in 2002, where she graduated in social work, in 2006.

While at the University of Ghana, Abi used to visit her elder sisters and other family members in the UK. By the time she completed university in 2006, Abi had already been frequenting the UK for a number of years. Immediately she finished her last paper at university, Abi jetted off to the UK again to look for a job. She started to do

some menial jobs and was looking for a permanent social work job at the same time. However, she had to go back home to Ghana in early 2007 to get married to her long-time boyfriend.

Then again, just a few months into the marriage, she made the "difficult" decision to return to the UK. A decision she still regrets. She came back to the UK in 2008 and in early 2009 she was pregnant. She now has an eight-year-old child who lives at home with her. Because her husband did not approve of her return to the UK, the marriage broke down just before the child was born. She has since remained a single mother.

After a number of failed applications, Abi finally got her first social work job in South East England in 2010. She was given a five-year work permit visa. The job was far away outside London and she had to drive the long distance every day to and from work. She described being stuck in traffic on the M25 for hours and had to change jobs nine months into her employment. She then moved to another County Council where she was employed as a social worker in the Children In Need and Child Protection Team.

Abi spoke about the difficulties and the challenges she has faced during her years in England. Her managers questioned her qualifications, experience and ability to do the job. She was taken through the "disciplinary" process. She felt unsupported, victimised and abused by her employers. She was depressed and was signed off by her GP for about six months. She went back to work after just three months, as she was determined to "fight" her employers. She was terrified at the thought of losing her job, her visa etc. She went back to work, and was taken through the "capability process" as she wanted to prove them wrong, and that she was capable of doing the job.

Abi still remembers those difficult moments of her social work practice in England and says she has "mixed feelings" about her decision to relocate to the UK. On the one hand, she thinks she has learned a lot to upgrade her skills and yet, on the other, she said she made a mistake by leaving her husband and moving to the UK.

Mike: 47 years old

Mike, who was born to a top civil servant and a university lecturer, is from a middle class family. His parents are originally from the Eastern region of Ghana, but he and his four siblings were born in Accra, Ghana.

Mike attended his primary and secondary school education in Accra in the 1970s and 1980s. He gained admission to the University of Ghana at a tender age and was one of the pioneer social work students at the University of Ghana in 1995. When at the university, Mike was a student activist who took part in many student activities and events. He even stood for the SRC president but was not successful.

Upon completion, Mike did his national service at the Nuguchi Research Centre, Legon where he subsequently worked for a few years before travelling abroad. He met his wife at the centre as she was doing an attachment programme there. Mike decided to do further studies when he went to Asia. He could not secure a scholarship for his studies and, after a year or so, he abandoned the studies and travelled to England. He applied for social work jobs and got a place at a County Council in England, where he was employed as a social worker, and granted a five-year work permit visa.

Mike worked in several Local Authorities across southern England and London.

He reports that the change from Ghana, to Asia and then to England has had no significant impact on his practice and he has familiarised himself with the way of life of these countries and people. Mike also said he travelled around the world, and visited other countries such as the USA, France, Israel and China. He speaks fluent French and other Ghanaian languages. He avers that frequent travel to these countries has made him a "global icon" as he has become familiar with the culture of the respective countries.

He disclosed that he was able to settle in quite well when he started to practise social work in England. He said he did not face many challenge or difficulties in his practice as he was able to learn on the job and also did some reading and sought advice and guidance from his managers and senior social workers.

He loves his job and indicates that being a social worker in England has opened his understanding to a lot of things and he has upgraded his skills and achieved financial independence as a result. He is happy with his decision to make the trip to the UK.

Joe: 45 years old

Joe was born in a rural/farming community of the Brong Ahafo (BA) region of Ghana. His parents were peasant farmers and he was the second of his mother's ten children. His father also had eight children from another wife. His father died when Joe was in the first year in primary school. Joe was then placed in the care of his paternal uncle in Sunyani, the regional capital. He served as the house boy and helped his uncle's family doing the household chores and other farm work as directed by his uncle and his wife. He studied hard in school and got admission to attend a nearby secondary school. During this time, he spent his holidays with his mother and siblings on the farm land. When his admission letter for secondary school was posted, he could not get it until schools reopened. Consequently, he went to secondary school during the second term as he missed the first term. He worked hard in school and did not join any bad company.

He told me during the first year in secondary school, he had an infection (Guinea worm infection) on his left leg which was swollen with blisters. He could not walk properly. He was in pain but there was no money to send him to the hospital for treatment. He missed lessons as he was indoors at the dormitory. Yet, he did not give up. He worked harder and by the time he completed secondary school he was one of the top students of his year group. He, however, did not pass his O Level Maths and had to resit this exam, after which he gained admission to sixth form, and then to the University of Ghana, Legon. While at the university, he had wanted to study Law or Economics but he was not able to secure these subjects. He ended up doing social work. He was disappointed and wanted to drop his course or completely abandon his studies. He was then advised by a friend to hold on and complete the social work course, which he did. He told me he did not do well at the end of his BA course.

He did his national service with an NGO, where he was involved in community development and projects. He could not complete the national service with this NGO,

because he took exceptions to the management style of the organisation and the perceived corruption therein. He then went to GBC (Ghana Commercial Bank), where he completed his national service.

Upon completing his national service, Joe could not find jobs in Ghana. He decided to travel to England upon an invitation of a family friend. He did not have any intention to travel abroad. While in England, he met a gentleman who introduced him to the job scheme where social workers were being recruited from Ghana into the UK as "residential social workers". He then went back to Ghana and got enrolled onto this programme. A few years later, Joe returned to England as a residential social worker in a children's home. He then applied for statutory social work positions and got his first job in a County Council in England where he was on a five-year work permit visa. After this, he moved to work in child protection in London and South East England.

He went back to Ghana in 2009 where he got married to his wife with whom he has three children.

He describes his sojourn to England as "divine intervention" as he had never thought of travelling abroad. He is happy and says his decision to relocate to England has been very productive.

Yaw: 47 years old

Yaw was born in the Volta region of Ghana, specifically the North Tongu District of Volta. His parents were peasant farmers who managed to send their children to school as they did not have the chance to go to school. Yaw describes himself as a "clever" child growing up. He learned hard and passed his elementary school examinations. He then progressed to teacher training college where he trained as a teacher. He taught for a number of years after training college and then decided to further his education to the tertiary level. He got admission to do a Diploma course at the University of Ghana. He told me that he felt compassion for the pupils he used to teach and wanted a way to be able to help those who were needy and vulnerable. He studied adult education at the university because he wanted to "help parents to effect changes" in the lives of the pupils.

Yaw is a family man who has four adult children: three from his first marriage, and the fourth from another relationship.

Upon realising that adult education could not help bring about the change in the parents (as he wanted), Yaw enquired about an alternative programme at the university that could help him bring about changes in the lives of the pupils he used to teach. He was finally convinced by a friend to study a BA degree in social work. His aim was to acquire skills and knowledge to be able to mobilise community resources to support the children and their families. He also wanted an opportunity to get in touch with what he described as the "donor community", for the purpose of getting donor support for the children.

He told me of his frustrations after graduating from the University of Ghana. His dream of getting support for the vulnerable children did not materialise. He could not get to work in an organisation that would help the needy in the community.

He did his national service at a brewery in Kumasi. After his national service, he decided to remain working at the brewery company. He rose quickly to become the personnel manager.

The turning point in his life arose when he was contacted to enrol on a programme to travel abroad to practise social work. He reluctantly applied for the programme and made the difficult but painful decision to leave his "well-paid" job in Ghana to relocate to England as a residential social worker. He left his children and family in Ghana to undertake the journey to England some 13 years ago.

He did talk about his frustrations in practising social work in England. He dreams of going back to Ghana in the future to use his skills in Ghanaian society.

Frank: 41 years old

Frank is a married man with two lovely children. He grew up in Ada, in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. He was the eighth of his parents' 10 children. He completed his basic and elementary schools in Accra and then continued to the University of Ghana to study social work.

He has been in England since 2006, on a social work recruitment programme. He was recruited from Ghana as a residential social worker for a children's home in London.

He spoke emotionally about the difficulties he went through looking for job opportunities in Ghana upon completion of the course at the University of Ghana. He remembers attending an interview in an organisation in Accra and when he was asked what course he did at the university, he mentioned social work, and the panel laughed and told him he was in the wrong place.

As such, when he heard of the job opportunity in England and the recruitment event taking place at the University of Ghana social work department, he willingly rushed there to get registered for it. He was overjoyed when he was successful at the interview and got enrolled on the programme. Frank did not mind the challenges ahead of him going to England. All he wanted was to move out of Ghana to find something to do in the UK. He felt his social work qualification was not regarded in Ghana.

He was happy to leave Ghana to England on a five-year work permit visa. The only difficulty for him at the time was leaving his family and girlfriend behind in Ghana.

He told me he had some family members (cousins and uncles) in Coventry, who were helpful to him when he first arrived in England. They helped him financially and guided him as to how to make job applications etc.

Frank worked at a residential home as a "residential social worker" for two years before getting a social work job in a North London Local Authority, in the Asylum Team. He told me he did not know anything about social work practice at the time he started work here but had to learn on the job. He struggled, and allegations of misconduct were made against him.

When he later moved into the Child Protection Team in 2011, he struggled to make the "right decisions" and had to be supported and guided by his managers and senior social workers in his team.

Now that he is settled here and his family are with him in England, Frank assures me that he is a "happy man" as he has a good social work job and his family are around him. He does not regret his decision to relocate to practise in England.

Enyo: 56 years old

Enyo is a mature woman who has been in England since August 2008. She has three adult children; two of her children are in Ghana while her last born, her 18-year-old son, is with her in England.

Enyo was born in the Volta region of Ghana where her mother still lives. She went to primary and secondary school in the Volta region but later moved to live with her husband in Accra.

She was first trained as a nurse (midwife) in Ghana and practised midwifery from 1985 until 1990. She then joined her husband in Europe in 1990–91. While in Europe, she was a housewife who stayed at home to look after the children while her husband worked.

She returned to Ghana in 1991, and then decided to do a different programme as she "did not find nursing academically challenging". She sat her A levels and qualified to study at the university. She wanted to work in the non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector and eventually enrolled at the University of Ghana in 1997 to study social work. She graduated from the university in 2000 with a BA degree in social work. In the same year, in November she was employed as a field worker by an NGO, Street Girls Aid, Ghana, and she used her experience as a nurse to work and support the street girls.

In 2004, Enyo travelled to Europe to do her master degree in Population and Social Development. She returned to Ghana in early 2006 to continue to work with the Street Girls Aid.

Because social work is not a "well-paid enterprise" in Ghana, Enyo decided to seek greener pastures. She signed onto this programme being run in collaboration with the Department of Social Work, University of Ghana, and got the opportunity to travel to the UK in 2008 with a five-year work permit visa.

Enyo told me her experience of studying in Europe means she has had the experience of living there; hence, her transition and settlement in England was easy for her.

Leaving her children and aged mother back home in Ghana was her main difficulty.

During the interviews, she was very guarded and would not want to say much about her challenges and/or happy moments as a frontline social worker in England.

Sam: 49 years old

Sam has been in England since 2006. He also came on the social work abroad programme which was being run in collaboration with the Department of Social Work, University of Ghana.

He was born in Accra and is the third of five children. He attended primary and secondary schools in Accra. After his secondary school education, Sam worked as a pupil teacher (unqualified teacher) for about three years before he went to teacher training college in 1990.

Sam loves children and his teaching profession was dear to him. He was very passionate about the welfare of the children under his care. His desire for helping people, especially the poor children he used to teach, made him decide to do social work at university level. Eventually, he got admission to the University of Ghana in 2000. Upon completing his BA social work degree in 2003, Sam went back to teach as usual. He, however, wanted an opportunity to practice social work. He thought he was "wasting away" in Ghana as there was no opportunity to put his social work skills into practice.

He eventually enrolled on the social work abroad programme and moved to England in 2006. He describes being in England as "an opportunity to explore" job avenues and gain higher educational qualifications. He started his statutory social work practice in Brent council and said, "Initially it was not easy."

He also doubles as a pastor for a church he established in North West London. He does his church programmes during the evenings and on weekends.

He is a married man with three children. He says he is happy having his family around him in England. His motivation for being a social worker and pastor in England is to "affect lives, make changes and protect children", he said.

Emma: 48 years old

Emma was born in Kumasi, Ghana. He did not grow up with his parents. He disclosed that his parents separated when he was very young and he grew up in the care of his paternal grandmother. Upon the death of his paternal grandmother, Emma was moved to reside with his father and stepmother. At one point, he lived with his maternal grandmother briefly.

He described being maltreated by his stepmother to the extent that he had to fend for himself. At the tender age of eight, he had to work as a labourer on the farm to get money to buy his school uniform and feed himself. Even though his father was a teacher, he did not stay at home often enough to ensure Emma's safety; he thought Emma's stepmother was providing well for him and his step-siblings. He told me that he had looked after himself since Primary 5.

After completing his elementary education, Emma opted to attend teacher training college, in line with his father's desire. As such, he trained as a teacher and taught in primary and secondary schools until 2000 when he gained admission to attend the University of Ghana. He said his background upbringing and the maltreatment he suffered informed his decision to do social work at the university. He wanted to devote his time and resources to help those needy and vulnerable people in the community. He does not want any child to suffer what he went through.

Upon completing university in 2003, Emma went back to work as a teacher in another secondary school in the Ashanti region.

In 2008, Emma also got the opportunity to enrol on the social work abroad programme and moved to England to practise. He had had no previous social work experience in Ghana prior to his journey to England.

He said that he was forced to learn the legislations, policies, procedures and other acts in relation to social work practice in this country. He also relied on the advice and support from friends and people in the Ghanaian community.

He is a devout Christian who takes his church activities seriously.

Emma had a teenage son who passed away just one year after joining him in England. He was devastated. He still does not know what caused his death apart

from what his doctors told him: that the boy had cancer which multiplied rapidly and led to his death.

He is a family man who lives at his new home with his wife and three young children.

He has no regret relocating to practise in England. He disclosed that he has learned a lot, gained more knowledge into social work practice and experienced the values embedded in social work practice. He hopes to educate his people back home in Ghana if he happens to relocate upon his retirement.

Beki: 49 years old

Beki was born in Kumasi, but grew up in the Brong Ahafo (BA) region of Ghana. She is the fourth of a sibling group of seven. She has an adult son, who lives in Ghana with her family. Her husband was in England at the time she arrived here but the marriage did not work out and she got divorced after about two years of being in the country.

Beki had her primary and middle school education in Sunyani, and then continued to train as a teacher in 1993. She said when she was in primary school she was very clever and managed to pass the "Common Entrance" examination at a very young age. This meant she went to teacher training college when she was 16 years old.

After qualifying as a teacher, Beki taught in primary schools until she gained admission to further her education at the University of Ghana in 2000. She chose to study social work because she wanted to "do something different". She was interested in youth work, street children and so on.

After completing her BA Social work programme, Beki went back to work in the Ghana Education Service (GES) as a "guidance and counselling coordinator".

She worked in GES until she got enrolled on the social work abroad programme and moved to the UK in 2007 to practise as a social worker.

According to Beki, she was recruited as a "residential social worker" with a five-year work permit visa. She disclosed that when she arrived in England, the job on her work permit visa was non-existent, and that she was left frustrated. The "guy finally got my work permit changed into another residential home" she said.

Beki made it clear that "it wasn't easy" getting, and settling into, a social work role in England. She had to attend a number of job interviews and did not succeed. She finally got her first social work job after four years of being in the country. She was overjoyed at the news of getting the job. She told me that she attended interviews at the same work place three times, and was lucky at the third attempt.

Beki quickly contacted other Ghanaian social workers in England who guided and supported her to settle into her new role. She then learned various acts, legislations and procedures to support her practice in England.

She feels happy and glad to have made the decision to relocate to this country to practise as a social worker.

Chapter Five

Findings Part 1: The Journey to the Unknown

Introduction

> Psychoanalysis has largely conceded that interpretation is an art and not a science and therefore psychoanalysts have been prepared to theorise issues like intuition, use of the analyst's subjectivity, the role of emotion in thinking and the use of unconscious dynamics as a tool for knowledge.

> (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p 78)

This is a qualitative study that examines the experience of Ghanaian trained social workers' practice in child protection in England. My approach has been informed by psychosocial ideas and concepts. The stories the participants told are rich in biographical data which capture their life experiences. It includes their background experiences, their educational background, cultural upbringing, social work training and practice in Ghana, their journey to England and social work practice in this country. In addition, the respondents' descriptions of their lived experiences also bring to the fore the emotionality and unconscious feelings of social work practice.

I have placed the experiences of the participants, their background history and the social work practice at the heart of this research endeavour in order to understand the role and contribution of international social workers in England. In doing so, I attempt to understand the complex metrics that come to play in the recruitment and use of social workers from abroad in protecting children in England . This also goes a long way to answer the main question in this research: what is it like to be a Ghanaian social worker in child protection in England?

In an attempt to come up with a picture of what it means to be a Ghanaian social worker in England, I deemed it necessary to examine my findings with the aim of mapping out the motivation of the research participants to relocate from Ghana to practise their trade in this country. In this regard, I was keen to critically examine what the participants told me about their background, cultural heritage, social work education in Ghana, their social work experience in Ghana/England as well as factors that influenced them to decide to practise in this country.

The finding has been presented under two chapters to ensure all the relevant information contained in the corpus is captured. The various themes from the data have informed the various subheadings in this chapter.

In this first part, the themes have been captured under the following headings: the quest for an improved economic situation, the difficult transition from Ghana to England, the rough road into social work practice in England, and the emotional burden of being a Ghanaian trained social worker in the country. Finally, I have also explored the extent to which Ghanaian culture impacts on social work practice in England. [3]

While some of these themes were obviously more dominant than others throughout the data, my critical examination of them tells of multi-faceted factors that underpin the presence of Ghanaian social workers in England and how they managed to adjust to the world of social work practice here.

I must however point out that the research participants experienced these factors differently depending on their individual situations and how they found themselves in this country.

The quest for an improved economic situation

To leave one's country of birth to another for the purposes of work suggests that there are necessitating reasons or motivation to do so. Most of the research participants have expressed that they left their home country to England because of the worsening economic conditions in Ghana.

Thus, the participants' aim for travelling to England has been to improve their economic situation as they could not find jobs in their country of origin.

The participants have expressed this sentiment in similar contexts:

Joe, for instance, didn't necessarily come to England to practice social work. He came to do any work that could earn him some money. He put it this way:

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[3] During the interview the participants used the term 'UK'. Where I have quoted them, I have retained this term.

I became a little bit frustrated at the time without having any sustainable way of maintaining myself. And this idea of travelling abroad came in. So I came to England and, when I came, I didn't come here to practise social work. I came in like anybody else: to do some work to earn some more money.

When I pressed further to find out more about how he got into social work in England, Joe said he first came here to do "any work", but he met someone from the Ghanaian community who told him about social work and the benefits of practising as a social worker in this country. He then went back to Ghana, and applied through an agency who employed him in a residential home and eventually he got himself into social work.

On her part, Enyo had all along wanted to travel to England because social work was not paying well in Ghana. She made it clear that the poor condition of social workers in Ghana compelled her to consider travelling abroad with the hope of improving her economic situation.

According to Enyo:

I had always wanted to travel anyway because I found out the profession was not paying well in Ghana. So one of the reasons was economic, to improve my financial status.

In view of Abi and Frank, they made up their mind to travel to this country before they even completed their university course:

Abi said:

So, I qualified from the University of Ghana in 2006; I studied social work and sociology at the university. I knew straight away when I finished my degree I would come to England and come and practise. So, as soon as I finished my degree in May 2006, I made my way straight to this country.

In the words of Frank:

It was erm … I was excited and looking forward to coming to work in the UK even before I completed level 400.

Sam, Beki and Yaw came to this country via an employment agency because they were not happy with their teaching jobs in Ghana:

Sam:

It was after I had completed university, in 2003, then I went back to teach for a year and I was informed of a programme, the "social work abroad programme" which I was interested in. Yes, so when I saw this programme, in fact, I was very happy and

just wanted to travel outside and experience how social work is done in England. As I said already, because social work is not well defined in Ghana, it is difficult to secure a job after your university education. These are some of the things that challenged me to move here. If I wasn't to practise what I learned, I would have been deskilled.

Sam further pointed out that because there were limited social work job opportunities in Ghana, he didn't want to be deskilled; hence his decision to travel to practise social work in England. He said:

I thought I would not be able to effectively utilise my skills as a qualified social worker in Ghana. So coming to England gave me the opportunity to explore and also to understand how social work works, the reality of practice in this country. I would say that there are not many opportunities for social workers in Ghana. If you want to practise, you have to be with an NGO, like UNICEF and other NGOs in Ghana. It is very difficult to get a job as a social worker in Ghana.

In a similar vein, Yaw deplored the lack of job opportunities for social workers in Ghana and the fact that employers do not even know what social work is all about:

He expressed:

You go there for employment: "What did you do at university?" they would ask, and if you respond, "social work", the next question they would ask is "What is it about? Sorry, we don't think you can work here." But you know what they are doing requires social work, be it in the hospital, in the police service; in every sector of the Ghanaian institutions social workers are needed but they don't see the need. So, OK. I felt that I was wasting [my skills]. My first motivation to come to this country firstly was the frustration, and my second was all the donors live in the Western world, so coming to the UK I would be able to identify some donors to raise funding in my own small way to make an impact back home in Ghana.

Beki highlighted the following:

A friend of mine told me about social workers being recruited to go to the UK. She explained and asked if I wanted to try. So I tried to contact the person in charge and they gave me brief information about the programme. I was charged £5000.

The above findings from this research clearly establish what is known about most African migrants: the desire to improve their economic condition. The economic conditions in Africa are such that its youth or able-bodied people tend to travel abroad in search of better economic conditions. Because of lack of job opportunities in Africa, the economically active people usually do not find jobs. When they complete universities and high schools, they do not have jobs to do. This finding confirms an earlier study by Naidoo and Kasira (2003) who researched the experiences of South African social workers in the UK and established that they

migrate to the UK because of the poor working conditions of social workers in South Africa. Similarly, Gray and Van Rooyen (2000) also averred that South African social workers opt to work in the UK because they are dissatisfied with the service condition, low salaries and low status in their society. Whilst there may have been differences in the way social workers from South Africa were recruited, I believe that their motives for coming to this country mirror those of Ghanaians.

The government of Ghana has not been able to create enough employment avenues to meet the increasing population of the country. Even though the NGO sector has been doing well to employ some graduates from the various universities, the unemployment gap continues to widen each year. This situation has been the push factor that drives the youth to seek job avenues in other countries.

Difficult transition from Ghana to England

The journey from Ghana to England has not been easy for the participants. Most of the respondents experienced a myriad of challenges from the decision to travel to this country, the journey, the change of environment, and the practice difficulties they encountered in England. The emotional impact of the change of environment, the conflict of cultures, the tension and anxiety the respondents faced have all been spoken about. The research participants experienced their difficulties differently, but there are also similarities in what they encountered on their journey to settle in England.

Emma, Abi, Joe and Mike experienced a significant loss in the form of death of a relative, divorce and separation from relatives and friends:

Emma:

Leaving your whole family and friends back home was difficult for me – initially it was quite a challenge for me. I had a boy, while I was in school; you know when we were in school through girl and boy friendship, I had a boy. That boy grew up; in fact we were more or less brothers at some point but he passed away, unfortunately, when he joined me here.

Abi:

It was a very difficult decision because my partner at that time really had a good job back home and I also at that time had a good job as a social worker here. It was

special for me to return home when I got married, erm… as I said, at some point, I decided to go home but then I thought I will be losing a lot as well if I do go home. So in the end, I decided to stay here and it wasn't an easy decision. As a result of that, my marriage didn't last and ended very shortly after that and I have been around since. Like I said, it was quite challenging, very challenging for me as a single parent with limited support in this country and my job was my only livelihood; and there were a lot of constraints attached to that job because my status in this country was also dependent on that job as well. I have given up a lot for that career as a social worker – my relationship, I have lost contacts with some of my families and the job itself which didn't make it easy for me because the expectation was higher for me as a worker and there was a regular threat that if I don't perform or if I underperform they will pull/withdraw my sponsorship; there was a lot of burden to carry, hmm.

Abi and Mike realised their experience in Ghana was not enough to get them a social work job in England:

Abi

So, erm … I realised that I needed to gain experience in that and the challenge was that without experience you can't get a job. So nobody was willing to take me straight from the university. So my only option was to first get unqualified social work roles and, luckily enough, I got registered with an agency in London who was recruiting family support workers to supervise contact, so that's where I started off. I applied for a number of roles across England, everywhere; I just wanted a job. At that point, I was desperate.

Mike:

I must also say I experienced a sense of loss when I left my family and studied in Japan to move to the UK. Of course, anywhere you live forms part of your identity, your culture, your food, the people and the life style.

He continued to say there was nothing to learn from being a social worker in Ghana hence his decision to travel abroad.

In fact there was nothing to "borrow" as a social worker from Ghana. It was a big challenge when I came to England and I believe it was a challenge to other Ghanaian social workers in this country too. As I already said, it was very difficult. For example everything was based on reports linked with procedures. Even in this country, every Local Authority's procedure is different.

Joe:

The stress in social work, I mean the social setting, is quite different from Ghana. You go to work and you come home and you see [that] home is really obviously in Ghana but you also have to make home here as well. My dad was polygamous. Yeah, so my mother was the first wife …erm… seven of us and then we lost a sister. And it was quite a difficult experience again; that was why I have come into this country. Even though I had a cousin here, people go to work and sometimes you feel lonely and I was buying a lot of phone cards because I was calling Ghana a lot.

Erm… I missed the family and so it was quite difficult, you know. But I always look at Ghana and say it's a place where I wanted to stay but part of me is here so that's the dilemma.

Sam spoke of having allegiance to two countries:

I can say I have allegiance to two countries: Remember I was born in Ghana, and even though my nationality is British, I was brought up in Ghana where I have most of my family ties in terms of my mum, siblings and extended family members and I visit quite often.

Just like Beki, Sam mentioned the act of deception from the recruitment agency that brought them to the UK.

Sam:

And it's been quite challenging. That was the understanding we were given – that there was a job ready for us. We were made to understand this from the person who brought us over, but that wasn't the case when we came. The job wasn't readily available, so some of us found ourselves working in factories and other workplaces which were unrelated to social work. So, then, it was quite difficult for us; our hopes were raised only to find out that this was not the case. So we had to fight in order to get into social work. It wasn't easy.

On his part, Yaw talked about the morality, the conflict of leaving your country of birth that had spent its limited resources to train him. He felt guilty about leaving his home country to another.

Yaw:

So later, they sent the work permit and everything over, but still I hadn't made my mind up because I was doing well. When I say I was doing well, I mean I was doing well, so it took me about six months to finally decide to accept the offer to come to England to practise. It was difficult for me not in terms of the monetary values but for moral values because Ghana is a poor country with limited resources and Ghana used their meagre resources to train me and also my motivation to become a social worker was my desire to change the lives of Ghanaian children. Morally, as I said earlier, Ghana used its meagre resources to educate me. The fact that the programme was enrolled in the university is an acknowledgement that there is a problem and that we needed a course like that to tackle it. So here I was, trained to play my part, but found myself in England. So morally, I felt bad. So it took me about six months to make that decision.

Some of the participants did not know anyone in England prior to their journey, and have had to reside with strangers and others who took advantage of them and charged them exorbitant rents.

Beki highlighted the emotional impact this journey has had on her. She went further to mention the deception and mistreatment meted out to some of them:

Beki:

We were told that once we got here, our jobs were ready. I and my colleagues were happy and excited about it. At least when we get here, we could start to work as social workers. Upon reaching England, we found out that it wasn't like that. It was a different thing. For me, it took more than five months before my CRB came. So it wasn't easy. So first of all, I started to work in a residential home, in East London. It wasn't easy because we needed to learn, (she laughs) especially the London child protection procedures and everything. When we first came, we were told we were going to work in a residential home. But we realised that the home did not exist, so we were scattered. They placed us in different places. I worked in many places. I started in a care home in East London, I went to work in South London as well, I was going from my home to South London on Mondays and coming back on Saturdays, and some of our colleagues went to different homes. I later came to work in another home in East London. For instance the manager took me to South London, I worked there for three months. My transport fare was like £54 a week; I wasn't paid for the three months I worked there.

I didn't know much about computer, ICT. So I started to learn computer skills here; typing was not easy. The application forms – some of them were so complex and cumbersome (she laughs) – it wasn't easy. On the whole, initially, it wasn't easy. We were deceived, number one, and also when we came here, we couldn't get the help we were promised, I found it difficult initially to get to where I am; it wasn't easy at all, and accommodation was a problem.

Emma talked about the financial challenges he confronted during those early days of his practice in England:

Then I remember, another challenge was also the finances, erm… to do all that because we had to work, erm… we had to do this application on the internet online and it all cost money so it was quite a challenge financially as well. Apart from that learning the system and interpretation processes here was quite a challenge. Anybody would find it a challenge coming from Ghana; you need to do a bit more.

As can be inferred from some of the participants, they did struggle to find their feet when they arrived in this country. Most of them have had to work in unqualified roles such as residential support worker, care worker, and so on, before eventually finding their dream jobs. The challenges the participants faced were such that some of them chose not to remember or talk about them. For instance when Beki said, "it wasn't easy", she meant a lot. If a Ghanaian says something is not easy, she means a lot in there. In the interview, Beki kept making the same remark: "it wasn't easy" which I

interpreted to mean she experienced a number of difficult moments which nearly broke her down hence her inability to name those difficult moments.

Like other migrants, the research participants have had to encounter a lot of challenges and obstacles on their way to practise in this country. Even the decision to travel was not an easy one to make. In a similar vein, Hana and Lyons (2016) highlighted that the experiences of international social workers in Children and Families Services in the UK are multifaceted and place considerable stress on the personal as well as professional sources of the migrants. The problems of the participants are worsened by the dislocation of their personal relationships and their reference points, which often serve as a support network and backbone for the home-grown new social workers. The sense of loss and isolation coupled with lack of a role model from professional colleagues can be difficult for the participants in this country. Most of the participants have had to leave behind in Ghana their wives/husbands, children, parents, friends and other family members. This is a significant feeling of loss they experienced, especially at the initial stages of their sojourn to England.

Generally, migrant workers are more vulnerable to fundamental human right abuses in the form of low wages, poor conditions of service and long hours without the requisite compensations. Indeed some of the participants have had to work in residential homes for hours without being paid. Some of them were made to believe that the job on their work permit visa was waiting for them only to realise on arrival in England that there were no jobs for them.

Rough road into social work practice in England

The research participants found the transition from Ghana into social work practice in England very difficult and challenging. It became obvious for the respondents that the practice realities here in Britain are completely different from their experiences in Ghana. Writers such as Ferguson (2005), Cooper (2005) and Rustin (2005) all expressed the emotionality of child protection work which they described as fast, fluid, complex and ladled with anxiety when making decisions to safeguard children.

It is therefore not surprising that when they arrived in this country, this group of social workers found it difficult to fit into the nature of social work practice here. On arrival in England, the respondents could not apply for social work roles immediately even though they all qualified before arriving here. They spent one or two years working at residential homes as care or support workers while "self-educating" themselves. They spent a long period of time learning and reading about social work practice procedures, policies and legislations in England before gaining the confidence to make applications.

The following paragraphs from the respondents emphasis the points I have been making above:

Abi said she struggled in the early days of her practice in English social care. She knew nothing about the guidelines and procedures of social work practice in England and could not make appropriate analysis threshold decisions of information she gathered in her assessments.

However, I struggled. I struggled a lot in the first few months erm… because, like I said, I've come from Ghana. I didn't know the processes, what the guidelines were. I was in the R&A team. Cases were coming, they sent me to go out on visits, and when I gathered the information, I always struggled to write in the way they wanted me to write, because my understanding of social work was different from their expectations in terms of a social worker. To be frank, ours were slightly different. So, yeah, I struggled a bit. I struggled quite a lot to be honest. I felt inexperienced when I started. I could gather the information but in terms of making threshold decisions, I could not because I did not understand what the threshold was and all I read was theoretical knowledge. So when I gathered the information, I would come back and discuss it with my senior practitioner/manager and then, based on their discussion and my observations regarding the information I had, a joint decision was made whether to take it to a conference or support as a child in need.

She continued to talk about being clueless and not knowing what she was doing. In an effort to get to grips with social work practice in this country, Abi resorted to reading relevant information about the practice here.

… but then it was daunting at the same time because I did not know what I was doing. I mean, literally, I was clueless as to what I was doing. Erm… obviously, I had read the Children's Act, I had read various documentation on assessments, assessment frameworks and child development and these were the things I did in my own time, my own spare time, to enhance my knowledge base in the field.

Frank, Beki, Joe and Sam could not start statutory social work practice immediately upon arrival in England. They had to spend some time working as residential support

workers for a period of time before eventually gaining access into social work practice. While working in the residential home, Frank did some training and got to learn about how the care system works in England. This eventually helped him in securing a social work job.

Frank:

I came to the country in 2005, as a residential social worker on a work permit. I started from a care home in North London and moved to another care home. It was residential, more like support work roles. It was shift work. So from there, I started. We did some training. Most of it more like internships, gaining some experience in terms of the practice here in England.

When he eventually landed his first social work role, Frank disclosed that it was challenging as he knew nothing about social work practice in the country. He could not make threshold decisions without support from his managers. Even the care/pathway plans he was formulating, he did not know what they were.

It was challenging, because it was the first statutory post. I did not know anything and did not have much insight about the process. The challenge was that I had to start afresh; even though I read about it on paper, practically it was difficult for me. I remember my first pathway plan, for instance. I did not know what I was doing, I did not know what it was and the young person even made a complaint against me. It was difficult at the initial stages. I had to discuss most of the cases with my manager and colleagues.

In recounting her challenges in those early days, Beki disclosed that even the residential home on her work permit visa prior to her arrival in the country did not exist. Thus, she struggled to even find residential support work to do. When she managed to get into social work, Beki had to learn on the job just like her other colleagues.

Beki:

It was initially difficult for me; even the residential home on our permit was not there. It's like we were just moving from one place to another. It wasn't easy because we needed to learn (she laughs), especially the London child protection procedure and everything about social work. In this country, because it's different from Ghana, it was difficult. We were reading, doing some training – any opportunity, I tried to grab it.

Joe worked in children's homes for some time before gaining employment into statutory social work practice. Just like his colleagues, Joe struggled to get into

social work because of lack of experience and limited knowledge about the procedures and processes of social work practice.

Joe:

And then I worked in the children's homes for a while. Trying to get into mainstream social work in the Local Authority was quite difficult in that I didn't have the erm… I didn't have much experience in this country and I had to attend a series of interviews. Getting a negative answer wasn't easy to take but I was very determined that I could do it.

Sam describes some roadblocks and impediments he had to overcome before getting his first job as a social worker. He attended a number of social work interviews before eventually gaining access into social work. He also found it difficult to settle into social work in England because of his background and coming from a different country.

Sam:

But when we came, there were some roadblocks and impediments, and we couldn't go straight into social work. And so we had to do some work within a residential sort of setting where we were looking after young people with challenging behaviours. By then we were able to gain experience around how social work practice works in this country… and yes, initially it was not easy because having come from a different environment to a new environment, I really needed to study the dynamics and how things work in this country.

On his part, Emma spoke of the complex nature of the application and interview process.

Emma:

During the interview, the kind of questions they were asking initially were new to me. The application process is different from Ghana; it's quite detailed here. The interview process was tough because, like I said before, I didn't know the guidelines in this country, I didn't know what the Children's Act was and I didn't know what the assessment framework was – nothing.

In summary, the participants have had a rough road into social work practice in this country mainly because of their country and culture of origin coupled with the lack of experience in the host country. Most of them spent a long time (months and years) preparing for social work job interviews. Finding themselves in a new environment/culture and new way of doing things, these participants were forced to

learn to adjust to the system, learn the policies and procedures of practice and other legislations. This means they learned on the job, or by reading, attending training at their own expense, consulting other experienced Ghanaian social workers in England and putting in more effort to catch up with the demands of social work practice in the host country.

Indeed the efforts of these social workers at those initial stages of their practice in England were not recognised by their employers. They were not supported in their struggle to settle into social work practice here. The efforts and skills of these practitioners were not acknowledged and appreciated because of the culture and society they came from. This made it difficult for them to settle in their various roles as child protection social workers in this country.

The emotional burden/challenge of being a Ghanaian social worker in England

Another significant finding from this research is the emotional burden of being a Ghanaian trained social worker in England. Some of these challenges may not be peculiar to the Ghanaian or African social worker in the UK; it may run through most of the international social workers who trained abroad but found themselves working in the country. Indeed, Hana and Lyons (2016, p. 731) captured this aptly when they indicate that

"…the lived reality of workers adjusting to a different society – one with complex social problems, a diverse workforce and a new culture of professional practice – is hugely challenging (and apparently more stressful than some ISWs can tolerate)."

The problems identified in this study are many, of different kinds/nature and experienced differently in different forms by the participants. The difficulties include challenges in settling in England, the painful process of job application and interview sessions, issues in relation to the knowledge base and threshold procedure, the language (accent) of their English, racism and discrimination, among others. *Abi, Emma* and *Joe* spoke about being discriminated against because of their background and the fact that they were not trained in this country. Others such as *Abi* and Frank were taken through difficult but painful disciplinary processes as a

result of their inability to fit in and discharge their responsibilities competently as expected.

Abi expressed that she was taken through the disciplinary process as most aspects of her work was criticised. The criticisms knocked her confidence level down, which further compounded her frustrations. She repeatedly questioned herself whether she was good enough.

Abi:

… once they start criticising your work, your morale or your self-confidence goes down and once that goes down that also can affect your work so you start to question yourself, your practice, and whether you are good enough… I think for me it was hard; it was very hard for me because I took it personally and when you try to defend yourself then they try to make life even more difficult for you. They tried to justify why they think you are not good enough, so now every document you send they are Q&A (quality assured); every single word, even simple typos, have been highlighted for them to prove that you're not good enough. There's also an emotional burden that you are carrying to the office all the time – I'm not good enough, I'm not good enough… At some point I had to sign off sick. I was signed off sick … erm… because I just couldn't manage the way, erm… my work was constantly being criticised and I felt that they set me up and they wanted to dismiss me. And for me that meant because my stay in this country was dependent on my job, my finances were dependent on it. I was carrying a lot of emotional burden, so I went off sick. I had a time of reflection and then came back. I was signed off sick for three months. I felt that they were unnecessarily straight or harsh on those of us who came from abroad. It wasn't just me – I had colleagues who were from South Africa and Zimbabwe and their work was highly criticised for not being of the standard they required without accepting that we had come from a different country. I've been through a lot.

…my GP was happy to sign me off sick for longer because my GP said the way they were treating me was unfair and he didn't want me to go back to work, but then I just felt (you know the way we are – Ghanaians – we are survivors) I'm going to deal with it. I'm going to deal with it, I'm going to fight it, so I went back to work. I went back to work with a different attitude.

… erm… so I think that sometimes just the fact that you have come from a different country or you studied elsewhere makes them feel that you are not good enough; you have to present three times better than lots of people.

Abi was emotional when she recounted those difficult days as a single parent and going through tough times at work with no support from management. Even though she was emotionally burdened, she could not give up work, because she thought her stay in the UK was dependent on her work visa. Just like some of her colleagues, Abi misunderstood this but, in reality, she would not have been deported from the country.

… Like I said it was quite challenging, very challenging, for me as a single parent with limited support in this country and so my job was my only livelihood and there were a lot of constraints attached to that job because my status in this country was also dependent on that job. I had given up a lot for that career as a social worker: my relationships – I had lost contact with some of my family – and the job itself didn't make it easy for me because the expectation was higher for me as a worker and regularly there was a threat that if I didn't perform, or if I underperformed, they would pull/withdraw my sponsorship and that was a lot of burden to carry.

Frank, Sam and Emma talked about their accent and how the clients were mocking them because of the tone of their English language. Some clients would pretend they did not understand when they spoke.

Frank:

… Also, in those early stages, my problem as mentioned already was my accent. The clients pretended they did not understand you; they pretended they did not hear you. It made it very difficult, very disappointing; it made the work difficult at the initial stages. They tried to make you feel you didn't know what you were doing or what you were saying.

Sam:

…And it's been quite challenging… Even for you to speak on the phone was a challenge because you didn't know who was listening to you and you didn't know if you were saying the right thing – even your accent.

Emma:

…I have had that, with the accent; someone would say he does not even understand English, he does not speak English. It's a challenge that I know I am likely to face because I am from Africa, with a different accent, background, where their accent is different.

Removing children from their families because of concerns of neglect and significant harm is an aspect of the practice that worries Emma. He made mention of an occasion where he had to remove seven siblings from a home. He found this experience daunting.

Emma:

Obviously, it is very emotional, but you know the Children's Act talks about the paramountcy of the child; the welfare of the child is paramount. It's very emotional removing children from their parents. I wouldn't lie to you, it's difficult, especially when the child is so young, because I remember, in my experience before, I removed seven children, and it was very emotional, not only removing them from the mother but splitting them into different placements.

Joe worries about racist comments by some of his service users and the nature of the system which does not make sense.

Joe:

… you were very "raw" and you go to families and some of them are very racist and some of them are "something" and it gets to you especially when you don't even understand the system. So, I think I have come across difficult clients, I have come across difficult cases, but I think what frustrates me most is the system that does not work. A system that doesn't have common sense to it. That one frustrates me most.

Mensah made mention of a case in question where he was attacked and verbally abused by a client after a court hearing.

Mensah:

…I mean I had a case; it was in court. I had an S7 report completed and it was in favour of the dad and the mum was not happy with this. There were concerns around mum, so we went to court and then erm… after the first hearing, we were in the second one which was a private proceeding but because I was the author of the S7 report, and mum was not in agreement with my recommendation, the judge instructed that I come to court so that mum could cross-examine me. And I must say …mum was quite abusive outside the court. After the court, just as I was going into my car, she was, yeah, she was very racist, very abusive towards me. People were just watching, you know? Yeah, I was feeling quite bad. Her comments were not good – you are fat, you are from Africa, go to your country. It makes you feel a bit down.

Mike also spoke of racism and discrimination and notes that a client once felt the council had neglected them by sending him, a black social worker to their home.

Mike:

… But when it comes to issues of racism/discrimination, it is based on the individual. I can't suggest that it doesn't exist – I would be wrong. But I can't ignore the fact that I have had some African social workers being discriminated against by their clients. I remember a scenario where a family member told me "When we heard the name Mike, we were very happy but when we saw you as an African, we were very disappointed." (He laughs)… In his own words, he said "Mike, I felt at that point that the family had been neglected by the council" (He laughs) because a social worker is supposed to be white.

Mike also said if an African social worker does something wrong, he is more likely to be severely punished compared with a white British social worker.

Because, to tell you the truth, it's my opinion that if an African social worker made a mistake, I think it would receive more attention than a British social worker, the reason being that the people would start picking things from where he/she is from, not on the quality of his/her work. I have seen instances where clients have requested for a particular social worker with a particular colour. I won't go into the details.

Another frustration Mike mentioned was the visa restrictions for international social workers in this country.

And one other complicating factor is that, whenever we, the foreign social workers, come to this country, in most cases by the law we need to be dependent on the Local Authority visa as permanent staff. I mean, in most cases we are treated indifferently over this law. We have to work for longer hours unlike our colleagues who are not required to depend on Local Authority visas because they can choose to leave, because they are not compelled by circumstances to be permanent staff, so they can choose to leave whilst we get stuck until our time is up.

It is clear from the above excerpts that the participants did not find it easy settling into their job in England. They faced a myriad of setbacks in their workplaces. *Mike, Mensah, Abi, Joe* and *Frank* were challenged and discriminated against because of their African background and upbringing. *Mensah* and *Mike* were called "fat" and told to go back to their country of origin.

Abi in particular talked about discrimination and the persecution she faced in her workplace. She was under the impression that her employers treated her this way because she was from Africa and did not train in England. She also notes that she was targeted, and criticised in everything she did because of her country of origin. This put an additional burden on her to perform and meet targets. She went further to outline the emotional trauma she experienced and had to be signed off work for a number of months by her GP. *Abi* and other participants spoke of the sacrifices they had to make because of the decision to practise social work in England. They left their respective husbands/wives in Ghana (some got divorced as a result) and wondered whether it was worth relocating to England. *Joe, Mike, Frank* and *Mensah* were mocked and ridiculed because of the accent when they spoke English. They were told they did not speak or understand English. They spoke of the difficulties in communicating and forming working relationship with the services users because of the language barrier.

Just like any other Black, Asian and other Ethnic Minority (BAME) group, these participants also had their share of racism and discrimination in the course of their work in this country. *Mike and Joe* expressed that some services users would not want to work with them because of the colour of their skin and how they look. This made it difficult for them to feel they belonged and were accepted in the country. Some studies, for instance Stevens *et al.* (2011), report that racism is not far below the surface in many aspects of public and private life in the UK despite various efforts to promote anti-oppressive social work practice, and that this includes aggressive and prejudiced behaviour from the services users. Most importantly,

Hana and Lyons (2016) opined that institutional racism exists at the organisational level, impacting how ISWs are recruited, their relationship with managers and peers, and how they progress in their professional career.

Almost all the participants talked about the visa restrictions they encountered which meant that they had to stay put with a particular employer even if they were not being treated fairly. They had to put in extra effort to work harder than their counterparts who are British nationals to ensure their visa was not revoked.

All the challenges and issues the participants faced, especially in those early days of their practice, mean that Ghanaian social workers are at a disadvantage when it comes to settling in and discharging their primary responsibility of protecting children in this country. They have to put in more effort, work more hours, seek advice and guidance from other experienced colleagues and be ready to be targeted and criticised by their employers.

I must however note that some of the participants were defensive and did not want to open up and talk about the painful, stressful, emotional and disturbing aspects of their practice in England.

Ghanaian culture and its influence on social work practice/assessment/decision-making in England

One key finding of this project is how the cultural background and upbringing of the participants influenced them on their social work practice in this country. These cultural differences have resulted in conflicts and confusion, and have probably blurred the judgements/assessments and decision-making processes of the participants. According to the participants, they struggled (in the early stages of their practice) to fit into the British Euro-centric system on their arrival in the country.

The following excerpts buttress the point I have made in the above paragraphs.

All the participants spoke passionately about how their background culture and upbringing influenced and impacted their social work practice in England. They provided various accounts of this experience.

On his part, Emma recollects how the extended family support helped him as a child growing up. He also mentioned the collective responsibility of the kinship group to enforce discipline with the child. He tries to draw a comparison between the two countries about the role of the family in bringing up children:

Emma:

Back home you could easily rely on extended family support – like, I was raised by my grandparents. Here you wouldn't have the opportunity often, because the system in terms of family is more nuclear than what we have back home. Back home, even a family, a neighbour can discipline you, but here it's different; so in terms of a support network it's very easy to get that back home as compared to here. So, over there you don't struggle; they come out naturally to help. But over here, you have to look; some of them even have to rely on friends.

When prompted to talk about culture and social work practice, Emma said it was legal to physically chastise children in Ghana:

In terms of culture and how it has influenced my practice, what I have noticed is that back home in those days, it was not illegal to physically chastise children as a form of discipline.

Abi made it clear that she felt intimidated because of her background. She did not feel confident enough to ask clients questions relating to their sexuality.

Abi:

… Because of my background, I was a bit intimidated. It was only after gaining enough experience I could actually challenge some of them because sometimes when I went out on visits to gather information, my manager would ask me "Did you ask them this?" but it wasn't my place. Erm… a typical example was things about sexuality. I felt that it wasn't my place to ask people those things like "Are you gay?"

She also felt that because of her background and country of training, her managers did not have confidence and trust in her.

So I think that sometimes just the fact that you have come from a different country or you studied elsewhere makes them feel that you are not good enough; you have to present three times better than a lot of people.

Just like Emma, Frank spoke about physical chastisement which he indicated was being used in Ghana by some parents. But he quickly added that he has to be professional in England when it comes to what constitutes physical chastisement.

Frank:

Yeah, I would say, it affected some aspects of my practice. When we talk about physical chastisement, sometimes it's not the same as what was the case back

home in Ghana, you know; but on the other hand I have to put myself as the professional and I have to make decisions in the best interest of the child. So I think, erm, it has some influence. I think it affected some of my decision-making.

He continued to talk about growing up with his stepmother and having to take care of himself from age six, an experience which informed his decision to study social work.

Erm… I would say, growing up in Ghana, in an environment where physical chastisement is normal and considered as part of disciplining children [informed my decision] but what actually helped was that I also stayed with my stepmum and I had to take physical care of myself, from age 6. I had to do things for myself, so I grew up in an environment where I had to do things for myself. So this also helped in terms of my decision to do social work.

Yaw draws a distinction between the nature of socialisation in Ghana and the resultant child protection system that emerged as compared to the European/Western way of child protection. He also said it is the norm to physically chastise children in Ghana.

… Again, child protection, the African way of protecting children, Ghanaian/African way of socialisation is totally different from the Western way of child protection. The African socialisation means children are brought up to accept the norms of the society. So it's normal to smack a child, it is normal to… you know, erm… ignore a child and in some cases even children are starved as a form of… it's more of a punishment than a sanction. So those were some of the challenges [that] culture has on me. Social work has actually enlightened me, reading erm… the Western way of child protection as against the realities, ways, of the African/Ghanaian culture, [means] you have two different sets, and approaches, and the difficulty is, because it is an entrenched cultural/practice, any attempt made to change that concept is like a storm in a teacup. Who are you to tell parents you can't beat a child when teachers who are government employees are doing the same?

Yaw continued to point out the difficulties he faced trying to reach threshold decisions in this country as his cultural experience has meant that he could not distinguish between what constitutes risk to children.

… It was difficult initially, especially my own background growing up in Ghana where, you know, it was kind of normalised for parents to whip children, for children to be exposed to violence, for children to be shouted at. It was normal that when I came here, in a way, that initially erm... blurred my threshold for child protection, to be honest, because things that children expressed as concerns, at the beginning of my practice, I looked at based on my experience or the norms of Ghana.

… It gave me a confused judgement. For instance a child said my parents smacked me. But my immediate thought would be smacking is OK/normal; parents are allowed to smack their children or not give them breakfast. I know of those African children who sometimes go a day or a week without food. So if a child didn't have breakfast, my initial feeling would be but you would be able to have lunch in school and dinner so it was OK. So these were some of my issues.

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He went further to highlight the concept of the African family where it is the collective responsibility to look after the child. He wonders why the situation is different in England where grandparents expect to be paid before they can help look after their own grandchildren.

And also another difficulty is the African concept of family is totally different from the Western concept. In Ghana/Africa, when you talk about child protection and child care, it takes the whole village to bring up a child, and for that matter it takes the whole family to care for a child, so if you give birth to a child, it is not your sole responsibility to care for that child. The uncles, sisters, brothers and grandparents all share the same responsibility to care for the child. So, again, when I came to the UK and grandparents are looking after their own grandchildren and expected to be paid, I didn't say it but my thought is What is happening here? You look after your grandchild and expect to be paid?! So these were my initial difficulties.

In a similar vein, Mike talked about the influence of the family in bringing up children in Ghana/Africa.

Mike:

I must acknowledge that social work practice in Ghana is widely influenced by the wider family network; that's one thing we need to acknowledge because we depend on the family system, we do depend on the social system. Even if a family member is far away in the other part of the country, they feel morally obliged to play their part, unlike this country where the government erm… has to intervene. So it's fair to acknowledge, as an African social worker I didn't have the opportunity or I didn't need to be involved in such processes particularly bearing in mind that we don't have an established CIN process in that country… a social worker wouldn't be able to acquire the required experience while in Ghana.

While he acknowledged the influence of culture on his practice, Joe explained that it does not determine the outcome of his assessments. He made it clear that his Ghanaian culture values will remain with him forever.

Joe:

… also trying to learn the system really, and how you can understand the family and the dynamics here, given that you have grown up in a different family and different environment, and all that. Sometimes, even the culture, the language and the clients have been very difficult – been racial, and all that. It all brings stress.

…Yeah, I mean it's not in a way that will determine the outcome of my assessment, but I think that the way you are raised and brought up and how you are socialised is kind of something that is with you forever and that's your identity really. So sometimes I remember when I first came, when you looked at the issues in some of the referrals they were things I wasn't used to back home in Ghana… So, initially, it was quite a cultural shock.

On his part, Sam draws a parallel between the reporting of child abuse cases in Ghana and this country. He notes that in Ghana, people would not report a crime against a child and that they may prefer to settle things among the family members instead of going public.

Sam:

In Ghana, people may be abused but may not come forward to tell anybody. Families may want to settle things among themselves in order to avoid the embarrassment, so even with abuse such as CSE it's very difficult to expose family members who do this, erm… heinous abuse. You know, for the sake of the family reputation, they would rather cover up everything than support the victim to be protected against any future occurrences.

Sam continued to explore various layers of culture and how this impacts his practice in this country. He reports that a child does not have a say in the Ghanaian culture as adults make every decision and determine the norm of society.

Culture is a very big theme – sometimes you need to differentiate or distinguish between your personal values and practices. Having gone through some training over here and having come from a different cultural background, sometimes it's very challenging… Because back home in Ghana, remember that a child does not have a say in my culture. It's difficult for an adult to say sorry to a child, even though the adult might be wrong. But having come over here, seen the culture that pertains and operates in this country, I have come to realise that when an adult is wrong you need to acknowledge that you are wrong.

Enyo draws on her Ghanaian culture and makes sure she explores the family/friends support network and designs her care plans for children and their families making sure the children are placed at home with a family member.

Enyo:

As an African woman, I come from a background where we operate the extended family system. I think I factor that into my assessments when I assess families to see if we can get extended families to support families, erm… in order to keep children at home rather than place them in care and so, yes, I tap into those family resources, and I have been successful in some of the cases. The plan has been woven around the family even though the parents didn't have much skill to look after the children.

Interestingly, Beki reports that her Ghanaian culture heritage has no bearing on her social work practice in this country.

Beki:

My cultural background has no influence on my practice at all. My work has got nothing to do with my culture. Interestingly, most of the time I am the one assessing

Ghanaian clients, but most of them don't want to see me. If you are from Ghana and you are in need, we need to support you, and if you are from Jamaica, we need to support you. If you are lying, we would not support you.

It is evident from these comments by the participants that their cultural background and upbringing has impacted their practice, decision-making and assessments, especially during the early days of their work in the UK. They highlighted the issue of child protection and how they were conflicted. In their study, Pullen-Sansfacon *et al.* (2014) established the theory of "double culture shock" which affects both the personal and professionals aspects of ISWs who find themselves working in another country. This brings to the fore the social and cultural dilemma that ensues when professionals move across international boundaries to work.

It is therefore not surprising that the research participants who hail from a culture where there was no stringent enforcement of the laws around child abuse and issues of neglect find themselves in England where they have been employed to protect and safeguard children. While the participants in this research noted that in the Ghanaian culture, physical chastisement of children was not necessarily considered an abuse, and that it is rather an acceptable form of bringing up a child according to the norms and values of that society, there is no evidence in the laws of Ghana to suggest this is the case. I am aware that the Children Act of Ghana (Act 560) of 1998 does not support physical chastisement or any form of cruelty to children. I am of the view that even though smacking is not illegal in Ghana, people know it is wrong and an unacceptable way of bringing up children. However, corporal punishment remains widely seen in Ghana as a necessary tool in the upbringing of children. I am of the view that it is time parents and the general populace in Ghana stopped the use of corporal punishment and other forms of physical chastisement as a means of enforcing boundaries with children. The people of Ghana must use alternative means such as rewards and a sanction approach to bring up their children.

The participants went further to talk about the extended family system in Africa and how it helped mobilise community resources and people to support and safeguard children as against the nuclear, individualistic nature of the helping system in England where they even struggle to identify family support for needy children. In doing so, they expressed their utter surprise about Local Authorities paying grandparents, uncles and other family members to look after and support their own

family members (children). This is something they have never experienced or thought of.

In summary, the cultural experience of the participants has been entrenched in their minds, and even though they have learned to accept the norms and values of the English system, they could not completely do away with their identity and its impact on them as individuals and professionals.

Chapter Six

Findings Part Two: A Glimmer of Hope

Introduction

Whilst the findings confirm the gap between social work education in Ghana and here in England, the "significant revelation" to me is how the participants were able to "recover agency" and learn on the job as the years go by, eventually acquiring the needed skills and know-how to excel in their job, which ultimately led to emotional satisfaction in their personal and professional life.

This part of the findings highlights the gaps in social work education and practice in Ghana on the one hand, and how it impacted their practice in this country on the other. It brings to the fore practice issues and how the participants struggled to make threshold decisions and judgements in the early days of their practice. This chapter also highlights the coping mechanisms and the strategies the participants employed to address the gaps in their practice: this includes their reliance on other Ghanaian social workers in England, and the defences they deployed to manage in the areas of their practice.

There is a gap between social work education and practice in Ghana and the practice in England

One of the findings in this research is the gap between social work education and practice in Ghana and what pertains in England. It has emerged that social work at the tertiary level of education is mainly studied at the University of Ghana (please refer to chapter two for the details).

The gap in the training and practice between social workers in Ghana and this country are outlined in the following excerpts:

In talking about his training in Ghana and his experience in England, Mensah spoke of a paradigm shift. He opined that the focus of social work practice in Ghana is mainly about child maintenance.

Mensah:

My experience so far, almost 12 years working as a qualified social worker in England, erm… initially, it was quite challenging. There was that paradigm shift in terms of what we learnt/ usually do in terms of our social work practice in Ghana. I think in Ghana our main focus was much more around child maintenance and child protection but that was not actually very developed. I mean it wasn't developed as compared to this country, and so there was that paradigm shift for me.

In his view, Emma expressed that social work practice in Ghana is more generic as there are no specialist aspects to it, and that the theory he learned at university in Ghana is completely different from the practice reality in England.

Emma:

Starting the job was also another big challenge because sometimes what you learn in theory is different from the actual practice. Social work practice in Ghana, I have noticed, is more generic than in England where there are specialised areas.

He could not see the link between social work education in Ghana and the practice here in England. The two are completely different in his view. Emma thinks that the nature of social work education in Ghana is appropriate for that country but it cannot be transferred to this country.

I would say the link is very difficult. In terms of content, if I am really honest with you, one cannot use that to practice here. I think it's good for that system but transferring that here would be a challenge: one, the legislation is different; two, the values are the same but when it comes to policies and procedures, like child protection especially, I would say there is no correlation/connection at all because we didn't discuss much of that when in Ghana. The studies are more generic in Ghana. The system there is generic, but when you come here, the system is more specialised, like child protection is more specialised here.

Enyo spoke of a stark difference in social work practice between the two countries. She said the focus in England is on child protection work rather than the preventative aspect of the practice. She also notes that institutionalisation is the norm in this country.

Enyo:

In terms of the work itself, again I found a stark difference between what I did in Ghana and this country, because this is more sedentary. For instance we do more of the work in the office here, whereas in Ghana we do a lot of direct work with the children. Again, I realised that in this place there is more emphasis on child protection rather than the preventative aspect that leads children into care. I also think in terms of the social work practice itself I noted that a lot of children go into care and, for that matter, institutionalisation is more common in this country than in Ghana.

Another interesting point Enyo made is that in Ghana social workers are largely trained on how to write proposals to secure funding from the donor community whereas the UK is a welfare state which supports its vulnerable members.

This is a welfare state, so most of the funding comes from the state whereas in Ghana, and for that matter in NGOs, you have to depend on donor funding. So social workers are trained to write proposals; proposal writing is one of the things you would learn as a skill. Also, at the university level, the training is geared towards operational and managerial roles so, in fact, the training is management oriented in Ghana.

In recalling her experience in Ghana, Abi notes that the course content is largely focused on community development rather than children and family welfare. She is clear that her education in Ghana did not help her fit well into the English system as they were not taught how to identify and analyse risk and plan to safeguard children. She also said the course content is such that it only prepares one for community development work.

Abi:

I can't remember the course outline, but then it was more focused on community development and children and family welfare. Although we have the Act, the Children's Act in Ghana is slightly different from here. I think they are significantly different. But our course didn't deal, focus on those things; our course outline didn't teach how to write assessments, they didn't teach us how to present information, they also didn't teach us how to take cases to court, and so on. It was more practical knowledge to prepare us to potentially work in the NGOs in Ghana. For example, if you studied the Children's Act in this country and you are doing your placement in court, when they talk about sections of the Children's Act and they say s.20, s.17, you know what these are and what they are referring to, but in Ghana there was nothing like that. Throughout my placement I couldn't see what the Act was relating to. I did not make sense of the sessions in the Children's Act in Ghana.

Frank argued that although social work education in Ghana was adopted from the UK's courses, it is not intensive enough and does not prepare one to practice in this country. He also spoke about the community development nature of the training and placement in Ghana.

Frank:

I think the education or the social work training in Ghana adopt most of the programmes from here, but it is not as intensive as it is here in the UK. In terms of placements, for instance, we had to do three months' placements. I can't remember, but I think we did two placements, one was three months. The placement was more community-based. I did my placement at the district assembly. We were going from

one community to another. At women's group community development, you go to the community to show or demonstrate some products or activities they can do together.

Yaw is not happy that the text books and documents used in training social workers in Ghana have been written by Western authors based on social problems in those countries. He argues that the social contexts are completely different from what pertains in Ghana.

Yaw:

The text books we used in Ghana were written in the Western world – the UK and US. These books were written based on the problems of those parts of the world which are totally different from the realities of the African problem, but it gives a clue to what approach/method to use.

He went further to distinguish between the practice of social work in Ghana which is based more on group work as compared to the individualistic/case work practice in England.

The practice of social work in Ghana is such that it's more group work than case work – group work in the sense that you assess a community or a group of people to identify what the problems are and then come out with recommendations. Ghana being a developing country, of course, means the resources are not there, so sometimes you would identify the problems but the resources are not there.

Mike acknowledged that he did not have much experience in social work practice prior to travelling to this country. The practice experience he had in Ghana was just a one-week placement with an NGO. Consequently, he lacks the knowledge on the legal frameworks and practice procedures and processes in England.

Mike:

When I moved to this country, to tell you the truth, practically I had very little experience because I did only one week practical work at Help Age Ghana, Osu. But that was more observing than practical social work. So when I came to this country, I was inexperienced particularly regarding legislations in England.

He went on to argue that one cannot acquire adequate practice experience in social work in Ghana as there is nothing to learn from being a social worker in that country. In his perception, the support of the wider family means social work roles are less effective in Ghana.

It is fair to point out that a social worker from Ghana wouldn't be able to acquire the required experience while in Ghana. As I said earlier, the wider family support in Ghana is very effective. Therefore, no matter the number of years of social work practice in Ghana, one cannot acquire the skills or opportunities we have here to get

into core child protection or looked after children. Because as I stated, it's not so detailed in Ghana, it's more generic.

He continued to note that child protection work in Ghana is highly politicised as the regional and district welfare officers are appointed by the government in power.

… But, as I stated, the child protection process in Ghana is more political than welfare oriented. Even the head of child protection in the region is appointed by the government.

Joe also expressed similar views that the nature of social work practice in Ghana is more community development oriented. He continued to make a point that social work in Ghana is more theoretical than practical and that he experienced the actual social work practice when he moved to this country.

Joe:

My approach and the study of social work in Ghana were quite different from the practice here. It was kind of community development oriented which I really enjoyed doing in Ghana, but when I came here, of course, the case was quite different. Things we learnt in Ghana were theoretical; they were things you read to pass your exam.

Sam looks at the angle of the structures and institutions of social work in Ghana which he says are not well-developed. This means the practice of social work is not advanced as compared to England.

Sam:

Social work is not well-defined in Ghana because the structures and the institutions that would support/underpin social work are not in existence in Ghana… In the UK social work is very effective, efficient. In Ghana, people may be abused but may not come forward to tell anybody. Families may want to settle things among themselves in order to avoid the embarrassment.

As evident from the above comments by the participants, there is a vast difference between social work education and practice in Ghana as compared to what pertains in this country. At the time of coming over to England, this group of practitioners did not have the knowledge-base and wealth of experience required to practice in this country. Their training and experience is largely based on theoretical knowledge and community development work. Thus, they could not easily fit into the practice paradigm in England at the time they arrived here, as their training in Ghana did not equip them with the skills and competencies to carry out their primary task of protecting children in England.

Social workers in Ghana/Africa suffer what Kreitzer (2012, p. 65) describes as "confusion of identity and the profession's feeling of being on the periphery, and that social work practice will reflect that confusion as well".

Consequently, social workers in Ghana struggle with their professional identity and practice. They have mixed feelings as to their roles in helping address social challenges in the community. I am tempted to say that the state of helplessness of some social workers trained in Ghana compelled them to look for employment opportunities in the Western world where they thought their skills and knowledge could be put to good use.

No knowledge about policies/procedures/legislations of social work practice in England

It has also been discovered in this research that these social workers from Ghana had no knowledge about the policies and procedures in England prior to their sojourn in the country. This is understandable as they had never been to England or studied in this country. More so, the practice experience of this group of social workers from Ghana is completely different. The policies/procedures/legislations (if any) in Ghana are also not the same as those in England. While some of the participants told me they had tried to speak to their colleague social workers in England prior to their arrival, they did not get enough information in relation to the practice guidelines and procedures.

Even though these are qualified and HCPC/Social Work England registered social workers who are allowed to practice their trade in this country, they came without the basic knowledge of policies/procedures/legislations governing social work practice in England.

Below are the responses from the participants to support this point:

Emma:

Just like the training, before coming here I had little knowledge about the policies and procedures of social work practice in general in England. I had one white lady lecturer from Canada at that time, who was teaching us, but they were teaching us Canadian theories/values, the same as in the UK. But the practice itself, procedures, thresholds, those things are different – you can't get them from what I learned.

Abi came straight to this country upon qualifying in Ghana. She did not know anything about social work practice in England. All she wanted to do was to travel to this country to look for social work roles, even though she had no prior experience in social work practice.

Abi:

I made my way straight to this country. I didn't know anything about social work and how it's practised in England; neither did I know what the policies, the guidelines are – nothing. So in my mind, I thought it would be like the social work I studied in Ghana, which was mainly focused on community development, children and women's welfare. Like I said before, I didn't know the guidelines in this country, didn't know what the Children Act was, I didn't know what assessment framework was – nothing.

Yaw indicates that his background means his threshold for child protection is not clear-cut.

Yaw:

It was difficult initially especially because in my own background growing up in Ghana, you know it was kind of normalised for parents to whip children; for children to be exposed to violence, for children to be shouted at – it was normal. But when I came here, that in a way initially blurred my threshold for CP, to be honest, because things that children expressed at the beginning of my practice as concerns, I looked at based on my experience of the norms of Ghana – so I couldn't see them as concerns.

Beki disclosed that her background as a teacher in Ghana for so many years meant that she did not have a grip of social work procedures and guidelines.

Beki:

We got to know that here it's completely different from how social work is practised in Ghana. I have been a teacher throughout my life and I only had my social work placement at a community based organisation when I was a student at the University of Ghana. That was all my experience about social work in Ghana. But the practical aspect of our experience was lost, because when they gave case scenarios here, we were lost.

Mike said he has more knowledge on the theory of social work but lacks the practical aspect of the job.

Mike:

I must acknowledge it was a challenge. Even though, theoretically, I was very well versed in social work, practically, the front work was different – the paper work, chairing meetings, the processes of picking up issues that should escalate or downgrade cases – I didn't have those skills. To be fair with you, I didn't have much

knowledge in looked after children because it is not a typical thing in Ghana. So during my training in social work in Ghana the lectures didn't take time to highlight the nitty-gritty of LAC which was part of the child protection process.

Social work practice in England has a lot to do with rule following (structures), and lack of knowledge of such procedures is obviously an impediment to practice.

Giddens' concept of "structure", as outlined in chapter three, has something to contribute to the understanding of the thoughts expressed by the participants. Hence in applying the concept of structure to the research participants, Giddens stipulates that institutions have codes of conduct and other sets of regulations and expectations that govern the workers to deliver the aim of the organisation they work for. As has already been established in this research, the rules, guidelines, procedures, CP processes and procedures in social work practice in the country meant that the participants could not function as well as expected. They did not understand the structure, and for that matter the bureaucratic nature of social work practice in England hence they faced challenges when it came to making safe decisions to protect children from harm and abuse. It is therefore not surprising that the research participants struggled to understand and work within the legal framework of social work practice in those initial days of their practice.

Reliance on other known Ghanaian England-based social workers for guidance

Because the participants had limited practice experience and also lacked the threshold knowledge, they relied mainly on the advice and guidance from other known Ghanaian social workers in this country for direction and support. They did this by having face-to-face meetings and telephone conversations with their kinsmen during those early days of their practice in England. Some got other relevant information and documents about the legislations, policies and procedures governing social work practice in England. This helped them to read around and acquaint themselves with the standard of social work practice and procedures before starting the job. They were advised on how to make social work applications, how to attend and respond to questions during interviews, and so on. This was a form of informal

education and training which eventually yielded positive results as it helped the participants to acquire some basic knowledge and understanding of social work practice and standards before they started their career in this country. Of course, when they started to practice, they also got support and guidance from their supervisors/managers.

I have highlighted some of the comments from the participants to qualify this point as follows:

Sam, Emma, Abi, Beki and Frank relied on the support from their colleagues, friends and other Ghanaian social workers in England.

Sam:

… we were supported by those who are our forerunners, those already in this country practising as social workers. We drew on their experience… but with the guidance of managers and other experienced social workers in the team, I was able to pass my probation and, yes, then continued practising as a social worker, learning from more experienced social workers.

Emma:

I also got in contact with Ghanaian social workers who were practising in the country. Some had also been trained in Ghana and were practising here; some of them were trained here. I decided to understudy them. So indirectly I was shadowing them but not on the field because I couldn't do the shadowing in terms of visiting clients and stuff. I had to rely on my colleagues who were also overloaded with work already, but I managed to find one of the social workers, erm… who was a Ghanaian but trained here, who was very supportive to me. They helped me to settle – helped in terms of what training to choose and how the actual assessment works. They showed me some samples of assessments they had done for me to look at. That actually helped me. In fact the support I got from these social workers here actually helped me.

Abi:

I had to rely on people, friends and families who were already practising social work, to guide me on how to complete those tasks, and lucky for me I had a really good manager… For me, I think I relied on my senior practitioner a lot for decisions and guidance. I felt inexperienced when I started.

Frank:

Asking my colleagues, seeking advice from colleagues and friends, helped… but it was difficult at the initial stages. I had to discuss most of the cases with my manager and colleagues. The initial stages, I was consulting a lot with my managers and colleagues in making decisions.

Beki:

The lady was like a mother to me and gave me a buddy to support and supervise me.

Yaw has had to educate himself on the procedures and policies of social work practice in this country.

It took a long time, but what actually helped me was studying the policies, the CP procedures, and learning to be assertive and to put aside emotions and personal beliefs and experiences; and that is what made the difference.

Mike also attended a series of training courses and consulted his seniors for support during those early days of his social work practice in this country.

As I stated earlier on, I benefited from ongoing training and I was not shy and I did not hesitate to consult senior social workers particularly when I needed help. Yeah, I did a number of training courses: child protection, CIN, LAC, court training, gathering evidence in writing assessment. Because in Ghana we don't do these core assessments, the training helped to upgrade my knowledge. I didn't need intensive support. I think I did a lot of training/learning about government legislations and I consulted management a lot. Of course, supervision helped me a lot in those early days.

I think the participants were very proactive, visionary and made the right decisions and choices in those early days of their practice in England by seeking advice and information from those Ghanaian social workers who were already working as social workers here. They also made good use of their management teams and supervision sessions to help address practice gaps. They went the extra mile by reading the relevant information and procedures to improve their practice. *Mike* and *Emma* attended training courses arranged privately and also took advantage of the training opportunities at their respective workplaces. Others completed PQ (post qualification) courses and MA programmes in social work. All the training and further learning they embarked on have eventually helped to improve their skills and competencies to practice in England. Their working knowledge and understanding of the policies, procedures, legislations and thresholds have improved over the years and they are now able to make safe and better decisions when it comes to child protection and other areas of their practice.

Again, drawing on Giddens' concept of "reflexive modernisation" is appropriate in this context. Giddens argued that reflexive modernisation is accompanied by the ability of people to take stock of their lives and to reflect on structures and the rules governing their lives and everyday practices (Gray and Webb, 2013). By making a conscious effort to add value to their lives, the practitioners have thus contributed to their empowerment and improved ability to safely practice in England.

Positive emotional impact

Similarly, the respondents expressed their excitement, joy, emotional satisfaction and happiness of being social workers in England. This has boosted their emotional well-being and personal ego. The ability to intervene and make a positive impact in the lives of children and families has given them inner joy and satisfaction.

The excerpts below prove this point:

Emma expressed that removing children to a place of safety gives him emotional satisfaction.

But what normally helps is that the Children's Act talks of the welfare of the child, which is paramount. And that is what sometimes I take consolation in, because of removing the child to a place of safety. At least for some time the child is going to be safe. That's my priority, because where I am removing the child from has an imminent danger – it's not safe. But as long as the child is going to be safe – that's what balances the emotional difficulty for me. When I remove the child to a place of safety, I know there is a foster carer who has been assessed to safely look after that child. So at least I know I have that peace of mind that the child is safe.

Mike is happy that at least some of his cases have been picked as a good example of social work practice.

I had at least two of my cases picked up as very good examples of social work practice. One of my cases was chosen as a great example of multi-agency coordination work and the fact that it brought a lot of change within a short time… When we went to court (as a colleague A said yesterday), the court gave a very good compliment that the report was so comprehensive and then the evidence provided was so incredible. The judge stated that when the social worker was being cross-examined by five people, he was unwavering and he also demonstrated that he knew the case very well without even referring to the case file.

Sam said social work is his passion and he is pleased to have made the difference in the lives of children he has worked with.

I have been able to gain more experience in terms of my practice and I have been able to sail through the ranks to become a senior or advanced social worker. So far it's been good, because social work is my passion and I want to affect lives, make changes and give children and families a better understanding, and support them in order to shape their lives.

The inner satisfaction derived from achieving and making a difference in the lives of children and families cannot be quantified/measured. The participants are happy and excited that they have been able to make a difference in the lives of their service

users. They have been able to mobilise resources and impact many lives in the course of their practice in this country. Ultimately, the feeling of joy and happiness cannot depart from them.

Also, the participants have made financial gains in the course of their practice here. They have been able to buy their own houses, drive expensive cars and have their families here with them. In the final analysis, they argue that they are better off coming to practice here in England.

A fulfilled people

Despite the challenges and setbacks they encountered in their social work journey in the country, the participants have all expressed that they are happy and feel fulfilled because they have been able to attain a level of economic and social well-being they would not have achieved if they had remained in Ghana. They argue that it has been a painful but rewarding adventure pointing out that they do not regret making the decision to practice in this country. *Abi, Sam, Emma, Frank* and *Yaw* spoke of the knowledge, skills and experience they have acquired residing and working in England, something they would not have gained if they had remained in Ghana. Whilst *Joe, Mensah, Beki* and *Mike* talked about the international experience and exposure they have had as a result of working in this country. *Enyo, Yaw* and *Joe* plan on going back home to Ghana to teach and impact the knowledge, skills and competencies they have acquired in England.

The following narratives highlight the points I have been making:

Mensah

One of the good things for me is that there is a very well structured system here and a clear process and protocol to follow which is clearly laid down… I must say there are both positive things and challenges. I would say the positive is comparatively ahead of the negative.

Emma, Enyo, Abi and Frank are grateful for the knowledge, experience and opportunities they have acquired as a result of their decision to practice in England*.*

Emma

But I have never regretted it, because of the knowledge, because I have learnt a lot. Because this experience has given me the opportunity to know the other side of social work, I can go back and impact my community, my people.

Enyo

I don't have any regrets at all coming into this country. I think I came at the right time of my life. I am learning a lot from this country. For me, when I go back to my country, I have a lot to share with my people back home.

Abi

One good experience is that it's given me exposure; it's given me erm… greater depth of what social work is in England. I was excited to have gained employment as a social worker because most of my colleagues who I came from university with were still 'struggling' so I felt quite privileged that I was able to secure a job.

Abi made an interesting point that she likes social work but does not love it. She meant that she has gained some valuable experience and financial gains as a social worker, but the emotional challenges that come with the job mean that her heart is not in it.

I like social work, but I don't love it. I think you are speaking to the wrong person.

In all, I think it's a great profession to have. I don't regret my decision of practising in England because I think I have come a very long way. It has developed me as a person and because of some of the things I have been through, my resilience has come a long way as well.

Frank

Coming here has made me learn a lot: if I were to go back and practise in Ghana I would have been able to impact and support my people better because of the skills I have acquired in this country. So I would say my decision to come here has been the best for me. I would say it was a good experience. I think it was the best opportunity: I was able to get my wife here, we are happy, we have children and we visit Ghana regularly.

Beki is grateful to God for his mercies which enabled her to reach where she is in her social work career at the moment.

But thanks be to God! I tried, and this is where I am now.

Mike has learned a lot from his challenges, mistakes and the criticism of his work. He did not know how skilful he was until he came to England. He also mentioned the financial gains he has made being in this country.

Hmm… I must say the UK has got one of the most established child protection processes in the world. The most established, and therefore as a Ghanaian social worker, I feel that I have learnt a lot since I came here. That has helped me to give my best to society – more than before. I didn't know how skilled I was until I came here. The challenges, the training, the mistakes and the feedback alone make me very happy. So that suggests that my mission to come to this country has not failed. I have also made some financial gains. Sometimes, I think I probably could have ended up in the political landscape in Ghana if I had not come here. I am very happy here based on the fact that I have a secure job and I think that social work is a rewarding job.

While Joe has no regrets coming to practice in England, his heart is still in Ghana and he hopes to go back home to settle in Ghana. He remains in a dilemma as to where to call home.

Sometimes you say things, but time will tell. But I wouldn't say I have regretted it. I always look at Ghana and say it's a place that I wanted to stay but part of me is here so that's the dilemma.

Participants as defended people

An interesting finding from this study is that the participants are *defended* when it comes to talking about their painful experiences as Ghanaian trained social workers in this country. The fact that the participants are originally from Ghana and lacked the practice experience as well as the legal and procedural aspects of the work in England, meant they experienced high levels of anxiety and pain when they first started to practice here. Yet, six of the participants found it difficult to openly talk about their painful, agonising and difficult experiences.

During the seminar group sessions at Tavistock Centre, we discussed the defensive nature of the research participants, and the common theme that emerged from these discussions is that human beings are generally defended subjects, especially when things do not go their way.

The narratives of the participants below illustrate this:

Instead of talking about the challenges she faced in her practice, for instance, Enyo was talking about the cosmopolitan nature of the community she resides in and the fact that she has had experience working with managers who come from different backgrounds. She experienced some level of racism with service users but would

not name specifically what happened; even when pressed further, she was not forthcoming with responses.

Enyo:

I live in East London which is more cosmopolitan in nature. So in terms of racism, I mean issues with minorities, I didn't experience much. I think in general in my practice I have worked with many managers from diverse ethnic groups/societies. It's been worthwhile so far. I have not had any issues with racism here as a black social worker but in terms of working with management, in terms of working with service users, yes; I have been targeted a lot.

On her part, Beki expressed that she has not had many challenges with her practice since she moved to this country, apart from one occasion where her manager drew her attention to some spelling mistakes in her report.

Beki:

I remember my manager in the referral and assessment team. One day I worked from home. I was typing and not saving my work and lost almost one of my assessments. I had to start again so I typed speedily and when I finished, I couldn't read through my work. My manager noticed some spelling mistakes and drew my attention to them. That was it.

Joe also said he was not able to analyse his reports in those early days of his practice.

Joe*:*

I think initially what was happening was that the way I was writing my assessment wasn't really analytical. I learnt very quickly. I remember I was in a County Council for over a year but I have developed into a good social worker able to make threshold decisions.

Again, Emma talked about being a church person who takes solace in reading the Word of God and being inspired to put it into practice. He puts all his hope in the salvation work of Jesus Christ and says God delivers him from all challenges.

Emma:

For me what helped me is my church, because I am a church person. I am always very active in church activities. So I take a lot of inspiration and support from church and God has been faithful to me in all my afflictions in this country.

As I have indicated in this research, social work practice in England, especially children and families' social work is anxiety-driven and the service users tend to place additional demands on the frontline workers (Cooper, 2008). The nature of the

primary task, coupled with the backlash the social workers encounter when a child dies as well as the recent changes and reforms within frontline social work practice means that practitioners have to mobilise and adopt defence mechanisms to manage the anxiety and stress that comes with their work. It is therefore not surprising that the participants in this research chose not to talk about their stressful moments. I must also note that because I have some prior knowledge and working relationships with some of the participants, they did not feel comfortable sharing their painful, difficult moments of stress with me.

Projective identification

Projective identification, which is derived from Freud's concept of projection, means an unconscious phantasy in which aspects of the self or an internal object are split off and attributed to an external object (Bower, 2005). The projected aspects may be felt by the projector to be either good or bad. This impacts and affects the perception, behaviour and opinion of the other person.

This said, one particular participant, *Abi* could be singled out as one who was sincere, honest and opened up to me during the interview sessions. She poured out her heart and talked openly and painfully about the stressful moments she experienced in her practice in this country. She projected her fears and anxiety into me during the first interview. She told me she was targeted, labelled and singled out as not "good enough" as a social worker. She was fearful of losing her job, her visa and her livelihood in the UK when she was taken through the disciplinary process at her work place. She was depressed, frustrated and did not know what to do. She did not have anyone to talk to, no one was willing to help her and she was left in limbo. *Abi* told me that she thought her world had come to an end. Finch & Schaub (2015, p. 3007) pointed out that "the fear of failure, of not being good enough and the accompanying feelings of guilt and shame are likely to provoke deeply held unconscious feelings, emanating from infancy and childhood". It is therefore not surprising that *Abi* felt overwhelmed by her experience and remembered her childhood growing up in Ghana and the difficulties she faced. *Abi* wondered what might be wrong with her that she was not able to achieve her goals in Ghana or here

in England. She was also being targeted because of her background history and training.

I couldn't manage with the lack of support. I felt that they were unnecessarily straight or harsh on those of us who came from abroad. It wasn't just me – I had colleagues who were from South Africa, Zimbabwe and their work was highly criticised for not being of the standard they required. No one accepted that we had come from a different country. I've been through a lot. I took it personally because when you try to defend yourself then they try to make life even more difficult for you and try to justify why they think you're not good enough. There's also an emotional burden that you are carrying to the office all the time that says "I'm not good enough. I'm not good enough" … At some point I had to sign off sick [She sobs…].

Because projective identification occurs during dialogue between people, I was deeply touched by the accounts of *Abi* and was compelled to mobilise those feelings into actions or behaviours to help her reflect and process her experience (Trevithick, 2011). I made her understand that one of the goals of this project is to provide a platform for participants to express their frustrations and things that worry them. Indeed, *Abi* made me aware that she had wanted an opportunity or platform to talk to someone about her painful experience in this country but she could not find one. She therefore expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to talk about her painful experiences.

Limitations of this research

While this is an exploratory research which aims to examine the lived experience of Ghanaian trained social workers in child protection in England, it has its limitations.

This research does not seek to compare the baseline confidence and competence in child protection of newly qualified social workers from this country with Ghanaian social workers. Maybe the newly qualified social workers in England present with similar practice issues as captured in this research, but I think the organisations/local authorities they work for have structures in place to support them. Thus, the experiences of newly qualified social workers in England cannot be compared with these research participants who were regarded as experienced practitioners at the time they were employed.

Although this is a small-scale study, suggesting the need for caution in drawing generalisations from my findings, I am of the view that what my study reveals is a

valid representation of the experiences of Ghanaian trained social workers. Indeed, the participants expressed similar experiences and concerns in relation to their social work practice in this country, an indication that the data is credible and saturated, (Padgett, 2008), and the excerpts used in this write up/findings are an indication of this rich data.

Also, it would have been helpful to seek the views/thoughts of other principal actors (who are outside the scope of this study) such as team managers who supervise the research participants, services users and other professionals in child protection work in the country. I think the participants' own accounts are only a partial means of investigating a complex phenomenon such as the topic of this research. The inclusion of other actors outside the scope of this study would have created the means for a triangulation of data set, which simply refers to multiple sources of data collection to achieve a comprehensive understanding of data (Patton, 1999).

Chapter summary

The research participants have had a difficult transition from Ghana into social work practice in this country. At the time they came here, they were not well-versed in the social work practice standards and procedures. They lacked the knowledge and competencies to make threshold decisions when it comes to child protection in this country, as they did not have any experience prior to their journey to England.

They struggled to fit into social work practice in the country. More so, their cultural background and upbringing meant that they were not able to make the best decisions to safeguard children here in England.

For instance *Abi* and *Mensah* were targeted, labelled and called not "good enough" as social workers and were taken through disciplinary processes in their respective workplaces. While *Enyo, Beki, Yaw, Frank* and *Joe* were emotionally traumatised as a result of their experience in this country, they chose not to talk about their painful experiences.

But because of their peculiar nature, this group of social workers persevered, showed high levels of resilience and have managed to seek help to address the challenges, and gaps in their practice. They learnt on the job, sought advice and

guidance from their counterparts in the country and have now been able to fully establish their status as experienced and competent social workers who are working around the clock to protect and ensure the safety of children and families in England. The participants reflected that they have acquired more skills, and broadened their experience both personally and professionally. They are now in a better position to impact on their kinsmen when they visit Ghana.

However, it is obvious from my encounter with the participants, coupled with how they presented during the interview process that the emotional trauma they experienced has remained with them.

The biographical accounts of the research participants made me recount my own experience/story, my journey from Ghana to this country some 11 years ago, as captured in the introduction chapter. I made that painful but inevitable decision to leave my wife and family in Ghana in order to explore better economic adventures in England. The experiences as narrated by the research participants are similar to what I went through. At the time of my journey to this country, I knew nothing about how social work is practiced in England but I was ready to give it a try, hoping things would work out well for me. I went through painful, stressful and emotionally traumatising experiences along the way. I encountered disciplinary/capability procedures at my workplace, was not regarded as competent enough to safeguard children, and was highly criticised and labelled because of my background. Even though I now have my family with me and live in my own house, the emotional scars and distressing moments I have had continue to haunt me.

Chapter Seven

Discussion of Research Findings

Introduction

This chapter provides a reflective discussion of the findings and the thoughts and ideas this study has triggered in me as a researcher in relation to the topic of the study. The previous chapter has already outlined the findings of the study but I deem it necessary to provide a brief commentary about what has been discovered and what this research meant for me, for Ghanaian social workers in England, for international social workers generally, and the implication for social work practice in this country.

As already indicated in the previous chapters, this study sets out to explore how the participants' cultural background and training in Ghana influenced their decision-making in child protection in England.

A significant aspect of the finding has been the "emotionality" of the journey from Ghana to this country. The participants traversed a sequence of emotional torture and struggle in their quest to find economic stability in England. It has also been noted that the Ghanaian culture has played a major role in influencing their threshold decision-making in this country. Participants were in a cultural dilemma, a situation which made it difficult for them to fit well in the social work paradigm in England. Yet they found solace in religion as a form of support in moments of distress.

The emotionality of their journey

It has emerged from the data that the participants, (as well as I) have traversed a long process of struggle and suffering, with a good deal of injustice and discrimination in their journey of being qualified practitioners in Ghana to working practitioners in England.

The journey has some identifiable stages/phases, and predicaments for most of the participants. The phases of the journey could be traced to the lack of preparation, leaving their family/loved ones back home, poor knowledge of the CP process in

England, the performance culture in the host nation, racism and difficult work environment, among others.

During the course of the interviews with the participants, I observed that they seemed to narrate their stories in a register of stoicism or suffering in adversity: that they have battled through, but with little sense of anger, protest, injustice despite the fact that most of them openly and fully described scapegoating, targeted criticism, lack of active support from organisations and managers with a lot of racism in the mix of their predicaments.

In the data analysis (Chapter 5), some of the participants spoke of being targeted unfairly, being called names and labelled as unfit to practice, while others were taken through rigorous disciplinary processes resulting in long periods of suspension and threats of lay-off.

For instance Abi expressed that she was nearly dismissed from her post because of her background and lack of experience in England's social work practice:

… At some point I had to sign off sick because I just couldn't manage the way my work was constantly being criticised and I felt that they set me up and they wanted to dismiss me. And because my stay in this country was dependent on my job, and my finances were dependent on it, I was carrying a lot of emotional burden.

My personal experience is not different from that of the research participants.

In the words of Holliday (2016, p. 152), "the dynamics of the researcher's presence in the research setting, how it affects the research, and what she/he learns from it must become another significant part of the written study".

In this regard, I discuss below my personal experience in relation to the emotional pain and torture I experienced when I first started to practice as a social worker in this country (see the introduction).

I remember during the first few years of my employment in England, my managers did not have confidence in me and criticised every aspect of my work. During the time I worked in a North London Local Authority, my manager decided to take me through a disciplinary process because a service user had complained about my practice: that I had come to her home eating sandwiches, that her children did not understand my language, and that I supported her ex-husband against her. I was

subsequently suspended for about two weeks while the matter was investigated by another social worker who was in the same team with me.

Just around the same time, my 3-year-old son was alleged to be pushing boundaries in the nursery and also disclosed that "my dad hits me". Because I lived in the same locality, my employers (Children Services Department) had to initiate the S47 process and investigate the allegations. It also happened that my managers who were critical of my practice and wanted me sacked were in charge of this investigation as well. My colleague social worker (from the same office) was assigned the case. In the course of their investigation, I was arrested and detained at the local police station. By then I knew nothing about the justice system in this country and how to obtain support from solicitors. I knew no one and had limited knowledge about the court process. After about five hours in detention at the police station, a duty solicitor was called before I was interviewed and released on bail. I was asked not to attend my home until the CPS made a decision about my case. I then left home, to "sofa surf" with a friend in East London until the CPS made the decision of no further action on my case.

The outcome of the S47 investigation was that my son was made the subject of a CP plan under the category of Physical Abuse, and I was suspended from work indefinitely. My wife, who was also a social worker in another local authority, was sacked from her job for "allowing her son to be physically abused" by her husband.

This put the family in a serious emotional trauma and financial difficulty, with no one to turn to for support.

After about one month into my suspension, I gathered courage and appealed the decision to put my son on the CP plan. I also appealed to senior management and an early review CP conference was held to review my case. The outcome was that the case was discontinued and my son was removed from the CP plan after the senior management took into consideration my family background, the age of my son and the precipitating circumstances. Four months later, I was recalled to work.

However, my wife could not get any redress mainly because she was still on probation at the time, and we were advised by my solicitor that "the employer has every right to terminate her employment during the course of the probationary period". The entire family were impacted, particularly my wife, who was so affected

her confidence level went down, and she could not recover. She decided not to reapply or work as a social worker again. It took me 10 years to convince her to go back into social work practice.

It is clear from the above account I have given that my predicaments spilled over to affect my wife and my son as well as my entire family.

Recounting this experience evokes in me a sense of injustice, anger and bitterness. While I do not have a grievance against anyone who wronged me, I am still working through my experiences and trying to find ways to see them, or feel them differently.

I arrived at this point of being able to "name" what happened to me after having a three-way therapeutic discussion with my supervisors who helped me to "name" the ill-treatment meted out to me.

The above features of my experience are reminiscent of, or akin to, explaining a typical emotional experience or state of mind. Not only did we endure our sufferings, but also, it was not really possible to ''name'' what was happening to us at the time. This process of naming it is perhaps happening to me retrospectively and, by extension, my research participants.

Thus, I and the research participants found ourselves in a trap or predicament – we needed our employment not only to survive and have an income, but also to secure our stay/visa in this country. Protesting, or challenging our painful experiences did not feel like a possible option. We were better off, or felt safe to suffer through it. Challenging our employers or taking legal action against them would mean a revocation of our work permit visas.

The diagram below explains our experience:

Diagram of Ghanaian social workers' experience in England

Ghanaian social worker in Ghana:

(Ghanaian culture, customs, tradition, norms and values)

Social work values, principles, knowledge and code of conduct

Ghanaian social worker in England:

(Racism, scapegoatism, performance culture, the CP process etc.)
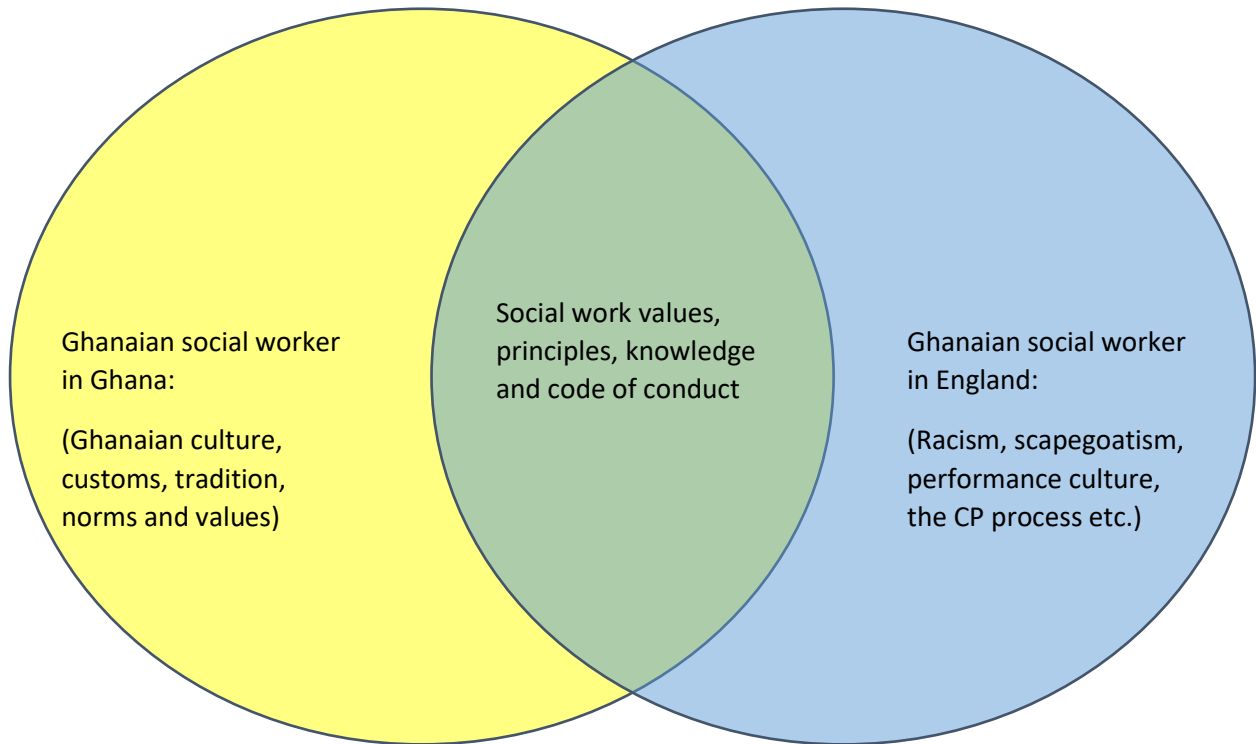
Scapegoating
Racism
Dependency
Unfamiliarity with system
Lack of organisational support
Social and personal isolation

A silenced suffering subject who is dependent on employers for survival in ways that 'native' UK workers aren't.

A difficulty in really naming or 'knowing' the meaning of experiences.

Suppression of certain feelings as a protective strategy in order to survive

Sensitive to data but possibly 'defended' also

A researcher who shares the same history and experiences (subjectively, emotionally and objectively) with participants

The above diagram is a pictorial representation of the experience of Ghanaian social workers in England. It can be seen that the values, norms, principles and knowledge base of social work is the same across international borders. Central to any social work practice are the core values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of the individual, and the importance and centrality of human relationships, integrity and competence. These values are taught in universities and colleges in Ghana as well as in England.

However, the cultural norms, belief systems, traditional family system and social justice system in Ghana are completely different from what pertains in England. The way of life in Ghana, the impact of culture and tradition of social work practice and what constitutes abuse in Ghana means that Ghanaian social workers do not have a clear cut view in terms of how to identify risk. All these influence and impact the participants' assessments and decision-making in this country.

Other factors which inhibit the ability of the research participants are racism, scapegoating, unfamiliarity of the British social work system and lack of organisational support. The participants experienced these things in different shapes and forms.

I have to point out that racism is not only peculiar to the Ghanaian social workers in this country; it is something people from other minority groups experience in their day-to-day lives in the UK. But what is disturbing about the experience of the research participants is that their background, their accent, and the way they speak the English language means service users as well as work colleagues make fun of them and call them names. Comments like "go to your home country", "you look like a monkey" and "he/she does not speak English" can be traumatising for the research participants.

Another setback which can be distressing and upsetting for the research participants is scapegoating. On some occasions, these social workers were blamed for wrongdoings, mistakes or faults which they did not commit. It would seem that because of their background and place of training, their managers/supervisors did not trust them and tended to blame them unnecessarily when things went wrong. These social workers usually felt looked down upon and complaints from the services users were usually laid at their feet. They were suppressed and their voices

silenced. It was a very disturbing situation to be in. This has impacted negatively on the moral, self-esteem and emotional health of the research participants.

More significantly, at the time of starting their employment in this country, these participants lacked knowledge about the policies, procedures and processes of social work practice in England. In addition, they did not get support from the respective employers/organisations or local authorities they worked for. This made them frustrated, dejected and confused. Those managers and seniors/supervisors who should have helped them, rather turned against them and took them through the workplace disciplinary/capability procedures. All these factors culminated in emotional trauma and depression for some of the participants who eventually sought help from their GPs and the community mental health teams. Sadly, one of the research participants suffered a stroke and died a few months after taking part in the research interview.

Yet, the participants, as well as the researcher, suppressed their responses to such attacks and abuse by the system as well as their employers and suffered in silence. They did not take any action to challenge their employers or managers. My impression is that they did not have the courage and temerity to express how they felt or complain about how they were being treated by the system. As has been indicated already, this was due mainly to the fact that their visa was dependent on the benevolence of their employers. As they understood it, if they complained about the ill-treatment from their employers, they might lose their job and would probably risk being deported from the country. However, they may have misunderstood this at the time as they could have just changed their employers who would have changed their visa for them. The shame, emotional trauma and pain that comes with being sacked from their jobs meant that they had to endure the sufferings with the hope that they would eventually be liberated one day.

In an attempt to liberate themselves from this predicament and to turn things around for the better, the participants and I decided to "add value" to ourselves by investing in further education and learning on the job, taking a cue from Giddens' theory, when he talks of the "recursive nature" of human agency in any social setting (as in Chapter 3). This means that human beings have the ability to empower themselves when provided with adequate information and consciousness about their situation.

Indeed the fact that I have been able to complete this research is a testament to the ability of people to turn things around for the better.

Participants unable to make safe decisions (during the early months/year of practice)

In those early days of their practice in England, the research participants did not have the prerequisite skills and knowledge to effectively discharge their duty of protecting children and families. I have to point out that at the time of their employment they were employed on the basis of their year of qualification. Some of them qualified three or four years before arriving in this country which meant that employers thought they had many years of experience to do the job. In a similar study, Hanna and Lyons (2016) also affirmed that many international social workers complained that their employers assumed that they were knowledgeable and competent and that they were expected to "hit the ground running" in a new environment and context which they were unfamiliar with, having high expectations and a new work ethic. Thus the expectations and demands placed on ISWs by their new employers and managers, who thought they would be able to perform based on the wrong assumption that they had been qualified for many years, meant that the ISWs found their new work environment challenging and daunting.

Social work practice is mainly about making safe decisions to ensure children, women, people with disability, elderly people and other vulnerable people are safeguarded. The ability, skills and judgement of the practitioner is therefore crucial to guarantee an effective service delivery.

However, it is apparent from my study, that on arrival, the limited experience of my participants had significant implications for their ability to make safe decisions in child protection work. As has been indicated in Chapter 5, this group of social workers lacked the practice experience and the knowledge-based skills to critically analyse information about risk and come up with safety plans and programmes to keep children safe. The lack of experience to make child protection decisions on the part of these social workers has to do with the fact that they did not have similar experiences from their home country.

Munro (2002) helps us understand that the work of the social worker in helping to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect is influenced by the society around them. It is the social context that determines what constitutes abuse and how the abuse can be prevented or reduced by professionals. It also determines the role and powers of the professionals in the helping process. Indeed, the role and responsibilities of parents in bringing up children is also largely determined by the nature of the society.

Again, in the words of Palattiyil *et al.* (2016), state intervention in families also varies according to each country. The level of state intervention is influenced by the norms, values and resources of the country. It can then be said that the system of child protection in each country is the combination of its culture and history. In this way, the nature of social welfare in Ghana is largely around efforts by the state and non-state actors in eradicating poverty, famine, water shortage, flood and other natural and man-made disasters.

Also, I must point out that there is no conventional child protection system in Ghana. Social work interventions are largely ad hoc and based on needs assessment and the political will of those in position of authority. I consider that the initial lack of professional skills and knowledge regarding child abuse is not unique to my participants, but it is likely to extend to other Ghanaian trained social workers.

It became obvious to the respondents that the practice realities here in England are completely different from their experiences in Ghana. Social work practice in the UK is fast, fluid, complex and ladled with anxiety when making decisions to safeguard children (Cooper 2008).

One may argue that their training and educational background might have equipped them with the knowledge and skills to make safe decisions in England. But the cardinal point here is that what constitutes child abuse and neglect in Ghana is not necessarily the same as in England. For instance in Ghana, parents would argue, fight and even exchange blows, but such incidents are hardly reported to the authorities and even those reported cases are not investigated by the social care system. More so, emotional abuse is not considered a serious safeguarding matter in Ghana. When children are physically and sexually abused by their relatives/other people, the authorities and traditional leaders usually tend to shield and obstruct the

course of justice by not allowing such perpetrators to be prosecuted. This means victims are left to suffer alone in silence and social workers in Ghana are powerless to take action to safeguard such children.

Furthermore, authors such as Rustin (2005), Bower (2014), and Hughes and Pengelly (1991) indicate that emotional pressures and unconscious processes go a long way to influence the decisions of social workers in an unconscious way. As I have highlighted in the introduction of this session, these participants have suffered emotionally through their difficult journey from Ghana to this country, through the struggle to find a job, racism and discrimination, among others. All these contributed to their emotional burden which impacted their ability to make safe child protection decisions in England. Researchers such as Godstein (2002), Mbarushima & Robbins (2015) note that the experiences of these social workers ultimately have a negative knock-on effect on their confidence level and self-esteem, resulting in feelings of inferiority and powerlessness (Laird & Tedam 2019).

It is, therefore, worrying that these practitioners were able to get social work jobs (a few months/years upon arrival in the country) without having the required knowledge and expertise to make decisions relating to the safety of children in this country.

Some of the respondents were honest to note that they were "lost", "had blurred judgements" and "did not know what I was doing". Some would go out there, obtain relevant information about the situation of children and families, yet were not in a position to analyse and make decisions in relation to safety matters. They had to go back to their superiors in the office for them to be helped to make the threshold decisions. In a study by Hussein *et al*. (2011), it was found that overseas social workers needed additional training and support, which was not always available to them. Their employers overlooked this need and tended to start them on their respective roles without the provision of adequate tools and know-how to do the job. Revans (2003) notes that there was often a lack of commitment and preparedness on the part of employers to ensure that overseas social workers who qualified abroad were equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and competencies to effectively discharge their primary duty of protecting children and vulnerable adults in society.

On the other hand, I must make the distinction that, with the passage of time, these participants have eventually acquired a considerable level of skills and expertise to make meaningful and safe decisions. This is particularly true after about two to three years of their practice in England where they have learnt on the job, and made the needed adjustments to be assimilated into the English system. They have now learned and become familiar with the necessary procedures, legislations, guidance and practice models to practise and make safe decisions. Indeed some of the participants are now senior social workers while others are in management positions.

What this means is that social workers who come from Ghana to practise in this country do not have to go straight into practice without the requisite training and support from their employers. Upon arrival in England, the best thing is to have them trained, taken through structured mentoring and support to the extent that they would be able to understand and be familiar with the practice procedures and guidance in England.

Training them on topics such as safeguarding, neglect, physical/emotional abuse, risk assessment and inter-agency working would be useful to get them ready and tuned in to the practice expectations in this country.

Participants in conflict: the cultural dilemma

Most social workers in England, including the research participants, come from diverse ethnic backgrounds and upbringings. Indeed, all cross-cultural encounters between service users and practitioners bring into play not only the heritage of the service user but also that of the worker (Laird, 2008). Each person belongs to an ethnic group, grows up within a family or community context which socialises them through a set of values, beliefs, norms and a way of doing things. These norms shape the personality and the world view of the worker and/or the service user. As such, it is vital for the practitioner to at least have an awareness of the service user's cultural background to inform his assessments and decision-making. Social workers must also acknowledge, evaluate and reflect on their own cultural backgrounds, value systems and traditions.

I have observed and got the feeling during the interview process and my interaction with the research participants that most of them are in a conflictual situation and dilemma when it comes to their background and cultural experience and the social work practice in England. For instance *Yaw* and *Emma* expressed that smacking using implements to discipline children is normal in Ghana, but not in this country, yet they have to religiously follow and adhere to the social work code of ethics in England and make decisions to protect children who are being abused or neglected.

A few of the participants grew up in families/communities where it is "normal" to walk long distances to and from school every day, others lived with their relatives and external family members who maltreated and physically and emotionally abused them. So when this group of social workers who endured these kinds of treatment and upbringing from their communities in Ghana are faced with the situation to make decisions on child abuse and neglect in this country, it becomes a very difficult jigsaw puzzle for them to untangle. This is because they can recall their background experiences which unconsciously had an impact on them.

There is, therefore, that raging personal, innate conflict between one's values and beliefs as against the professional's values and ethics of social work practice in England. The situation can best be described as a struggle between listening to and obeying one's inner voice, which is culturally and socially constructed as against following procedures and processes to keep children safe in the country.

For instance, *Yaw* made the following comments about how his socialisation in Ghana made him confused when it came to child protection decision-making in England (as captured in Chapter 5).

… It was difficult initially, especially my own background growing up in Ghana where you know it was kind of normalised for parents to whip children, for children to be exposed to violence, and for children to be shouted at: it was normal … It gives me a confused judgement.

These kinds of views ran through what the participants shared with me during the course of the interview. They acknowledged that their background experiences and upbringing, together with the norms and values of the Ghanaian society, meant that they struggled to clearly identify and name what constitutes child abuse or neglect in this country.

Yet, the participants have had to try as hard as possible to suppress and overlook these normative values and Ghanaian socialisation traits in order to wear their professional hat and identify with the standards of social work practice in England. They have had to learn and adjust to the social work procedures and processes in this country, having to understand the threshold criteria and practice requirements of their profession.

Another dimension of this cultural dilemma is the communal spirit or nature of most Africans. As already highlighted in Chapter Five, Ghanaian society is characterised by neighbours, family members or adults being responsible for child care, enforcing discipline, instilling moral values and bringing up children. It is the duty of every member of the community to bring up a child in accordance with the moral and social values of that community. If a child misbehaves, or goes wayward, any adult in the community can bring him to order by physically or verbally chastising him. If for any reason, such as a sudden death of a parent, disability, poverty or chronic ailment, a parent cannot look after his/her children, a family member or a distant relative readily comes in to take over responsibility for the children. This is unique and means that the child remains with the family who continues to take care of him/her. This goes a long way to ensure there is a strong communal spirit of bonding and togetherness and a transfer of societal values, norms and unique characteristics. Thus, the peculiar features that identify a particular community are transmitted from one generation to another.

On the contrary, this is not the case in European countries such as the UK. The care system is very pronounced here where the state (Local Authorities) intervene to place children and vulnerable adults into care homes, children's homes and residential units. Family members are usually not in the forefront in helping their needy members.

It is said that most social workers draw on their cultural heritage and values during their interventions with children and families. In this context, it is interesting to point out that the research participants do tap into the positive aspects of their cultural experience by making sure that family members are identified to take care of vulnerable children whose parents are unable to meet their needs because of ill-health, mental health, substance misuse or any form of incapacity. This they do by

organising Family Group Conferences (FGC) to identify and support those family members who put themselves forward to look after the needy and vulnerable children in the society. By this way, the child remains with the family members instead of being taken into care far away from the family.

I must point out that social workers from other backgrounds might also have good reasons for making use of the FGC approach to identify family support networks. This means the use of the FGC approach to mobilise family support is not only peculiar to the Ghanaian social workers in this country.

Giddens' contribution to this thesis

I have already discussed my reflections and thoughts on the added value that Giddens has brought to this thesis. Indeed, Giddens has contributed three significant things which add value and insight into the understanding of the experience of the research participants. In particular, his contribution to the concept of empowerment practice.

As already highlighted in Chapter 3, the participants were disabled as social workers by a context they didn't understand. They were regarded as professionals who were not competent enough to make safe decisions in this country because of where they came from and the context of their education and upbringing. However, the pivotal lesson from the story is really about the way in which the research participants recovered agency, enabling them to take up positions where they are more fully empowered and no longer feel oppressed by the context in which they work.

In this way, the research participants have invested in further education, learned on the job, acquired more knowledge and understanding of the CP process in England through self-education and have always made a conscious efforts to improve their social work practice in this country. No wonder participants such as *Yaw, Abi* and *Sam* have risen to become team managers, assistant team managers, and senior social workers in their respective workplaces. Therefore, the participants have been able to alter their performance within social practice in the host country by creating a new relationship in their respective workplaces via the acquisition of knowledge and understanding of social work practice in England. Thus, they have progressed from being oppressed, undermined and maltreated in those early days/years of practice in

this country to a more respected, acceptable and high standard in their later years of practice.

Another part of the story which Giddens has contributed to relates to the employment of international social workers in this country. It is about the UK "agency" (employers/local authorities) not being reflective enough or thinking through the implications of importing labour. It's as though nobody in social services' management thought there might be problems or issues associated with this. In a sense, people in recruitment failed to recognise that recruiting from Ghana, or anywhere outside England, is potentially much more complex. It is therefore crucial for employers in this country to be familiar with the challenges, skill-limitations and capabilities of international social workers and to plan appropriate support packages for them before they arrive to work in the country.

More importantly, Giddens has illuminated that "structures" in the form of rules and resources, enable social work to flourish. A proper understanding and interpretation of these rules and resources result in what is described as "good practice" which ensures safety and improved outcomes for children and families. On the other hand, lack of understanding of the rules and policies governing social work practice coupled with the bureaucratic nature of the profession means that the research participants found it difficult to practise safely during the early days of their practice. I explain this further in chapter 3.

The respondents find solace in religion

It can also be said that these research participants are very religious people and relied on the supernatural intervention of their Christian God to help them in their difficult moments. When asked how they were able to endure their pain and sufferings, some of them categorically point to their Christian religion. They do attend church regularly and engage in prayers as much as possible. Some received counselling, practical and emotional support during those difficult moments of their sojourn in the country. According to these social workers, the support and words of encouragement they received from their respective churches has been the main reason they coped with their challenges.

Others said had it not been for the support of the church, they would have found it difficult to adjust to life in England.

At least two of the participants are now leaders in their respective churches giving back what they received and continue to be role models to their congregation.

While they recount those painful and difficult moments and the way their employers maltreated them, the participants say they do not harbour any resentments, quoting the Bible verses to say vengeance is God's. They would want to leave everything to God in prayer, as it's only God who knows everything. Exacting punishment or taking the authorities on would be like challenging the ability of God to do justice for them.

Chapter summary

The research participants have endured a lot of pain and suffering in their long journey from Ghana to England as qualified social workers. They have been victims of racism, injustice, scapegoatism and discrimination, and have experienced social and work place isolation.

While they are now settled and continue to do their job as social workers, the emotional scars they suffered in the early days of their practice seem to haunt them still. It has also been established that the participants seemed to have limited skills and knowledge-based experience to make safe child protection decisions in the early days of their practice in this country. This meant that employers had to invest in training and equipping them with the necessary skills and competencies to ensure that they carried out their safeguarding responsibilities according to the laid down procedures and practice standards.

Also, their cultural background and upbringing mean that they are conflicted and lack clarity in relation to what constitutes risk to children in this country. Their cultural values and norms tend to weigh heavily on their subconscious mind and this interferes in their decision-making processes. The participants are caught up in a web of divided loyalty: they remain loyal and committed to their country of origin together with its norms and ways of life, while doing their best to be good citizens in the host country by learning the British values and its expected behaviours.

Again, Giddens' Structuration Theory helps to situate the findings of this research in line with the experience of the participants, in particular his concept of "structures" which are the rules and resources which facilitate social work practice. This gives a suitable framework to help understand the experience of the participants' social work practice in England. This is mainly because the practice of social work has become very structured and bureaucratised. These "structures" were new to the research participants and they found it difficult to understand let alone implement them, especially in those early days of their practice. Because they were in a new environment, the research participants could not easily make sense of the "structures" governing their practice.

The interpretation of these rules and procedures also depends largely on the individual social worker's background and life experiences. The cultural background, training and practice experiences of the research participants is such that they at times understand and interpret the rules differently, thereby bringing the performance of their duties to disrepute. On the other hand, proper understanding and interpretation of the rules would mean "good practice" and ensure safety for children.

It is vital to augment the social work workforce in the country by employing qualified practitioners from abroad, but these international social workers need training and structured support to be able to discharge their main task of protecting children in England to a high standard.

The next chapter recommends what employers, agencies and local authorities need to do to support international social workers to be able to fit well, reduce their emotional burden and safeguard children and vulnerable adults in England.

Chapter Eight

Conclusions and Implications for Practice

Introduction

In this research, I set out to explore how the participants' cultural background as well as their training in Ghana influenced their decision-making in child protection in England.

The main research question was:

> What is it like to be a Ghanaian trained social worker in child protection in England?

The subsidiary questions were:

- In what ways does their experience of Ghanaian social work education and their cultural background impact on this group's child protection practice in England and what particular challenges do they face as a result of this?
- To what extent do Ghanaian trained social workers feel they possess sufficient professional expertise to carry out child protection work in England?
- What is the emotional experience of being a Ghanaian social worker in child protection in England and how do they manage anxiety in this area of practice?

The focus has been the lived experience of the research participants throughout this thesis. The story of the participants is such that they have endured a sequence of emotional traumas in their attempt to settle and practise in this country as frontline child protection social workers.

I have established that their education in Ghana as well as their cultural background and experience meant that they did not have the requisite skills and know-how to function effectively in this country at the early stages of their practice. Because they have had limited experience in their home country before starting their roles as child protection social workers in England, they found it difficult to make sense of the practice expectations and to make safe decisions and determine the threshold for significant harm for children and families in this country. While the participants seem determined and committed to work hard to achieve better outcomes for children and

families in the host country, their lack of understanding of the child protection procedures and processes means that they could not function effectively. Indeed all the participants acknowledged that their education and training in social work in Ghana did not equip them with enough knowledge and understanding of the rudiments of child protection work in this country.

The participants adopted different techniques to manage anxiety in their respective roles as social workers in England. Emma, Joe and Sam, for instance, were actively involved in religious (church) activities and programmes as they believe their salvation comes from the Lord who comforts them in times of distress. Abi was also supported by her GP to manage the anxiety that comes with her work. Frank, Mike, Mensah, Enyo and Yaw resorted to self-education, private consultation with other experienced social workers in this country and the use of supervision sessions to address the challenges in their work.

The above research questions have been addressed thoroughly in the findings in chapters 5 and 6, and the discursive in chapter 7 respectively.

Thesis summary

This research has established that this group of social workers could not practise safely upon arrival in the country and that it took them some time to settle in England and eventually acquaint themselves with the practice paradigm in the country.

To put this research into context and to distinguish it from other studies about the experience of African social workers in this country, I have come across a few studies about Zimbabwean and South African social workers experience in England with different emphases/focus from this research. For instance, Chogugudza (2017), in his study into the transferability of social work knowledge and skills from Zimbabwe to England, suggests that some aspects of the social work values, knowledge and skills can be transferred to England with adaptation, while at the same time highlighted that other aspects of these skills and knowledge could not be transferred fully to English social work practice due to the differences in social work education, training, legislation, organisation and the political environment in the two countries. Similarly, Naidoo and Kasiram (2003, 2006) concluded that South African

social workers in the UK have different views and perceptions about their experience in the country: some complained about racism and work structures which are very bureaucratic and frustrating, and viewed clients as difficult, rude and unappreciative of the support they received. Other concerns were social isolation and neglect of their cultural and spiritual needs in the UK. Yet, other South African social workers indicated that they find the UK a better place to work compared with their home country which has poor conditions of work, low wages, an identity crisis for social workers, and the socio-political structures. Again, Naidoo and Kasiram averred that some of the participants in their study indicated that their South African training equipped them for "multi-cultural" practice, while others described their training as "academic" and theoretical compared with the UK training which they considered as "practice-oriented" in scope.

I have to emphasise that this research is unique to Ghanaian trained social workers' experience in child protection in this country with a focus on how their cultural background as well as their training in Ghana influenced their decision-making in child protection in England. Thus, the claims to its findings and contribution to social work knowledge are unique and authentic.

While I look back and reflect on the progress of this research work, it's only appropriate and sound for me to acknowledge, once again, that it is an insider study that has emerged from my own experience of being a Ghanaian trained social worker in England for the past 11 years. In short, this research work is a combination of my lived experience and that of the research participants. While I have learned a great deal from the participants who participated in the research, my background history, knowledge and practice experience of the social work profession, both in Ghana and England is considerable and extends a lot further than my sample for the study. I was, of course, born in Ghana, and attended my primary, elementary and tertiary education there before eventually moving to practise in this country. I was born into a traditional "royal" family where I was initiated into the norms and values of the community such that I was expected to behave in a particular way so as to uphold in high esteem the position and authority of my father who was the leader of

the community. In this way, I am familiar with the culture and the way of life of the people of my community and, to a large extent, that of the country.

Interestingly, I was educated in the Western hegemony style, which at times is variant and in conflict with my traditional values and norms. As already outlined in this research, there is therefore a matter of identity crisis for social workers trained in Ghana as the culture and influence of the traditional leaders in the community meant that social workers could not clearly fathom their role in the development of the country. While the confusion and uncertainty about the function of social workers in Ghanaian society rages on, some of the qualified social workers chose to relocate to the Western world where they thought their training and skills would be most needed. Eventually, I and the research participants moved to England in an attempt to improve our social and economic standard. Thus, I have been working as a senior social worker in various roles for many years where I gained considerable experience and knowledge as well as serving as a practice educator and mentor for newly qualified social workers. These attributes and background experience alone have meant that I not only approached the research from a particular perspective, but also, inevitably, viewed my findings through a particular perspective.

Moreover, working in frontline social work practice across five local authorities in the London area over the years has given me a wealth of experience which is invaluable for this research. In a similar way, these experiences and the exposure I went through gives me an impetus and insight that has enabled me to remain more informed and in touch with the literature that is written about recruitment of international social workers in this country. It is important to point out that whilst my conclusions are drawn from the data my insider status has given me a much wider perspective and helped contribute to the information in this research.

In summary, the findings in this research are a combination of the primary data as well as my personal experience and reflection of the literature on the practice of international social workers in this country and what they bring to the job. As a consequence, I have not confined my reflections wholly to what has emerged from the primary data of the study.

In the following paragraphs, I make recommendations in respect to policy and practice, as well as with regards to the future role of international social workers in safeguarding children in England.

Practical and emotional preparedness for the journey

My experience and that of the participants is such that we did not have enough preparation and information/knowledge about what we were putting ourselves into. We did not do any background checks as to the availability of social work jobs in England, where we would reside, and what to expect in a new environment. Some of us were overzealous and thought we were going to an environment where there would be social work jobs waiting for us and that the system would be able to meet our day-to-day needs. Some were made to believe that there were "residential social work" (as indicated on their work permits) jobs awaiting them only to realise upon arrival in this country that this was not the case. Indeed there was no information about the job market in England. We were not told about the processes and procedures for applying for identity cards, DBS, and other essential documentations. We were left in limbo upon arrival in the country.

Even when we arrived at the airport, the recruitment agency did not make any arrangement for us in relation to where we were to reside. Some of us were asked to contact family members, friends and other people in the Ghanaian community if they could accommodate us. Those of us who could not find anyone in this country to take us in were made to sleep in a congested apartment for about two weeks before eventually being moved to other destinations across the country. It is difficult to find words to describe the frustration, dejection and agony we experienced on the day we arrived in this country.

I must however point out that eight out of the ten participants came to this country through a particular recruitment agency while the other two arrived through family connections. One may be tempted to describe this experience as "people trafficking" but the context here is completely different. These are social workers who were desperate to leave their home country to experience a better working condition in another and to improve their economic situation. I think this particular recruitment agency did not adequately provide support and other practical resources to the

research participants before they arrived here. I think this agency mislead the participants into committing themselves to this turbulent journey.

It would have been useful and appropriate for recruitment agencies to be honest and sincere to Ghanaian and other international social workers by providing them with information about what to expect upon arrival in England, the procedures for settling down, life in the UK, challenges and opportunities in the host country, and how they would be accommodated and what level of financial package would be available for them. This information would have been very useful to help this group of social workers to then decide if they indeed wanted to undertake the journey. It would have been proactive and appropriate for the participants to do the necessary research needed including background checks while in their home country prior to deciding on the journey. While in Ghana, these social workers could have done online searches about the job prospects in England, what they required, where they were to sleep and what level of skills they needed to be able to do the job. They could have contacted community organisations such as GHASWU for information in advance of travelling to England. Having prior knowledge of the potential difficulties and challenges in the country would have helped the international social workers to at least prepare emotionally and psychologically to face these bottlenecks.

On the other hand, if the participants had received information about the potential challenges that awaited them in England, some of them might have changed their mind and stayed at home in Ghana. After all, life in the UK is not as perfect and rosy as some of the participants thought while in Ghana. The saying is that "life is greener at your feet"; meaning there are opportunities and potential for people to become successful in life if they stay in their home countries. Indeed, I am aware of some social work graduates who have become very successful in business, academia, and politics in Ghana. The notion in Ghana that one becomes successful and prosperous when in Europe or America is a fallacy. This research has clearly shown that life in this country is a struggle. The participants endured myriad agonising and painful experiences when they arrived in England. The emotional burden and pain can be overwhelming.

Need for further studies prior to working in England

I strongly recommend that social workers who trained and qualified in Ghana must endeavour to enrol themselves on some courses before they work in this country. It has been clearly demonstrated in this research that Ghanaian trained social workers lack the knowledge and skills to practise safely in England. While there are some similarities in the course content, the practice paradigm in the two countries is starkly different. Also, the practice experience and the procedures and legislative framework of social work practice in England mean that people from Africa, and for that matter Ghana, find it difficult if not impossible to fit in and to keep children and other vulnerable people in the society safe. My experience is that frontline social work practice is a complex and emotionally demanding project, which should not be taken for granted. Social work researchers such as Ferguson (2005), Cooper (2205) and Rustin (2005) have all indicated the emotional burden that comes with child protection work and the complex dynamics in relation to working with families, parents and professionals to keep children safe. They highlighted the need to look at the experiences and background of child protection social workers and what played a part in their decision-making process. It is therefore not surprising that most serious case reviews (SCR) tend to focus on the rationale behind professionals' decision-making process.

Social work practice in this country is not like a football game where two or more competing clubs from different continents can meet in a tournament and compete for trophies where any of them has the equal chance of winning. The skills and competencies required to do the job are completely different and the local context and the dynamics in the community also play a major role in the ability and tenacity of the worker to make meaningful intervention in the lives of people.

I therefore recommend that social workers coming from Ghana must have at least six months to one year training when they arrive in England. In this way, they would have the opportunity to learn the legislations, policies and procedures that govern social work practice as well as the various organisations and professionals involved in service delivery in this country.

On the job training/buddying/mentoring

Similarly, training on the job is another important way of helping international social workers to acquaint themselves with the rudiments of the job. It is advised that these social workers are not allocated cases at least in the first six months of their practice. They should be supported through the buddy and mentoring system until they acquire the necessary skills and know-how for the job. This is in line with what Tinarwo (2011) said when she recommend that ISWs should be provided shadowing opportunities as part of their induction process to enable them to familiarise themselves with the court and legislative aspects of their job, child protection procedures and processes and working with other professionals amongst others.

Employers can assign experienced social workers to guide and monitor them, whereby they attend meetings, learn how to make and receive telephone conversations with the clients, report writing and communication skills and inter-agency work, helping them to understand the legislative and legal framework of social work practice as well as care proceedings and how the legal system works. All these techniques are needed to give the international social workers a feel of the job and an opportunity to evaluate their own ability and acumen for the job. At the end of the sixth-month mentoring and support, the managers can then make a decision as to the suitability of the candidate for the job. To me, this would give employers the means to sieve the *wheat from the chaff*. In this way, these social workers would be able to practise safely which would mean increased safety and well-being for children and families.

Cultural reorientation/appropriate practice

One of the significant findings of this research is the fact that the cultural background and experience of Ghanaian trained social workers inhibits their ability to make safe decisions in child protection. Growing up in an environment where physical abuse of children has become the norm (even though this is against the law of the land), where parents can leave their children unsupervised for hours and where other family members can enforce discipline with children means that these social workers

do not see these issues as risk in this country. Also, concerns about child abuse, child sexual exploitation and matters of emotional abuse are not taken seriously within the Ghanaian culture. Some of the participants grew up in peasant farming communities where they walked long distances to their farms and schools without adequate care and protection from their parents. The cultural norms, values and belief systems also play a part in the ability of the worker to practise safely. For instance, in Ghana children are expected to remain submissive, quiet and obedient, not challenging adults in any way. This means that adults do not consult or seek the opinion of their children in doing anything as they are not regarded in high esteem in society.

All these experiences have registered in the subconscious minds of the participants, such that it's difficult to forget about them. It has become part of their upbringing and in a way an aspect of their social life. As has been established in this research, social workers' understanding of families and risk is linked with the workers' cultural background and experience. Consequently, the research participants find it difficult to make safe decisions when matters around their cultural experience come to the fore in their practice here in this country. There is that perpetual conflict and struggle between their *inner voice* (culture) and their social work values and norms. This means that they are conflicted and always on edge when confronted with these matters.

In order to practise safely, this group of social workers must have reflective moments where they must re-examine their culture in line with that of their service users. This would help them have a renewal of their minds and thoughts and do away with the negative and harmful aspects of their culture in order to make safe threshold decisions in the UK. Laird and Tedam (2019) call for social workers to examine how their own cultural experiences affect their world view. They concluded that "cultivating self-awareness in relation to one's own heritage is therefore essential as a first step in developing the ability to practice effectively in cross-cultural contexts" (p. 93).

Most importantly, employers should also help this group of social workers by setting up training sessions or workshops to help them understand the culture of the majority of white British people and how to function effectively in such situations. It is

therefore imperative for employers, managers and supervisors to always take into consideration the cultural background and experience of international social workers so as to support them to overcome the possible impact this could have on their practice. In this regard, I intend to approach my current employers with the findings of this research, and encourage them to take up the challenge and set up a culturally appropriate training unit to help address these challenges in the organisation.

An element of empowerment

I have also observed during this research that the participants lack the ability and the willpower to "name" the painful, debilitating, emotionally depressive aspects of their experience in this country. It's like their voice has been silenced and they dread naming or having the language and courage to voice how employers, managers, supervisors and their colleagues treated them. I have come to the realisation in my experience in this country that if the victims of racism, scapegoatism, and discrimination cannot name such experiences, they cannot challenge them. People then suffer in silence as they internalise the maltreatment and biases they encounter in England. Some of the research participants did indicate that they could not report these negative tendencies directed at them mainly because of the fear of losing their jobs. Their livelihood, their existence has a correlation with the job they do here in this country. The thought of being sacked from their jobs and possibly not being able to find another job meant that they chose to remain silent in agony. This situation can best be described as a "silent killer" as they experience inner pain and do not have the opportunity or avenue to name and shame the perpetrators of this act.

As a result of these sentiments and experiences, I have decided to establish a training and support centre, where I would serve as an anchor, an avenue and means by which this group of social workers could come for advice and guidance on how to seek redress. This will then become the platform for them to air their voices and be helped. As an advocate, I will work in partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and other agencies to empower and represent the interest of these international social workers. Drawing on Anthony Giddens' Structuration Theory which has an element of empowerment, where Giddens made a point that human beings have agency, are knowledgeable and have the ability to take action to

change their situation, I am certain to play my part to awaken the consciousness of the research participants and for that matter international social workers in England. The training I will provide would include anti-discriminatory practice where I will support these social workers to improve their self-esteem, promote diversity to help them realise their full personal and professional potential while helping them to value and appreciate other people.

Recommendation for policy and practice in England

This research has clearly established a need for a drastic shift in the recruitment and employment of international social workers, especially those from Africa, and Ghana, in particular. I have no doubt in my mind that the era of Brexit would mean the government and employers would focus their attention in recruiting social workers from Africa and the Commonwealth countries to augment the workforce in the UK. I do understand the need for a concerted effort to employ more qualified practitioners to fill vacancies in the UK, especially with the advent of COVID-19, which has led to many countries experiencing lockdowns for many months resulting in an unprecedented increase in domestic violence incidents. It is therefore not surprising that some Local Authorities and government agencies are currently looking to employ social workers to ensure children and vulnerable adults are safeguarded.

While it's imperative to invest in the recruitment of international social workers, care must be taken to ensure that they are trained, supported and provided with the necessary tools to practise safely in this country.

The influence of culture, coupled with the nature and standard of their training and experience in Ghana means that these research participants lack the needed credentials and aptitude to uphold the standard of the profession in England.

Linking this to what Giddens called *reflexive modernisation* which is the ability of people to take stock of their lives, to reflect on structures and the rules governing their lives and everyday practices, employers must reflect and re-examine the tendency to bring into the country international social workers. In this vein, employers of international social workers must engage in what I call "self-introspection", and critically examine their actions and choices when it comes to

employing this group of social workers. The employers must come to the realisation that international social workers face a myriad of challenges upon arrival in this country and that concerted efforts and deliberate measures must be put in place to support and empower these social workers to be able to practise safely.

Also, Local Authorities and recruitment agencies must invest in the training, support and re-education of this group of social workers. As I have already indicated in this research, there is a need for re-education prior to starting their jobs in this country. The training should be geared towards their understanding of policies, procedures, legislations and guidance of social work practice in England. Other aspects of the training could be culturally appropriate practice, decision-making, and issues of neglect and abuse. It is my candid view that this training would equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to practise safely in this country.

Furthermore, the employers must engage in a "skills audit" of the social workers from the beginning to clearly identify the gaps in their skills and knowledge. This would make it possible for the development of suitable training and support packages to help address the gaps. It is also vital for employers to establish what I call "culturally appropriate support units" at their workplaces whereby these social workers are helped by people of similar background to have more insight into how they can have reflective moments and think about their culture in line with the culture of the host country.

In addition, international social workers, especially those from Ghana/Africa, would benefit from a well-structured induction process when they commence employment in England. This will afford them the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the organisation's culture, procedures and processes at their respective workplaces and help them to integrate well into the workplace.

Again, it is imperative and appropriate for the employers, managers and supervisors to acknowledge the hard work, dedication, commitment and sacrifices of these social workers and reward them accordingly. They must avoid racism and discrimination and be honest and sincere in the promotion and financial reward for all social workers, including international social workers. Issues of subjugation, prejudice and

antagonism should be done away with and these social workers should be given the chance to develop themselves so as to make progress in their career.

With the onset of Brexit, the UK government and policy actors must set in motion schemes and strategies to make it possible for more able-bodied men and women to enrol on social work courses across the country. This is the only way the country can be self-sufficient and be able to take its destiny into its own hands to guarantee the safety for children and adults alike. The training and development of more qualified social workers in England would guarantee uniformity of practice, high standards and consistency in the interpretation of practice paradigm and decision-making thresholds in the country.

Need for further research

This research has pointed to the gaps in the education and practice of the research participants in England. It has also shown that, upon arrival in this country, this group of social workers did not necessarily have the skills and knowledge-based aptitude to safeguard children and vulnerable adults in the country partly because of their cultural background and the nature of the training and practice experience they had in Ghana prior to arriving in England. The study also highlighted the challenges of racism, subjugation, prejudice, attacks and discrimination against Ghanaian trained social workers in England. All this maltreatment affected their morale and ability to safely practise in the country.

Nevertheless, there is a need for further studies to understand other factors (other than those mentioned in this research) that affect the ability of the research participants to make an impact in this country. Similar studies in countries across Africa would also be helpful in having a clear understanding and insight into the factors affecting them in their day-to-day social work practice in England. This would go a long way towards identifying similar patterns and establishing generalisations to validate this research finding.

Conclusion

In this research, I have outlined the challenges and difficulties faced by the research participants in their endeavour to work as qualified social workers in England. The participants (and I too) have endured a long process of struggle and suffering, with a good deal of injustice and discrimination in their journey of being qualified practitioners in Ghana to working practitioners in this country. These challenges started from the point of making the decision to travel to England, the journey itself, and issues of settling in the country and the struggles that come with looking for and starting social work jobs in England. These experiences have been excruciating and mind-boggling. All these sufferings and pain have knocked down the confidence level of the participants which in a way culminated in low morale and motivation to perform on the job.

I have established that their training and social work practice in Ghana does not equip them with the necessary skills and acumen to do the job in England. Their skills cannot be transferred from Ghana to this country. While the participants are hard-working, committed and strive to excel in their roles in England, their background and training means that they could not discharge their duties with distinction. There is this management principle which I find useful in this context: *efficiency vs effectiveness*. Efficiency is doing things faster while effectiveness is doing things right/correctly. One can be said to be efficient by doing the *wrong things* faster, rather than being spot on in doing things the right way. While these social workers might be seen to be doing the right thing by getting to work on time every day, attending meetings and visiting the services users in their homes and schools, they may not necessarily be effective, as they lack the practice experience and understanding of the practice guidelines in England. Their effort can be likened to an Akan (Ghanaian) proverb which goes like this: like *a tortoise, dance.* What it means is that no matter how skilfully the tortoise dances, because of the shell behind it its effort does not get any recognition. In a similar vein, due to the environment they come from, as well as their training and practice experience, the employers and managers do not have confidence in the ability of these social workers to practise safely. They endure a myriad of maltreatment from their own managers and supervisors as well as the service users. This leaves them emotionally drained and

empty. They feel dejected, unwanted and unsupported, and the failures and shortcomings of the organisation/team are laid at their feet.

Again, this research has revealed how the culture and upbringing of the participants means that they find it difficult to make threshold decisions in the host country. Their culture is part of their identity and way of life; they were born and grew up in the Ghanaian way of life. This has become part of their being. Thus, they are conflicted and struggle to decipher what act or behaviour of parents and carers can be described as neglect or abuse. To them, what constitutes child abuse and neglect is totally different from what pertains in their home country. This puts them in a struggle, a dilemma, and the recollection of their culture comes up anytime they have to make threshold decisions. For instance, in Ghanaian culture, it's the collective responsibility of the family, adults and members of the community to discipline a child who is seen as wayward or deviant. Anybody at all in the community can use physical chastisement as a tool to correct a wayward child, but the same cannot be said of this country. No parent or caregiver would allow his child to be smacked or physically hit by another person in the community in the name of enforcing discipline with the child in this country. There is a raging inner conflict and turbulence in the minds of these social workers who find themselves in situations to make such safety decisions for children in England which are the opposite of their cultural imprint.

In a similar way, the participants lack understanding of the legislations, policies and procedures, guidance and other documents and theoretical frameworks that underpin social work practice in England. They are not familiar with the court processes and procedures, inter-agency working, resources and agencies and how to build and sustain working relationships with the service users. They also do not have the expertise to undertake detailed assessments to clearly identify risks and concerns when it comes to issues of child abuse and neglect. All these inhibit their ability to practise safely in this country. They have had no practice experience using these guidelines in their home country prior to working in England hence their inability to fully comprehend and use such procedures in their practice.

On a positive note, as the years go by and they become familiar with the practice paradigm in England, the participants are then able to distinguish themselves as experts in the area of their chosen career. They have acquired a wealth of

knowledge and practice experience which has helped them. Some have progressed to become senior social workers and team managers in their respective workplaces. This also comes with adequate financial remuneration and improved conditions of service which has helped some of them to acquire their own properties in this country, at the same time sending money back home to support their relatives in Ghana. The inner peace, joy and satisfaction which come from protecting children and removing children from a place of harm to a place of safety is reminiscent of the emotional satisfaction they get from the job.

I have also outlined some recommendations for prospective social workers from Ghana as well as their employers in England as to what they must do to keep children and vulnerable adults safe while they practise in the country. A critical recommendation from this research is the need for employers and recruitment agencies to put in place a structured training regime to support, enlighten and empower international social workers who come to practise in England.

I finally call for the need of further research, particularly from other African countries to establish patterns and generalisations which would go a long way to validate findings in this study.

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Appendix 1 Gateway Letter

<div align="right">

George Dzudzor

12 Windermere Close

Feltham

TW14 9QF

</div>

The President

Ghanaian Social Workers Union, UK (GHASWU)

196 High Road

Wood Green

London

N22 8HH

08-07-2017

Dear Mr Nketia,

I am writing to ask your permission to be allowed access to your members as research participants. I am a Doctoral student at Tavistock and Portman Clinic (an affiliate of the University of East London) currently undertaking a research titled "**The Lived experience of Ghanaian social workers in England''.** The study has been approved by the University of East London Ethics Committee and, as part of the approval process, I am required to obtain gatekeeper permission from site(s) where I intend to recruit participants.

The aim of this study is to understand what it is like being a Ghanaian social worker in the UK (more details can be found in the attached Participants' Information Sheet). I will conduct two sets of interviews with the identified participants. Each interview will last between 45 minutes to 1 hour (depending on how long the participants will be willing to talk).

If you are willing to be involved and/or permit your members to be involved, would you please sign the form bellow that acknowledges that you have read the Participant Information Sheet, you understand the nature of the study being conducted and the risks and likely benefits of participation in this study, and you give permission for the research to be conducted at the site.

Yours sincerely,

George Dzudzor

U1445606@uel.ac.uk

I, Edward Nketia as President of GHASWU, (196 High Road, Wood Green, London, N22 8HH) having been fully informed of the nature of the research to be conducted in: "**The Lived experience of Ghanaian social workers in England**", give my permission for the study to be conducted. I reserve the right to withdraw this permission at any time.

Signature:………………………………Date……………………………….

Appendix 2

UREC Approval Letter

25th July 2017

Dear George,

Project Title:	**The lived experience of Ghanaian trained social workers in the UK**
Principal Investigator:	**Professor Andrew Cooper**
Researcher:	**George Dzudzor**
Reference Number:	**UREC 1617 27**

I am writing to confirm the outcome of your application to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), which was considered by UREC on **Wednesday 18 January 2017.**

The decision made by members of the Committee is **Approved**. The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation. Your study has received ethical approval from the date of this letter.

Should you wish to make any changes in connection with your research project, this must be reported immediately to UREC. A Notification of Amendment form should be submitted for approval, accompanied by any additional or amended documents: http://www.uel.ac.uk/wwwmedia/schools/graduate/documents/Notification-of-Amendment-toApproved-Ethics-App-150115.doc

Research Site	Principal Investigator / Local Collaborator
GHASWU - London	Professor Andrew Cooper

Any adverse events that occur in connection with this research project must be reported immediately to UREC.

Approved Research Site

I am pleased to confirm that the approval of the proposed research applies to the following research site.

Approved Documents

The final list of documents reviewed and approved by the Committee is as follows:

Document	Version	Date
UREC application form	3.0	June 2017
Participant Information sheet	3.0	June 2017
Consent form	3.0	June 2017
References	1.0	December 2016
Gatekeeper letter from (GHASWU) Ghanaian Social Workers Union, UK	1.0	July 2017

Approval is given on the understanding that the [UEL Code of Practice in Research](#) is adhered to.

The University will periodically audit a random sample of applications for ethical approval, to ensure that the research study is conducted in compliance with the consent given by the ethics Committee and to the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

Please note: it is your responsibility to retain this letter for your records.

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of this project.

Yours sincerely,

Fernanda Silva

Fernanda Silva

Administrative Officer for Research Governance
University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)
 Email: **researchethics@uel.ac.uk**